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BOOK REVIEW

A Promising Guide for the Equality Researches in Turkey
Review on "Inequality Re-examined"

A. K. Sen, (1992). Inequality Reexamined. Oxford (England): Clarendon Press (ISBN: 0198283342/Hardback). 207 pages including (xvi) pages preference.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THE CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS

If the issue being discussed is on welfare economics, poverty, development and/or inequality, it is impossible to avoid mentioning about some of Sen's works in 21st century. As a new paradigm in poverty and inequality analysis from the perspective on social policy, Sen's capability approach provides a fruitful and enlightening guide in terms of understanding of the questions in these fields. The absence of Sen's new paradigm in academic literature of Turkey also indicates that the conceptualizations of these aspects are still being discussed with outdated perspectives. Therefore, in this review, it is mainly aimed to gain a familiarity to readers of the journal about Sen's perspective by the way of introducing one of his major works, *Inequality Reexamined*.

As Nobel Prize Laureate, Sen's contributions to development economics and social policy indicators turn around the concept of capability. This concept is mainly embedded in the core of his article published under the title of "Equality of What?" become a book, *Inequality Reexamined*, later on.

First chapter of the book is about a normative discussion on the meaning of equality. During the chapter, Sen mainly focuses on the relationship between equality and diversity of human beings. During the chapter, he introduces main concepts such as equality, diversity, well-being, poverty, freedom and means of freedom within an interrelated perspective. It can be said that, in this chapter, Sen's ultimate aim is to gain to readers a familiarity of his new conceptualization in the field.

On such theoretical ground, in the second chapter he starts the discussion on what freedom, achievement and resources of freedom are. His main emphasis in this chapter is that freedom is not much meaningful by itself, but it would be meaningful only under the condition of possibilities for individuals to actualize it. That means, he refers to the actualization of the freedom, in other words, substantive freedom. In that context, resources and ownership is considered as only means of freedom, but not as ends unlikely than other welfare theories.

The chapter three can be called the theoretical core of the book. In this chapter, Sen introduces his main claims on the theoretical ground that he constituted previous chapters. During this chapter, he claims that poverty should be understood as a capability deprivation and development is capability enhancement. In this context, he mainly attacks to the traditional understandings of the poverty and development, namely income and utility-based assessments of them. He defines capability as "valuable beings and doings". Individuals' deprived conditions, according to him, should be assessed whether people are capable or not "to be or do" what they define as valuable for their own life. This is a clear objection to the modernist and paternalistic understanding of development as well.

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In the chapter fourth, he combines what is insisted in chapters two and three. He tries to prove the interrelation between freedom and capability and; addition to this, refers to the place of agency, namely the individual. Agency has a particular importance in his writings. The control over the freedom should belong to the actor him/herself instead of an external coercive power. What he insists during the chapter is that behaviors of actor should be judged according to his/her own objectives, independently from what is accepted as right or wrong by an external power.

In the chapter fifth, justice and Sen's approach are discussed in relation. In this chapter, he criticizes libertarian and utilitarian justice models since they only give sufficient importance to either rights or utilities, but not enough concentration on them all together. In this context, he justifies Rawlsian model of justice but indicates its deficient points as well. He argues on John Rawls political perception on equality and primary goods. His main aim is to show that informational basis of any justice theory can be neither only utility nor rights.

In chapter sixth, the place of inequality in welfare economics is considered as the major subject. Choice of space for the inequality assessments and deficient points of traditional choices are open for the discussion. Addition to this, welfare based evaluation of inequality is discussed in the field of social justice theories as well.

In chapter seventh, the linear correlation between poverty and inequality is introduced to the discussion. Poverty is not an aspect independently from inequality but both are strictly connected in each other. In this regard, poverty as capability deprivation is discussed in affluent, namely developed, countries.

In chapter eight, the relation between gender, inequality and social classes is the major subject. During the chapter it is possible to observe some references to the Marxist class analysis and the manuscripts of Marx. Although, Sen shares some Marxist references such as going beyond the utility-based equality assessments, he criticizes these methods in terms of that they do not always take inequalities within the classes into account. According to Sen, despite the fact that there are keen inequalities existing between the classes, e.g. working class, middle class or bourgeois, such inequalities exists within the classes as well.

The last chapter of the book can be read as a conclusion. In this part, Sen considers equality as a social concern. Besides that he discusses on the subject in terms of some empirical data.

