Dignity at a Worker Cooperative Society through the lens of Capability Approach

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Capable of Approach

Equality of what?

Capability is “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be” (Sen 1993, p. 30).

Capabilities are opportunities or “the freedoms [people] actually enjoy to choose the lives that they have reason to value” (Sen 1992, p. 81).
Freedom, self organization

Adam Smith

- human nature is essentially ordered and so is society when allowed with sufficient freedom
- self order may produce unity and concord
- recognising the ill-effects of such unfettered freedom to pursue one’s self interest – he pinned security and justice laden society to be a fruitful ground for engagement

John Rawls

- society ought to be structured in such a manner that the greatest possible liberty is ensured to members as long as the liberty of one member doesn’t infringe on that of the other

- Amartya Sen critiques through his ‘The Idea of Justice’ (2009) that ideas about a perfectly just world do not help address the real inequality
- Raul as he emphasises that institutions grant justice in society, has failed to consider the effects of human behaviour on the institutions' ability to maintain a just society
Dignity

To be dignified or have dignity is first to be in control of oneself, competently and appropriately exercising one’s powers. Then, dignity is about self-command and freedom leading to self-organisation.

**Aristotle**
- freedom is obedience to self-formulated rules

**Karl Marx**
- believed that work itself means dignity which was further expanded to include necessity for interesting and meaningful work to ensure dignity at work

**Immanuel Kant**

*In the realm of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalence, has a dignity*
Why Capability Approach for this study?

- By design, explains poverty, inequality or well being
- Enables a framework that can help understand, conceptualise and evaluate phenomena
- Qualitative methods has also been used while analysing through Capability approach
- “There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. (Sen, Preface of ‘Development as Freedom’).
- Extending the thought a bit, we consider individual freedom to be a critical building block for dignity in organisations
- Normative framework grants flexibility to conceptualise the themes in the format that is conducive with the variables under analysis
- Should be understood as a way of assessing individual human well-being
- Stresses on human diversity and directs the attention to analysing structure in terms of individualisation
- More individualisation and less standardisation enable plurality in understanding the individual actor.
Mapping the concepts

- Organization
  - Structure
  - Actor
    - Security
    - Justice
    - Freedom/Liberty
    - Self organized
    - Engagement
      - Self Knowledge
      - Dignity
      - Meaningful Work
Case Study Approach

– Owing to the difficulty to separate the context from phenomenon
– Derive inference on human actions embedded in the context of structure
– ‘Verstehen’ – interpretative examination of social phenomena
– Data collection through In-depth interviews, Observation, secondary sources

• Embedded design as against Holistic
• Journeys through the ecosystem of Cooperative Society
The study attempts to reveal the following through the framework of Capability Approach:

- How has capabilities and functioning manifested in this Cooperative Society?
- How has the Worker Cooperative Society ingrained dignity within its structure?
- How was the organisation built on freedom, agency and self organisation?
• **ABC House* - A Worker Cooperative society which runs restaurant chains pan India**
• Existence dates back to Pre-independent times as ABC Hotel
• Transition from ABC Hotel to ABC house
• Rises out of the erstwhile Board’s decision to shut down owing to recurrent losses; lays off few employees
• A series of protests forces the Board to take back some of the laid off employees
• Their leader was otherwise known as the *General of the Poor*
• The leader invites the employees to take up the ownership of the institution from IAS pedigree
• After much resistance, the Board recognizes the newly formed Union of employees
• ABC House is born
  - Carefully changes the earlier elitist image
  - Brings together local palates and cuisines at extremely affordable rates
  - Becomes a House for all
✓ Reflects Ethical Individualism
  • Although the interests are collective, the basic unit of analysis is individual

✓ Functionings as facets that people value

✓ Functionings are facets that people have reason to value

✓ Capabilities are the freedom to enjoy valuable functionings

✓ Vantages of justice and equality

✓ Combination of freedom and agency
The capability approach is a proposition, and the proposition is this: that social arrangements should be evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value. If equality in social arrangements is to be demanded in any space – and most theories of justice advocate equality in some space – it is to be demanded in the space of capabilities. (Alkire, 2005, p122)
Thank You