Quality of Life by Literacy in Framework of Capability Approach

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Concept of Quality of Life has been defined in various ways by several researchers, authors, academicians and great thinker. It is very subjective and differs by individual to individual. For some it is a good living standard, for some it is a good health & well being, for some it is an empowerment and so on.

The Capability Approach has been intensely stimulated by Amartya Sen’s revolutionary work in developmental economics. His works cover an immensely diverse range of subjects and got a revolution in the field of economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology and now days in inter-disciplinary as well.

Amartya Sen has argued that in assessing the individual ‘quality of life’ one should also analyses individual capability of ‘doing’, ‘being’ and ‘functioning’ as per the terminology he has given in his conceptual framework of Capability Approach. It refers to the manifold perspectives to assess the functioning of an individual. Functioning itself varies again, e.g. disease free, able to participate in social functions, individual personal status in society or community and having a purposeful life. It means involving & accomplishing essential functioning to a definite benchmark criterion of living. Sen has not given a definite operational definition of his terminology as whole, though he defined them separately. Hence, it becomes easy to assess the Quality of Life of an individual. However he suggests that in such approach, literacy has a major role to play, as literacy is a capability and helps to broaden the other capabilities. He further elaborated that literacy is pivotal process. It is an empowerment process that enables people to acquire the skills and knowledge to improve their quality of life. Literacy is a process that empowers people, leads to an evolution in attitudes, sets the value system required for this process to develop, restores the inner worth and confidence of people, and develops their self-reliance and their ability to act and exercise choice. For the processes to be firmly anchored, literacy skills that have relevance in the everyday’s life of the people, and that will put to use, are essential. Literacy is thus vital to all individuals. It expand the all possible capabilities by availing the other possible opportunities.

As per the Human Development Reports, literacy is the basic and first indicator as per Human Development Index. Afterwards, education, health, gender equality, peace, less poverty, and other basics are mentioned. As per the report, literacy has been considered as a tool to & individual capacity to read & write and it’s become instrumental in bringing and expanding capabilities which further helps in measuring other parameters.

As per the Capability Approach, it gives the foundation and gives the platform to perform called ‘functioning’, means what exactly an individual wants to do and wants to become in his or her life. It also gives choices, freedom and space to live a respectful life with dignity. An individual got the insight to judge himself, his strength, weakness, aspiration although in the framework of his Capability. As per this structure, there is one essential things i.e. ‘agency’, without it, neither one can avail neither opportunities nor makes choices to be functional in society or community. Unlike Sen, Nussbaum’s (2000) has produced a list of ten central capabilities in which literacy is not explicitly mentioned but which has an impact on a number of capabilities such as reason, affiliation, creativity and so on. She asserted that there are central human capabilities which are essential for each individual in all situations. These capabilities are fundamental to live a dignified life. Hence, it is appear from a capability perspective literacy have both instrumental and intrinsic value. This argument is also supported by Saito (2003) and Maddox (2008) they also studied it inherent value for leading a good quality of life. They further studied and suggested that learning, education and skills are plays a vital role and are critical
in capability approach. These factors are fundamental source which enable individual to have a good life and also provides the important opportunities to live an eminence of life.

Keeping the contextual notion in to consideration, literacy is an itself a capability, it’s also an ‘input’ and also broaden further capabilities. It is mean and output as it also transfer and shared by others in longer sense. It further acts as knowledge sharing tool for each individual. Therefore, to have a good quality of life, an individual required literacy skills and it thus accurately regarded as a basic of expanding capabilities as well as a process. This process, further decides that individual’s space to being in this state or he need to move further. Now it’s person choice to look an agency for expanding his capabilities which certainly bring a good quality of life.

This argument is also supported by Karol & Halima (2006), he illustrated that literacy & learning significantly contributes in enhancing capabilities of an individual to live a good quality of life. Alkire (2005) also introduces the Amartya Sen’s concept of agency and surveyed the three measures of human agency which is also known’s as sphere of well-being: Self-direction, Self efficacy and Self determination. A capability approach to literacy and learning is acquisition of social, cultural, economical knowledge and now a day’s health & wellbeing at most, while considering people’s priorities as preference instead of uttering on obligations from society.

These rational and rooted agencies are assessed in the room of certain values, ‘Being & Doing’ and further which can help an individual to become ‘being to becoming’. Hence, all existence issues are also relevant in the context of capability approach. This is called ‘capabilities’ of individual agents in Nussbaum and Sen terms. Therefore an individual required all resources and opportunities including education, learning platforms, social security, economical benefits etc.

As Robeyns in year 2005 emphasized on individual capabilities to function, if one focus on his ability to perform, one should also see the effective opportunities, he stated that “their effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and be who they want to be”. He also elucidates that “having access to an education that allows a person to flourish is generally argued to be a valuable capability”.

Therefore, notion of ‘freedom’ became the central, freedom to have agency, opportunities, activities and states. Moreover, individual can avail and enjoy the activities, which is also indispensable to live a good quality of life, as per capability approach, which assess it terms of having a standard of living.

Sen (1987; 1992) also has emphasized about the concept, scope, implications and relevance of capability approach in his various literature to assess the quality of life. Nevertheless, this approach is also reflected in the work of Adam Smith, Aristotle, Karl Marx, John Stuart and John Hicks among others. It has been argued that measurement & assessment of ‘Quality of Life’ required to envisaged and calculated from the angle of functioning’s and capabilities rather than from resources and utility point of view.

Quality of Life from a Capability approach perspective offers three fundamentals: functioning, resources and capabilities.

**Functioning**

It refers a ‘doing’, means an individual can do, such as walking, reading, or other hand, ‘being’, means an individual can be such as he/she can be socially accepted or social. These can be fundamental e.g. well nurtured, no diseases, healthy, however, they can be unusual such as dignity, respect, status, participation in society or community etc.

**Resources**

While functioning refers to the things that people can be, or things they can do, these should be distinguished from the resources which are used to achieve functioning. Resources can refer to variation of government
provision, and the other psycho-social resources such as individual. Ability, effort, community needs and so on. However, quality of life is not measured in terms of resources such as income, wealth but on achieved functioning and capabilities.

Capabilities

Capability refers to ‘the various combinations of functioning (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. Capability is, thus, a set of vectors of functioning’s, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another... to choose from possible livings’ (Sen 1992). For e.g as per present scenario of world health crisis or any other critical issue, how an individual access for probable existing. Capabilities thus imprison not only accomplishment but also unpredictable or uncertain options; it scans the horizon to notice roads not taken. It checks ‘whether one person did have the opportunity of achieving the functioning vector [that is n-tuple] that another actually achieved’ (Sen 1985). Thus capability is a particularly rich kind of opportunity freedom, and functioning are a wide and flexible category that can be elaborated quite extensively.

Now considers an approach to ‘quality of life’ in which the objective is to expand what people are able to do and be what might be more called their freedom or their choices. In this view, Quality of Life from capability approach is that enable people to enjoy a long and healthy life, good education, a meaningful and respectful work, socio-economic empower and so on. The proposal is that quality of life should be considered in the space of capability and functioning. In other words, quality of life should be measured in terms of the capability to achieve functioning.