Since the presentation on the contents of the chapters is considerably superficial, it is not easy to understand Sen's eminent contribution by this presentation above. Therefore, it is crucial to submit some major thesis of Sen which will be introduced below.

2. WHAT TYPE OF (IN)EQUALITY?

According to Sen, (in)equality is the concept that is impossible to be measured or understood in one "space". At that point, it is crucial to get the connotation of the word, "space". By usage of the word he emphasizes that "in which space equality should be demanded". Do we need to demand the equality in the space of income, liberty, opportunities, social rights, wealth, need-fulfillment, politic or civic rights? The choice of space, according to Sen, has a cruciality to start any particular assessment in the field of inequality. Addition to this, it should not be turned a deaf ear that the chosen space often produces inequality in another space.

The plurality of the spaces in human world illustrates that there is a plurality as well in the diversity of human life. In this regard, diversity is the key concept. According to Sen, diversities in human world exist across many different ways. Human beings have different characteristics in terms of not only internal features of them, but external features that influence the people's choices/lives also. These

differences can very possibly change their life styles and preferences as well. Accordingly, demands toward particular space of equality can be varied among people, e.g. for a disable person, the demand can be in the space of primary goods –providing wheel-chair to every walking-disable-, it can be in the space of libertarian rights for a politician –holding a right as freedom of speech-. Addition to the different personal features, environmental factors have also influences on equality demands. Sen emphasizes that our lives exist in different natural environments. Societies and the communities to which we belong offer very different opportunities to us regarding to what we can or cannot do. These opportunities and limits existing because of natural and social environments in which people live often diversify the equality demands.

Because of these variation in terms of internal and external features of human beings, according to Sen, "inequality in terms of one variable (*or space*)[1], for example income, may take us in a very different direction from inequality in the space of another variable, for example liberty" (p. 20).

Such contradiction can be briefly explained by an illustration: Demanding equality in the space of libertarian rights, let say free enterprise right, can cause inequality among people in the space of income, wealth, utilities etc. since different talents of people in terms of bargaining, establishing a company, management etc. most probably cause different earnings in the space of income. Accordingly, despite the fact that free enterprise right is accepted as one of the indispensible libertarian rights of our era, it is in contradiction with the right to equality which is another crucial right of citizens in our era. Therefore, the choice of space is central to be able to understand equality according to Sen, this is why he gives a central place to the question of "equality of what" in his work.

3. ASYMMETRIC FEATURES OF HUMANS AND WELL-BEING EQUALITY

"The powerful rhetoric of 'equality of man' often tends to deflect the attention from these differences (*internal differences of human beings*)[2]. Even though such rhetoric 'all men are born equal' is typically taken to be part and parcel of egalitarianism, the effect of ignoring the interpersonal variations can, in fact, be deeply in-egalitarian, in hiding the fact that equal consideration for all may demand very unequal treatment in favor of disadvantaged" (p. 1). As seen, it is clear that Sen's main point is on the heterogeneity of human beings. When we consider the issue in terms of equal opportunities, it can lead to very unequal, let say, incomes and; unequal incomes can lead to very unequal happiness and satisfaction levels. However, if equal well-being is preferred space for human beings, this would be more sensitive decision to the consistency of human heterogeneity and fulfillments of divergent needs.

In conformity with human heterogeneity and fulfillment of divergent needs for equal satisfaction and well-being can be entailed implementations which are unequally organized. Sen, in that point, considers that some egalitarian approaches can reach in-egalitarian conclusions while some approaches which are seen in-egalitarian at first sight can arrive more egalitarian conclusions. To illustrate, it can easily be deduced that income equality can lead to inequality if we consider the diversities of human beings in terms of interpersonal distinctions. Let's consider two different characteristic of people. One of them is pregnant, single parenthood woman with two kids and the second one is same aged single man. It is not possible to claim that the providing same level of income (e.g. unemployment payment as a social policy implementation) for both types of people can lead equal satisfaction and well-being in terms of primary goods. It is not as easy as to overcome her disadvantaged situation for the female one by the same level of income that of the male one. In that example, it is seen that the interpersonal diversities do not allow the woman to experience same level of satisfaction or well-being. So, the absolute egalitarian approaches usually cause the in-egalitarian conclusions. Therefore, to focus on only one space, e.g. income, has not sufficiently significant methodology to yield equality. However, to focus on well-being level, instead of income level, can yield a better conclusion regarding to the satisfaction and well-being level.

