

Nemzetközi Kapcsolatok Multidiszciplináris Doktori Iskola

# A COLLECTION OF THE THESES of the doctoral thesis by

Folk György

Economic growth and well-being Liberalization and well-being in rural India

Budapest, 2011

Thesis advisor:

Dr. Csicsmann László PhD

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# 1) A brief introduction to the subject of the thesis

Asian regional studies have a limited coverage in Hungarian academics during the last decades and the place India holds is even more modest, in spite of her increasing global significance and international exposure. And if covered the attention revolves around subjects and relationships that are less essential for this subcontinent size country and nonetheless the most appealing to us. These theses are resulted by a decade long study of the history, the society and then economic order of India. It is based on the resolution that human reality can not be arranged in isolated branches of research and at the crossing of specialized disciplines realizations necessarily overlooked by posittivist research will emerge.

India as a subject of research returns to the author of present theses as an increasingly complex and profound one. Her peculiar circumstances, unexpected opportunities and medium term threats are followed up by too few among the observers in Europe, thus her "expert" can not do other than warn and try his best to fill in the gap.

## ← Objective of research

Our research centres on two distinct research subjects, human and social well-being and the structural changes of an economy. Our territory is that of India, the sovereign federal state and the era is that of the 25 years from the end of the 1980-es until today. This period is embraces roughly one human generation, as history is perceived on a comparable time scale by most humans. An essential tenet of the neoclassical economy is the causality between economic growth and general well-being, any structural change resulting in economic growth will increase the well-being of the society.

Our research aims to prove wrong this tenet for India as a whole for our research period.

Our hypothesis goes that the liberalization reforms of the national economy and the growth trajectory they entail do not bring about an increase of the well-being for the rural majority of the Indian population and as a consequence it is one-sided and misleading to describe the changes resulted as the "development" of India.

We set off by assuming that structural changes, international exposure and accelerating growth divide India into a well adapting minority of winners and a less changing, disadvantaged majority. This division can be defined geographically (advancing versus lagging regions), socially (wealthy/privileged versus poor/disadvantaged), the most obvious is however the increasing gap between the cities and the rural countryside. Economic growth doen not mean "development" for the rural majority, but a drastic change in the existential conditions and exerts a controversial impact on their well-being. The structural changes in India involve tremendous sacrifices, losses and global risks.

The neoclassic developmental narrative ascribes the role of the eminent disciple to India since the changes started in 1990 (Panagariya[2004]). India is liberalizing so that she

acquires economic power and increases her wealth. The increasing incomes should be converted to widening opportunities, augmenting consumption and added public goods. This tenet is, however applicable to an obtrusive minority instead of the whole of Indian society for over a human generation. Rural aam admi, the rural majority does not have a fair share of these opportunities, and runs risks and shares disadvantages imposed recently.

This "development" can be demonstrated by means of a heterodox interpretation of human well-being past the usual limits of the = income = well-being equation. We set off by the definitions of both as used in everyday life, the political and macroeconomic discourse as suggested by the neoclassical economy of our times and oppose them to a different interpretation leading us to very different conclusions.

We define and interpret the structural reforms and the rural segment of India and present the major changes during the 20+years of structural changes. Finally we analyse the impact of those changes to the rural well-being as interpreted for the purpose.

#### ← Resources and literature

Our research focuses on the trend of well-being during the last 20+ years in rural India. The literature for this complex subject will comprise four diverse fields:

The definition of wealth creation and well-being

The (mainly Anglo-saxon) literature on well-being abounds. Much countrywide research has been done on the subjective perception of well-being, universal comparisons, however are hardly possible. Important contributions are made by studies on the influence of the various social, environmental and personality factors (age, employment, income, education, climate, family status, personal traits etc.).

As opposed to the research of subjective well-being and quality of life the quest for objective well-being won the day from the beginning of the 90-es. The need structure analysis of the poorer global regions was high on the agenda of the World Bank (Alkire[2002], Narayan[1999,2000,2002,2009], Topalova[2007,2008]) and various (Anglosaxon) schools of research (Doyal-Gough[1991], Van Praag-Frijters[1999], Gasper[2004]). The analysis of human needs and well-being became a subject of the European political discourse during the last 5 years (Hoff-Stiglitz[1999], Kates-Swart[2002], Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi[2009]).

