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CLASS, GENDER AND OTHER GROUPS

8.1. CLASS AND CLASSIFICATION

As was discussed in the very first chapter of this monograph, the importance of the distinction between seeking equality in different spaces relates ultimately to the nature of human diversity. It is because we are so deeply diverse, that equality in one space frequently leads to inequality in other spaces. The force of the question 'equality of what?', thus, rests to a great extent on the empirical fact of our dissimilarity—in physical and mental abilities and disabilities, in epidemiological vulnerability, in age, in gender, and of course, in the social and economic bases of our well-being and freedom.

There are diversities of many different kinds. It is not unreasonable to think that if we try to take note of all the diversities, we might end up in a total mess of empirical confusion. The demands of practice indicate discretion and suggest that we disregard some diversities while concentrating on the more important ones. That bit of worldly wisdom is not to be scoffed at, and indeed, no serious study of inequality that is geared to practical reasoning and action can ignore the need to overlook a great deal of our immense range of diversities. The question in each context is: What are the significant diversities in this context?

In fact, general analyses of inequality must, in many cases, proceed in terms of groups—rather than specific individuals—and would tend to confine attention to intergroup variations. In doing group analysis, we have to pick and choose between different ways of classifying people, and the classifications themselves select particu-

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1 A distinction has to be made between (1) an intrinsic interest in the inequality between different groups (viewed as groups), and (2) the derivative interest in group inequality because of what it says about inequality among individuals placed in different groups. Our focus here is on the latter. On the distinction between the two approaches and the ethical status of any intrinsic interest in group inequality, see among others Béteille (1983a, 1983b) and Lowry (1987).
lar types of diversities rather than others. In the literature on inequality, the classification that has been, traditionally, most widely used has been that of economic class—either defined in terms of Marxian or some similar categories (mainly, concentrating on ownership of means of production and occupation), or seen in terms of income groups or wealth categories. The importance of this type of class-based classifications is obvious enough in most contexts. They also indicate why it is the case that equality in the space of, say, libertarian rights does not yield anything like equality of well-being, or equality of the overall freedoms to lead the lives that people may respectively value. They also draw attention to the importance of inequalities in wealth and income in generating unequal well-beings and living conditions, even when there is equality in formal procedures and in the allocation of some specific facilities—which are sometimes called, somewhat euphemistically, ‘equality of opportunities’. The crucial relevance of such class-based classifications is altogether undeniable in the context of general political, social, and economic analysis.

The class analysis is also central to the Marxian theory of ‘exploitation’. The contrast between some people working hard and getting little income while others till little and enjoy high income is one that has moved social critics to theorize the dichotomy in different ways. While Marx rejected Proudhon’s diagnosis that property was ‘theft’, he did outline a system of accounting in terms of effective labour time that captured the contrast in a descriptively rich way. But going further into production analysis, the theory of exploitation involved an identification of who is ‘producing’ what. Exploitation was seen as the enjoyment of one person of the fruits of another’s labour.

Diagnosis of who is producing what in an integrated system of production is not an easy task, and this is a difficulty that applies even to the later attempts—on the basis of neo-classical economic analysis—to attribute to each factor of production a definite share of the product. Such attribution plays a major part in normative theories of production-based ‘desert’, as reflected—in one form or another—in the writings of J. B. Clark (1902) and Peter Bauer (1981). Peter Bauer’s attack on ‘the unholy grail of equality’ has many distinct features, but it turns crucially on the right of the ‘producers’ to enjoy the fruits of their production (as he puts it, ‘it is by no means obvious why it should be unjust that those who produce more should enjoy higher income’). The identification of who has produced what is, in fact, quite arbitrary in any integrated production structure. Production is an interdependent process involving the joint use of many resources, and there is in general no clear way of deciding which resource has produced what. The concept of the ‘marginal product’ of a resource is not really concerned with who has ‘actually produced’ what, but with guiding the allocation of resources by examining what would happen if one more unit of a resource were to be used (given all the other resources). To read in that counterfactual marginal story (what would happen if one more unit were applied, given everything else) an identification of who has ‘in fact’ produced what in the total output is to take the marginal calculus entirely beyond its purpose and depth.