1 Emphasis added.
2 Emphasis added.

Sen makes critic on some approaches which use "same response function strategies" to measure the inequality among people. According to Sen, these strategies, e.g. Atkinson's measurement strategies in his article titled "*On the Measurement of Inequality (1970)*", predict that same level of income produces same responses in terms of people's satisfaction and they do not take into account the people's interpersonal differences. These measurement strategies of inequality use symmetrical ways to make categorizations about people needs, although people have their own specific deficiencies that are necessitated a kind of measurement taking the asymmetrical conditions among people into consideration. These asymmetrical conditions do not lead to achieve same satisfaction level for different people such as in the illustration of pregnant woman and single man above. Besides that, these symmetrical measurement methods did not take into account that the people having different interpersonal features can achieve different level of freedom with the same level of, say, material ownership. Accordingly, "objects of these symmetric measurement methods were specifically focused on the distribution of income, but not levels of well-beings" (p. 30).

He continues his critics by claiming that making generalization among people in terms of their deprivation levels. He says that "the literature on welfare economic theory dealing with inequality has typically overlooked human diversities and has tended to take everyone as being exactly similar (including inter-alia having same maximal potentials)" (p. 93). In sixth chapter of the book called "*Welfare Economics and Inequality*", he attacks on the understanding that everyone is accepted like people are all in the same conditions and their subjectivities not taken into considerations. In this regard, he attacks to the normative understanding of inequality of traditional utilitarian welfare economics in which if every person has same amount of income, to establish a potential for equality will have been accomplished. This point of view of simple utilitarian welfare economics has a viewpoint that income is main linear vector of the welfare. In this perspective, "social welfare was taken to be the sum-total of individual utilities, and each individual utility was taken to be a function of the income of that individual. The same utility function was taken to apply to all individuals, and this fact, along with diminishing marginal utility from income, ensured that for any given total income to be distributed among the people, an equal distribution would maximize social welfare" (p. 95). On the other hand, income is only one vector of the welfare accomplishments. However it is not a main vector and not a linear vector of welfare always. This discussion will be broadened below in terms of two major concepts, "functioning" and "capability", of Sen.

Before starting on these concepts, a couple of words on the emphasis of Sen concerning to the perception of freedom can be enlightening. The aspect of freedom, as it is well-known, is often assessed according to material ownership of individuals. However, it is not accepted as a proper evaluation in Sen's perception. He points out that "the resources a person has, or primary goods that someone holds, may be very imperfect indicators of the freedom that the person really enjoys to do this or be that" (p. 37-8). Because of the great varieties among humans, it is impossible to assume that well-leveled resources always yield well-leveled freedom that people achieve. There is no rule like "the more resources people have, the more freedom that people can achieve". So, to compare the level of freedom among people by comparing their command on resources will be insignificant as well since their different characteristics in terms of interpersonal and external differences. So, every people should be evaluated according to their own subjectivity, which means "in general, comparisons of resources and primary goods cannot serve as the basis for comparing freedoms" (p. 38).

4. FUNCTIONING AND CAPABILITY

The chapter called functionings and capability is the one of the core points of the Sen's monograph. First of all, it will be better to have a look how he explains the concepts of "functioning" and "capability".

He defines the concept functioning as "beings and doings" which both of them are interrelated and; an individual's well-being depends on what s/he can achieve, what s/he can does, or what s/he can be with the consistency of his/her interpersonal and external diversities. According to him, functioning can vary from simple one like adequately nourished, being in good health to complex one like having self-respects and taking part in the life of the community[3]. Addition to this, he introduces another term in his analyze, that is capability. Capability is a vector of functionings. It means the term capability reflects "the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another".