#### India as economic entity

Economic, social, sectoral and regional study of India the sovereign economic entity is rendered possible by six and a half decades of political continuity of the independent federal state. The economic framework is provided by the system of five year plans and the

reporting on the federal budget. Indian macroeconomics, rural development, regional differences among the states and social stratification are covered by a prolific English language literature. Comprehensive economic textbooks on the Indian economy are published and actualized yearly (Datt-Sundharam[2007] and Dhingra[2006]). Major economic and social issues are elaborated in general or special reports of the Government of India, her central authorities or special committees sent to probe into an important subject highlighted by political controversy (the most prominent ones are the Wanchoo committee (1962-68) investigating the size of black economy, the Mandal (1979) and Sachar (2006) committees analyzing the status of the backward Muslim castes, and the Tendulkar committee (2009) reinterpreting the official poverty level. Particular experiences and overall opinions are widely published while very limited factual information is available on the social influence on the caste realities of our day as well as on the living conditions of the huge masses beloning to backward castes and tribes. A meagre literature is to be found on rural living as a whole beyond the regular analyses of land distribution, agricultural cultivation, income and productivity. Research on ecological subjects and the ongoing marginalization of the peripheral social groups (dalits, adivasis, women, bonded labourers) are usually pursued by foreign researchers or studies supported by international NGOs and funds.

Changes of economic environment and welfare in rural India during our research period The development of rural India as a research subject is fiercely contested among the different political blocks, articles and books, official publications and studies and research reports are ideologically biased or mask vested interest. The most obvious is the government-related commitment to liberalization and globalization (Bimal Jalan, Montek S. Ahluwalia, Ashok Desai, T.N. Srinivasan, S.D. Tendulkar), contested incessantly by the organs and personalities caring for the integrity, traditional (mostly Hindu) values against the intrusion of foreign influence, pooled in and around National Volunteer Organization (RSS) and the Family of Hindu Associations (Sangh Parivar). Leftist thinking is also intensive and consequently present in the political arena, arguing in the interest of the lagging masses, the poor and the lowly (Amartya Sen, Utsa Patnaik, Kamal Kabra, A. Vaidyanathan, S. Mahendra Dev). The debate among protagonists the of market liberalization and economic development and the proponents of ecological viewpoints and the protection of the environment (Vandana Shiva, Debal Deb, M.S. Swaminathan). Foreign observers, analysts and researchers of the Indian economy and the society as well as defenders of the human rights (Jean Dréze, Angus Deaton, Anders Müller, Jackie Assayag, Bruno Dorin) have a distinctly critical Western approach, and an important field of study is based on the the ideological confrontation between the secular versus traditionalist, Hindu, Muslim, eventually Sikh and Christian platforms.

Rural India is a model of limited relevance about a subcontinent and a country with an almost unparalelled population, historical, geographical, climatic diversity and social complexity. Western analysts have an ingrained tendency of putting the unifying factors before splits, divergences and social complexities and and interpreting India in term of the unity due to the geographical and cultural distance.

Available economic data are plentiful and extremely scanty the same time. Painful is the delay in time, caused before all by the remote date of the last census in 2001. The characteristic mode of data provision in India is the "report", data processed and provided by an incumbent of a post somewhere in the hierarchy with an ever present tendency of distortion in the expected direction due to political zeal and the adherence to the position. Data are non-existing or casual for many politically sensitive subjects, such as the influence of caste and religion, the black economy and the reality of the multitude of communities with low status attribution. The interpretation or basis of many statistical terms have changed during the reform course (the most importent being the line of poverty) that are subject to widespread controversy and bitter argumentation, while continuos monitoring of long term trends is disabled.