This problem of identification (who has produced what) applies to Marx’s theory of exploitation as well—perhaps even more strongly, since the non-labour resources are treated in a very limited way. If that theory is to be seen not mainly as a significant description of the production process in terms of human work, but as the usurping of one person’s product by another, there remain many unanswered questions. Marx himself was fairly sceptical of this more

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4 This was one of the uses to which Marx put the ‘labour theory of value’. Indeed, both the major theories of value explored in the 19th cent.—the labour theory and the utility theory—paid much attention to descriptive richness, as opposed to just predictive usability. See Dobb (1937), Sen (1980b), Roemer (1982, 1986a).

5 Bauer (1981: 17). It was argued earlier—in Ch. 1—that despite Bauer’s explicitly anti-egalitarian stand, his own theory insists on the equal right of the producers to enjoy what they have produced. We are not concerned with that particular issue here, but with the substantive content of the type of justice Bauer seeks.

6 I have discussed this issue in Sen (1985a).

7 See Dobb (1937) for the classic exposition of the view of labour theory—and also of utility theory—as rich description.
assertive diagnosis. Even though he did invoke it in many contexts, he refused to see it as the central distributive concern in his evaluative system (discussed most clearly in his 'Critique of the Gotha Program', Marx 1875).

In analysing the relation between economic opportunities and freedoms, the tradition of classification based on the so-called Marxian classes can be quite inadequate. There are many other diversities, and an approach to equality related to the fulfilment of needs or to ensuring freedoms has to go beyond purely class-based analysis. For example, even if inequalities based on property ownership are eliminated altogether, there can be serious inequalities arising from diversities in productive abilities, needs, and other personal variations.

The case for going beyond class analysis was, in fact, persuasively made by Marx (1875) himself in chastising the German Workers Party for taking for granted that equality in rewards for work would not conflict with equality in satisfying needs.

But one man is superior to another physically or mentally and so supplies more labour in the same time, or can labour for a longer time; and labour, to serve as a measure, must be defined by its duration or intensity, otherwise it ceases to be a standard of measurement. This equal right is an unequal right for unequal labour.

Marx saw the insistence on equal reward for equal work—irrespective of needs—as an extension of a 'bourgeois right' seeing human beings only as producers (Marx 1875: 9). The diversities within the category of the working class made Marx insist on the need to seek other classifications. In fact, productivity differences constituted only one of Marx's concerns. He also focused attention on the necessity to address our manifold diversities, including differences in needs, and this led him to the well-known slogan 'from each according to his ability to each according to his needs'. An essential part of Marx's complaint was about the mistake of seeing human beings 'from one definite side only', in particular seeing people 'only as workers, and nothing more seen in them, everything else being ignored'.

As an illustration Marx had referred specifically to the fact that different workers have families of different size. While it could be

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8 Marx (1875: 9).
9 Marx (1875: 9). On this distinction, see also OEI, ch. 4.
10 'Further, one worker is married, and another not; one has more children than another and so on and so forth' (Marx 1875: 9).
11 This is not to deny that there is an 'incentive issue' also involved in offering larger social help for larger families, and problems of population policy cannot be ignored in this context. But that incentive argument has to be tempered by the concern for the well-being and capabilities of the disadvantaged members of the larger families among the poor.
ties in many circumstances. Distinctions of caste similarly have
influences of their own, despite being frequently correlated with
class. Race or caste can be a factor with far-reaching influence on
many aspects of day-to-day living—varying from securing
employment and receiving medical attention to being fairly
treated by the police. Inequalities in the distribution of income
and ownership will typically be part of the story, but by no means
the whole of it.