Let's clarify the terms by some examples. In the current world, all of us are entitled some rights, e.g. taking part in the elections. Now imagine two individuals, one is a walking disable and the other able-bodied adult. Although, both individuals have a right to vote in the elections as the citizens of the country, if the disable cannot walk and has no financial power to afford a wheel-chair to mobilize him/herself, s/he cannot go to vote in the elections. Accordingly, there is an inequality between these two persons: While the able-bodied adult can actualize his/her right to vote in the election, the disable one cannot. This is not seen as the violation of libertarian rights in traditional libertarian theory, however. According to libertarians such as Nozick and Hayek, pioneer names of the neo-liberal approaches, the question is only about to be entitled with these rights but not about being able to actualize these rights or being capable to realize these rights[4]. Let's get another example: As it is well-known, all of us are entitled a right to purchase and sell goods and services in the market. Say, a fine lady wants to stay in Ritz Carlton or a middle-aged scientist wants to buy a new Mercedes from the market, which both of them have a right to do these actions so long as they are capable to afford. However, if they have not sufficient resources to actualize their wishes, e.g. staying in Ritz Carlton or purchasing a new Mercedes, what is the point to say everyone has a right to benefit the operational rules of the market? Sen's point is on this: If I am entitled some set f rights that I cannot actualize this is not much significant; instead, being not only entitled these rights, but able, namely, capable, to actualize these rights is crucial as well. The concept of capability, therefore, is expressed in the writings of Sen in the connotation of substantive freedom, in other words, real freedom[5]. In this sense, while capability means substantive freedom or real freedom, functioning means an actualized capability. In other words, on the one hand, having a right to vote in the election and being able to mobilize to vote in election constitute a person's capability. On the second hand, being mobilized and vote in the election are functioning itself. Namely, capability is the real opportunity of the individual whereas functioning is the actualization of that opportunity. In this context, welfare of a person cannot be assessed only possessing certain rights, but also whether s/he is able to actualize these rights. According to Sen, functioning and capability are in interrelation. The well-being level of a person depends on his/her functioning level, e.g. level of nourished, health etc. and the capability sets that the person has is necessary to reach these functionings. These achieved functionings, being in good health, well-leveled income, gaining respect from the other members of society etc. constitute person's well-being level and capability to achieve these functionings will constitute the person's freedom to have that well-being (p. 40). Accordingly, if the issue we concentrated on is well-being, capability and functioning of a person cannot be separable from each other. Therefore, in the sense of Sen, inequality should be assessed in the space of capabilities instead of one, single space, e. g. income, libertarian rights, wealth or something else. In this regard, poverty is the capability deprivation and development is to enhance human capabilities, but they are not associated with particular increases and decreases of Gross Domestic Product or per head income.

3 He references at that point to the Adam Smith's famous expression as "being in public without any shame" and Peter Townsend's definition of "being in society".

4 The question for Nozick is about holding and entitlements, but not actualization of rights.

5 It is sometimes called as positive freedom and some scholar say that this is an inspiration from Isaiah Berlin.

Lastly, a point on that freedom does not always positive outcomes in terms of human well-being needs to be mentioned. The question at that point is that can more freedom in terms of having functionings yield always more advantageous circumstances for people?

Having more freedom can cause sometimes negative situation. According to Sen, it is impossible to make generalization on this topic as well. Because of having cost of decision-taking, freedom can sometimes push the person more wretched situations. Sen summarizes this argument as follow: "There are costs of decision-taking, and it may be comfortable to lie back and relax while others make detailed choices. It is possible to construct different types of scenarios in which more freedom makes one certainly less happy, and possibly even less fulfilled" (p. 59). The example for this kind of situation that Sen gives is interesting. Imagine that a crime-scene is occurring while you are walking on the street. And you are faced two opposite decisions. One of them is turn back and going away. Another option is that you can interfere to the crime-scene. If you chose the former option and going away like anything exists, it will be possibly cause the feeling of guilty about why you did not do anything to prevent this terrible crime. If you chose the second option and interfere to the situation that you want to prevent, it is possibly to feel a reduction in your well-being. In these both option, you will feel a reduction in your well-being. So, having these kinds of choices in some circumstances can be meaningless in terms of freedom and both choices can reduce people well-being (p. 60). Obviously, this is too vague interpretation the relation between freedom and well-being. Although, the same negative influences of freedom on human welfare can be seen in more usual incidences, for example, choosing to live as an addict, e.g. being subject to smoking. For the sake of increasing human well-being, to prohibit, let say, the smoking undoubtedly increases physical health; but it is arguable that this prohibition will increase well-being as well. In Sen's view, there is no truth about affirmative action of state or some other external power can act with the logic of "we know what right thing is to do for you". This is obviously too paternalistic view.

5. IS CLASS ANALYSIS ENOUGH FOR SOLVING THE INEQUALITY?

In the measurement of inequalities, classification among wealth groups, classes is widely used. Sen questions that whether making these kind of classification is right or not.

According to him, to make classification between groups or class forces scientists to pick and chose one particular type of diversities rather than assessing it in multi-dimensionally. According to him, Marxist class analysis can be quite inadequate. Even if the classification is made in terms of economic opportunities and freedom, there would be still inequality in terms of varied diversities among people who belongs to same social classes in a society. For example, "even if inequalities based on the property ownership are eliminated altogether, there can be serious inequalities arising from diversities in productive abilities, needs, and other personal variations (p. 120)." Therefore, an approach to equality should going forward beyond the pure class-based analysis of Marxian approaches.