## Primary sources

Overall data are provided by the general censuses carried out decennially, the last one available by the time of writing was of 2000/2001. Economic and social development is outlined by (all-Indian) National Sample Surveys (NSS) done yearly since the 50-ies, and extended rounds every 5 year, the last extended round made available is the 64the round 2007/08. Consumption data is provided by the Consumer Expedition Surveys carried out yearly on a "small" (10-30000), and every five years on a "large" (100000) sample in two steps on stratified samples. The impact of market changes on the households can be inferred from Market Information Survey of Households (MISH) by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) 70% of the respondents of its 300000-strong sample, however are urban citizens. Overall agricultural development is covered by the yearly Agricultural Surveys.

The National Accounts Statistics (NAS) are published by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) with a base year of 1980/8, it provides, however, no rural-urban distinction (Vaidyanathan[2001]).

Macroeconomic data and financial balances are published in the yearly in the Economic Surveys by the Government of India for each financial year. Published data serve the purpose of "shining India", this is to say are systemically biased towards a developing, powerful, balanced India-image "lifting all boats". Since 1994 a group of economists publish a yearly Alternative Economic Survey in order to draw attention to the interest of

the majority and the economic alternatives in opposition to the "pro-G7, pro-MNC, pro-superrich" economic course of the ruling government (Kabra-Upadhyay eds.[2004]). An important source of information on the status of the rural society is the Agricultural Census. Agrarian censuses follow recommendations by FAO and were carried out in 1990-91, 1995-96, 2000-01 and lastly in 2005-06.

# 2) Applied methodologies and their foundations

## Hipotheses:

Our subject will be examined by applying the following hypotheses:

### I.) Hypothese on the definition of well-being:

(methodology: a review of the anthropological, comparative study of civilizations, existential, anthropological, psychological and social psychological results of the last decades)

#### Hipothese:

Well-being can be defined invariably from civilizations, i.e. geographical regions and historic periods.

#### Short exposition:

The mainstream of the liberal economy postulates human needs infinite, insatisfiable, subject to individual choice, while well-being is by the individual satisfaction and the good mental and bodily state. Contrasted to this the objective well-being as can be inferred from anthropological and social psychological research maintains that the factors of well-being are finite and determined biologically and socially. Following this approach the objective needs are satisfied by many factors other than income as a major determinant.

#### II.) Hypothese on the development of India as a whole:

(methodology: sectoral macroeconomic analysis)

#### Hypothese:

India as an integrated economic entity is a generalization created and maintained by political prejudice.

#### Short exposition:

India developing on a faster track as compared to the earlier periods ("shining India") is a construct maintained by theory and research committed to the Washington consensus. A more profound analysis of actual realities will divide the country into a multitude of diverging communities and regions, onto the majority of whom the standard development criteria, increasing individual income and freedom will not be applicable or relevant. The most important divergence of this kind is the widening gap between urbal and rural India throughout the last decades.

#### III.) Hypothese on an integral global economy

(methodology: deduction - a refutation of a statement on a significant part of the whole will deny the statement in its entirety

#### Hypothese:

The structural changes enabling participation and adaptation to the world economy do not imply the development of the involved national economies and accordingly will not infere the increasing well-being of the majority of the society.

#### Short exposition:

The paradigm of the ever increasing number of winners generated by an increasingly open world economy is denied by the widening social and regional gaps, the stagnation of the subjective sensation of well-being and the loss of existential safety in the "winner" as well as the accelerating ecological deterioration, the instability, the failure of states in the "looser" national economies, while the threat of the global ecological risks due to "economic development" (climate scarcity of water, food supply failure, partial exhaustion of the fossile fuels) are universally shared. India, the most populous "winner" 2020 to 2035 will hide an increased amount of internal welfare risk and existential insecurity (poverty, undernutrition, strengthening paramilitary powers, AIDS and other contemporary mass diseases, illiteracy and lack of education) behind the facade of a economic growth. Thus the relative deterioration of rural India provides a most striking and large scale refutation of the universalistic developmentalism.

#### Structure of the treatise

Well-being has no definition in the sense of a generally acknowledged narrative, however a plethora of interpretations have been maintained in the various value systems of different ages and civilizations. Present treatise can not do better than trying to enlist and review the relevant interpretations, definitions and measurement attempts arriving at a tentative definition serving best the purpose of the well-being analysis of rural India.