8.2. GENDER AND INEQUALITY

One basis of classification that is particularly relevant in this con-
text is gender. There are systematic disparities in the freedoms
that men and women enjoy in different societies, and these disparities are
often not reducible to differences in income or resources. While
differential wages or payment rates constitute an important part
of gender inequality in most societies, there are many other spheres of
differential benefits, e.g. in the division of labour within the house-
hold, in the extent of care or education received, in liberties that
different members are permitted to enjoy.

Indeed, in the context of intrahousehold divisions, it is not easy to
split up the total household income into the incomes going respec-
tively to different members of the family. The sharing may take an
unequal form, especially in relation to needs, but this is hard to
translate into income differentials, which would be an odd concept
to use in examining intrahousehold divisions. Inequality inside the

household is one of resource-use and of the transformation of the
used resources into capability to function, and neither class of infor-
mation is well captured by any devised notion of 'income distri-
bution' within the family.

There is a lot of indirect evidence of differential treatment of
women and men, and particularly of girls vis-à-vis boys, in many
parts of the world, e.g. among rural families in Asia and North
Africa. The observed morbidity and mortality rates frequently
reflect differential female deprivation of extraordinary proportions.

Even the crude ratio of women to men in the total population
varies between only 0.93 and 0.96 in South Asia, West Asia, North
Africa, and China. In contrast, partly because of the biological
advantages that women seem to have over men (given symmetric
care), the female–male ratio in the population tends to be much
higher than unity (around 1.05 or so) in Europe and North America.
It is, of course, quite possible that a part of the higher mortality rate
of the males in the richer countries reflect social rather than bio-
logical factors. For example, there is considerable evidence of
greater incidence of death from violence for men in many societies,
such as the USA. There are also some effects of higher male mor-
tality due to war deaths. But there does seem to be a substantial
biological component in the advantages in favour of women, given
similar treatment. The mortality differential against women in
Asia and North Africa, thus, reflects quite a remarkable departure
from what could be expected on the basis of biological potentials,
given symmetric care (as seen by Sen, 1989a). The higher mortality
and morbidity of women vis-à-vis men in these countries reflect serious 'attainment inequality', in addition to exhibiting

14 On different aspects of 'the gender gap', see Ansden (1980), Okin (1987, 1989),
15 The use of 'household-equivalence scales' provides a way of making inter-
household comparisons, typically assuming no differential treatment within the
household, even though that feature can to some extent be altered by discriminating
analysis (see Muelbauer 1987; Deaton 1988; Blackorby and Donaldson 1988). But it
is, in general, informational limited to the extent that the observations do not
directly include actual functionings (e.g. individual undernutrition or morbidity) and
concentrates instead only on aggregate consumption patterns and commodity com-
positions of the household. However, sometimes the limitations of data regarding
functionings can make this approach the best that can, in those circumstances, be
used.

16 On this see, among many other contributions, Boserup (1970, 1987, 1990),
Tinker and Brunsen (1976), A. Mitra (1980), Miller (1981), L. C. Chen, Huq, and
D'Souza (1981), Rosenzweig and Schultz (1982), Buvinic, Lytch, and McGeevy
Kumar (1989), Sen (1989a, 1990a), Tinker (1990a), Kanbur and Haddad (1990),

17 On the general issues of cultural influences on gender differences in demographic

18 On this, see I. Waldron (1976, 1983). The biological advantages seem to apply
even in the womb, with female foetuses having a lower rate of miscarriage than their
male counterparts.
extraordinary extents of 'shortfall inequality', given the biological potential in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{19}

In the context of many developing countries, these are elementary and important aspects of gender inequality, and their assessment need not be derivative on any constructed concept of income inequality within the family. They reflect functioning differences and the corresponding disparities in the elementary capabilities to avoid escapable morbidity and preventable mortality. We are not concerned here with the causal factors underlying these gender inequalities,\textsuperscript{20} but with the prior exercise of identifying the nature of the problem of gender inequality. Here a departure from the traditional perspective of income distribution towards direct accounting of functionings and capabilities can be an important step.\textsuperscript{21}

Even when the gender differentials in morbidity and mortality are not so acute, there can be disparities in other important functionings and capabilities yielding substantial inequalities in freedoms.