However, Marx had predicted this inequality among individuals and named this reality as "unequal right for unequal labor". Sen refers to this prediction of Marx and quote from him: "But one man is superior to another physically or mentally and so supplies more labor in the same time, or can labor for a longer time; and labor, 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 labor" – *Quoted from Marx by Sen* (p. 120). Accordingly, Marx's position in terms of diversities forces him to make another classification which is summarized with a well-known slogan as a cure for social and economic inequalities that is "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs".

Sen insists that, as Marx did, it must be gone beyond the income-based equality to establish real equality and it must be taken into consideration the "needs" of people by targeting to provide well-being equality. He says that "equality of incomes, or -more generally- of primary goods or resources can fail to yield equal satisfaction of needs, when needs vary interpersonally and so does the transformation of resources into need-fulfillment. In pursuing the demand of equality in the space of well-being or need fulfillment, we have to go beyond the income-based categories and also the so-called Marxian classes (indeed, as Marx himself had argued)" (p. 121).

Lastly, to have a look on the issue in terms of gender and in international dimension can be fruitful. First of all, it is necessary to say that Sen does not say anything new in terms of gender-based inequalities. According to him, there are systematic disparities in terms of freedom level that male and female enjoy in different societies. Besides that these disparities in relation with income and resources are not reducible often. He agrees on that payment and wages differences are important dimensions of inequalities between genders, but he also implies that "there are many other differential benefits, e.g. in the division of labor within the household, in the extent of care or education received, in liberties that different members are permitted to enjoy" (p. 122). However, it is an important point worth to be mentioned that Sen insists, in developed countries, the inequality is not less than the developing countries. In terms of functionings and capabilities in developed countries, dramatic gender gaps are observable too.

Sen brings about a genuine approach to the international differences among countries in terms of inequality. According to him public policies and the level of capabilities and functionings to reach some services are considerably associated with reducing inequalities. Therefore, level of capability enhancement policies is usually more important than the level of economic development of a country. By quoting him, "the extent of capability deprivation can be quite remarkably high in the world's most affluent countries. For example, a study by McCord and Freeman (1990), presented in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, indicates that men in the Harlem region of the prosperous city of New York have less chance of reaching the age of 40 or more than Bangladeshi men have. This is not because the residents of Harlem have lower incomes than the average Bangladeshi does. The phenomenon is more connected with the problems of health care, inadequacy of medical attention, the prevalence of urban crime, and other factors that affect the basic capabilities of the Harlem resident" (p. 114).

His claim is on that some developing countries are more successful than developed countries in terms of providing more egalitarian education, health services and medical care. If we move our attention from the income and commodities (which are developed countries consume more than developing countries) to the functioning and capabilities (in some developing countries, it is easier to obtain them than the developed countries) the picture (saying that people in affluent countries are living more comfortably) changes radically. With the help of public policies in terms of quality of life, medical care, and basic education, level of capability and functionings are higher in some developing countries such as in Costa Rica and Bangladesh. This higher level of capability and functionings can bring about more qualified life for developing countries' than developed ones. By the way of examples Sen concludes in the last part of his work, he repeatedly provide a convincing thesis that the increasing level of income is not much important to solve the question of inequality and poverty, although classical utilitarian welfare perspective attributes it much importance than its worth. Instead of level of income, it is more important to increase the people's level of capability and set of functionings to reach higher level of equality and affluence.

6. CONCLUSION

It seems that main point of Sen is to establish a new paradigm for the assessment of inequality, poverty and developmental issues. His framework in the book is a clear illustration of this paradigm which is based on capability evaluation of individuals' advantages instead of libertarian and utilitarian interpretation of these subjects. Although, this framework is being used by dozens of scholars in the world and particularly in the western scientific communities, it has not been sufficiently implemented to the scientific inquiries by researches in Turkey. Majority of the researches in these fields in Turkey is still using the outdated paradigms for the assessment on the aspects mentioned above. In this context, as one of his comprehensive works, Inequality Re-examined, can be an enlightening tool for the future researches. To the curious readers and researches, the book can be accompanied with Sen's two other influential studies, namely, *Development as Freedom* (1999) and *The Idea of Justice* (2009).