The impact of the economic changes of the last two decades on rural India is analized following the systematic framework expounded in the first part of the treatise. "Rural India" will mean 72% of the total population, 1023 million people in 2001, living in approx. 600 thousand villages (Census GoI[2001]).

Our research comprises the period from the ongoing liberalization of the Indian economy (1990/91) or alternatively from and the start of the reform course in the wider sense (following 1985)until present (2010), the time span of an entire human generation. The research has comprised the systematic study of published information of several scientific fields around the commencement of the reforms (1991), as well as the nearest available to our present time (2009/10). The economic order and performance has been considered as independent variables that exert an influence on our depending variables, the

partial factors of well-being. We arrive at the trend of their changes due to the change of the economic order, this is to say the increase or decrease of well-being.

Based of the review of the available sources and literature the well-being for the majority of rural population stagnated or deteriorated.

Both the profit yield and the share in GDP of agriculture has shrunk, while the ratio of the population living from it (70%) remained about the same. The essential role of stategenerated financing of development was not replaced by private financing, yields have grown slowly. The distorted system of sustained state subsidies caused further deterioration of the soils and the water table.

The price of staple foodgrains and pulses has grown considerably, while the procurement prices were depressed by exposure top the global market (Dev[2007,2009]).

The incertitude in rural employment has increased. The organized forms of labor have been gradually replaced by employment on contracts and of females replacing males for lower wages (Chandrasekhar-Ghosh[2000] and Sharan[2007]). Child labor and bonded labor remained widespread. The average size of farmer holdings shrank and landlessness was also on the rise (Ramakumar[2009]. Wage earners and casual laborers migrated to the cities and to more distant regions to an increasing extent (Bhagat[2010]).

The impact of the "revamped" and "targeted" Public Distribution System (PDS) has diminished. Due to diminishing buying power and hiking food prices the rate of undernutrition has grown or not improved and the health status of rural population changed for the better only marginally (Deaton-Dréze[2009], Nandakumar et al[2010]). New, global consumption patterns and aspiration shave emerged among the rural population as well due mainly to TV broadcast. Mobile telephony and TV viewership has grown quickly while the of computer usage and Internet remained limited. The new opportunities resulted from local self-government and entrepreneurship were captured by the traditional elites, the handful large landowners and the members of the upper castes. As the price of the agricultural inputs hiked and the selling prices remained depressed grew the indebtedness of the farmers and an endemic wave of suicides among the farmers was observed throughout the lat decade (Vidyasagar–Suman[2007]).

For the majority of the material factors the chance of need satisfaction diminished. The chance of need satisfaction for the social factors increased for certain needs and decreased for many others. The existential security became more often threatened, the subjective sense of security decreased.

As for the rural population, the structural changes did not bring forth pregnant changes of the social environment that could have an enabling effect on human growth and blooming, we have no proofs of an increased rate of leisure time or the percentage of the non-subsistence expenditures in the rural consumption basket.

# 3) Major results and conclusions

## I.) Interpretation of well-being

We have defined well-being as the chance of satisfying human needs. The list of human needs proved to be finite and identifiable as can be drawn similarly from several researches (Alkire[2002]). The needs have an anthropological foundation, i.e. are shared by all humans, while historical and cultural divergences find explication with the socially preferred mechanisms of the need satisfaction (Ekins-Max-Neef[1992]).

The comprehensive list of the needs comprise physical and biological ones that can find a satisfaction for the individual, the social needs as well as the self-determined need of personal growth and blooming (Ryan-Deci[2000]).

The model of well-being based on our interpretation of human needs along with the trends of satisfaction in rural India is summed up by Table 1.