\textsuperscript{19} For example, if India had the African ratio (1.02) of females to males (not to take up the very high ratio of 1.05 or so of the long-lived European or North American population), rather than the ratio it does actually have (0.93), then—given the number of males in the country—there would have been nearly 30 million more women in India in the mid-1980s. The corresponding number of 'missing women' in China (\textit{vis-à-vis} the African ratio) is close to 40 million (see Drèze and Sen 1989). To provide serious quantitative estimates of 'missing women', proper demographic models of births and deaths would have to be considered (with clear specification of the possible counterfactual scenarios), but we get some idea of the enormity of the problem from these crude estimates of the millions involved (based on using the ratios obtaining in sub-Saharan Africa). For analyses of the different economic, social, and cultural factors underlying the problem of 'missing women', see Sen (1988c, 1989a) and Drèze and Sen (1989).


\textsuperscript{21} This does not deny that differential earning power of women \textit{vis-à-vis} men may affect the status of women (on this, see Boserup 1970, P. Bardhan 1984; Sen 1984, 1985d, 1990a, K. Bardhan 1985), or influence economic calculations underlying child care (on this see Rosenzweig and Schultz 1982). That is a separate issue requiring causal analysis of the role of income-earning power, and must be distinguished from the problem of diagnosis of gender inequality.

While anti-female bias in nutrition, morbidity, or mortality is much less present in sub-Saharan Africa,\textsuperscript{22} there are often big gender differences in many other capabilities, such as being able to read and write, avoiding bodily mutilation, being free to pursue independent careers, or being in positions of leadership. In terms of many social functionings, gender differences can be important also in the rich countries of Europe and North America, even though in terms of survival and mortality, women do have a relative advantage (at least in terms of attainment, if not in shortfall avoidance). I shall not have the opportunity of pursuing this question further here,\textsuperscript{23} but I would argue that the question of gender inequality in the advanced societies—no less than in developing countries—can be understood much better by comparing those things that intrinsically matter (such as functionings and capabilities), rather than just the means like primary goods or resources. The issue of gender inequality is ultimately one of disparate freedoms.

8.3. INTERREGIONAL CONTRASTS

Before closing this chapter, I would like to discuss some empirical examples of interregional contrasts to illustrate the importance of the distinction between judging poverty by income and judging it by the capability to achieve some basic functionings.

Some of the most important functioning for living standard, including the most elementary one of being able to live long (without being grabbed by premature mortality), often diverge from real income per head in a really spectacular way. This is easily seen in making international comparisons of gross national product (GNP) per head and life expectancy at birth.\textsuperscript{24} In terms of per capita GNP, South Africa ($2,470), Brazil ($2,540), Gabon ($2,960), and Oman

\textsuperscript{22} On the relatively better nutritional situation of girls \textit{vis-à-vis} boys in many parts of Africa, see Svedberg (1988, 1990). See also Deaton (1988).


($5,220) have six or more times the per capita GNP of China ($350) and Sri Lanka ($430). But these relatively richer countries give their people significantly lower ability to survive premature mortality (with life expectancies varying between 53 and 66 years) than do the two lower-income countries (with life expectancies around 70 years or more). Costa Rica, which is also considerably poorer than the first four countries, offers not only a much higher life expectancy than those four (and other 'upper-middle-income countries'), but a life expectancy that is not significantly below those obtaining in the richest countries of Europe and North America (with ten or more times Costa Rica's GNP per head). For example, the USA with a GNP per head of $20,910 has a life expectancy at birth of 76 years, whereas Costa Rica with a GNP per head of only $1,780 has already achieved a life expectancy of 75 years.