	Cathegory	Basic need	
1.1	Anthropological	Physical needs (water, temperature. etc.)	DECREASE
1.2	(biological/physic-	Biological needs	DECREASE
1.3	al)	Bodily health	DECREASE
1.4		Food	DECREASE
1.5		Exercise/physical activity	DECREASE
1.6		Access to materials/tools	INCREASE
1.7		Physical protection	NO CLEAR TREND
1.8		Events and stimuli	INCREASE
1.9		Freedom of movement and action	NO CLEAR TREND
2.1	Psychosocial	Sexuality	NO CLEAR TREND
2.2	(groups and com-	Spatial belonging	DECREASE
2.3	munity)	Education	NO CLEAR TREND
2.4		Attachment to groups	NO CLEAR TREND
2.5		Near relationships	DECREASE
2.6		Task, commitment, work	DECREASE
2.7		Status,	DECREASE
2.8		Social order, security, peace	DECREASE
3.1	Organismic	Knowledge and skills	DECREASE
3.2	(personal growth Adventure and variety		INCREASE
3.3	and blooming)	Power	DECREASE
3.4		Harmony and spirituality	DECREASE
3.5		Lustfulness, play, recreation	DECREASE

Table 1 Trends of basic need satisfaction in rural India

#### II.) Change of life and welfare in rural India

The majority of the more than 1 billion people living in India, 650-700 million live in a comparatively slowly changing rural India. The most striking traits of this rural living are and have remained mass poverty, neglect and lagging behind in spite of all countrywide, local or international discourses, mass revival movements, international development efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies.

This inert and less mobile majority of the Indian society yet moves following its Indian patterns and rules under the external influences that are central or peripheral for the rural ways of life. One can not claim either that rural india has not plied to those influences or that rural life has changed in an essential way. The bulk of the rural population lives on the verge of subsistence deprived of the means to change or break away from while being confronted to an ever widening lure of education, well-being and individual freedom.

#### III. Consequences on global economic theory (Methodological results)

The red thread through world economy and regional studies are the nation and the national income, the dominant approach is the universalism of development theory. Developed nations in this veneer are industrialized, more open both in the political and the economic sense, a larger portion of goods and services produced are monetized, and the consumtion as measured by the expenditure on it is greater per capita. In the open competition among nations the democratic systems and the countries warranting for the human rights have further advanced, while the same trajectory of development is open and available for all nations. Advanced and expensive technologies offer advantages in the arms/security race as well. As the income is converted into absolute goods (competitive strength, consumption, security, individual freedom) the increased income = increased well-being is axomatic.

This treatise argues that the universalistic approach to development is erroneous, and similar to other social sciences modern economic theory has a limited domain of validity (Adelman[1999] and Evans[2004]). The boundaries of this domain are marked in time by the delimited natural resources, an in the geographic space by the boundaries of the civilizations. This treatise denies the above universalism for subcase of universal significance, the "development" by the detailed analysis of the responses to the inclusion in the global economy.

### Conclusion

Our denial of the developmentalist axiom leads us to another approach to well-being, interpreted as absolute for the human being. Our definition is based on the need and welfare research focusing on the developing world and widened by the positive psychology

and the self-determination theory (SDT), rendering possible a model of well-being that is invariable among periods of history and the variance of societies.

The lists of needs of the last two decades based on anthropological research beyond the societies of consumption comprise a set of finite and satisfiable needs. Different societies with different cultures develop conflicting modi to satisfy these needs. It seems feasible however, that the extent of which the needs are satisfied are not depending on income in the first line, but the surrounding environment, the community and the individual efforts. The odds of personal growth and blooming (as postulated by SDT, see ) have not improved in rural India as inferred from the available evidence. Subsistence (self-sustaining) has become slightly more difficult for the majority of rural population. No break-through has taken place in education, individual choices hav not augmented essentially. Men and women find themselves burdened by heavier burdens of income generation and family sustenance. Child and bonded labor did not diminished characteristically, the generation of new jobs and livelihood opportunities is not significant. Conflicting forces shaping the rural life did not create major improvements for rural India.

Instead of the development narrative our research confirms that the structural reforms have strengthened an economic and social order that contributed to the blooming of a widening group of people and left behind or increased the burdens of another, much more populous group.

One feels obliged to pose the question: why is this all in all a must? What legitimates the economic reforms of a very populous country that disregards all other ends and means if we have do not have convincing evidence that it brings about the increasing welfare for the majority of the society?

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