As we move our attention from commodities and income to functionings and capabilities, the relative picture can change radically. The difference seems to relate to a great extent to differences in the social, educational, and epidemiological conditions. The achievements of China, Sri Lanka, and Costa Rica in quality of life has much to do with policies regarding communal health services, medical care, and basic education. Thus, this distinction between deprivation of income and that of the capability to achieve elementary functionings, also has some relevance for public policy—both for development and for the removal of poverty and inequality.

Another interesting exercise relates to contrasts within a large country, e.g. India. Among the Indian states, Kerala has one of the lower real incomes per head, but by a long margin the highest life expectancy at birth—over 70 years (compared with around 57 years for India as a whole). Its infant mortality rate is, correspondingly,

much lower than the Indian average. Kerala also has a much higher level of general literacy (91 per cent, as opposed to the Indian average of 52 per cent), and particularly female literacy (87 per cent, compared with the national average of 39 per cent). Indeed, Kerala's achievements for many crucially important functionings are not only very much better than those of the rest of India, but they have an edge in some fields—especially with respect to women—even over China and Sri Lanka. For example, the low female–male ratio that characterizes China as well as India as a whole (around 0.93), in contrast with the substantial excess of females over males in Europe, North America, and sub-Saharan Africa (discussed earlier in this chapter), does not apply to Kerala. The female–male ratio for Kerala is 1.04, which is very similar to the ratios around 1.05 in Europe and North America.

If the value of average GNP is 'corrected' by taking note of distributional inequality, the income perspective is made somewhat more articulate. But even with this adjustment (i.e. even when distribution-corrected measures of real income are used), Kerala still remains one of the poorer Indian states. Distributional corrections do not seem to eliminate adequately the deficiency of the income approach to explain the high capability levels in Kerala to escape premature mortality. The deficiency of the income approach is not adequately remedied by supplementing the average income figures

28 However, Kerala does have a much higher self-reported morbidity rate than the rest of India (on this question and related issues, see Panikar and Soman 1984; Kumar 1987, 1989; Vaithyanathan 1987). This may, to some extent, reflect the low-income level of the Kerala population and possible nutritional deficiencies resulting therefrom. But to a great extent the higher self-reported morbidity seems to be a consequence of more awareness of health status on the part of the Kerala population, largely related to greater literacy and higher use of health services. Indeed, the self-reported morbidity rates are lowest in the least literate states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which have very high mortality rates (combined with illiteracy). And as Murray and Chen (1990) have shown in a recent paper, using similar criteria of self-reporting of morbidity, the United States has even higher rates of reported ill-health than Kerala. Incidentally, this inverse connection between self-perception of illness and observed mortality rates also illustrates the pitfalls of going only by self-perception in judging well-being (discussed in Ch. 3).

29 The Indian comparative data are taken from publications and working papers of the office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, including Census of India 1991: Provisional Population Totals (New Delhi: Government of India, 1991). The literacy data relate to the population aged 7 years or more.

30 In fact, the ratios would possibly not be materially different if the effects of the differentially higher male mortality of Europeans and North Americans due to past wars were to be factored out.

by considerations of inequality of incomes and commodity holdings.

The explanation of Kerala's success in the important space of basic capabilities has to be sought in the history of public policy involving education (including female literacy) and health services (including communal medical care), and to some extent, food distribution (including the use of public support of food consumption of the rural as well as the urban population), in contrast with the rest of India. There are also other factors involved, including a more favourable position of women in property rights and in inheritance among a substantial and influential section of Kerala's population, and the greater public activism connected with educational campaigns as well as politics in general. The history of public action in Kerala goes back a long time, with remarkable literacy campaigns in the native states of Travancore and Cochin in the nineteenth century.

This monograph does not, of course, provide the occasion to go into details of policy issues, but it is important to emphasize that the evaluative perspective of the capability approach does draw our attention forcefully to examining and scrutinizing such policy questions. It also suggests the need to take a broad view of development efforts, going far beyond the focus on improving the national output and the distribution of incomes.

These diverse matters (including the international comparisons and the regional contrasts within in India) have been discussed, with a focus on policy issues, in Drèze and Sen (1989).