

Weaker Section in India: Fact and Fatigue

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ABSTRACT

Weaker Section is a Social Fact and a popular concept, yet remains elusive, misspelled and often contested. It is seen to be acquiring much larger space and momentum day by day. Its significance and operational definitions are also found to be greatly varying. Without understanding it clearly, profoundly and phenomenally it loses its relevance and, in this process one causes greater harm and damage to a social order and a better society. Therefore it is inevitable to shed fresh light and re-look into this, because the popular discourses and contemporary constructions of weaker section left many questions, but one vital, unanswered. The irony is that though it has been extensively discussed and articulated by cross-section of scholars and administrative machineries an explicit meaning of it is yet to be developed and still awaited. Now it is the high time not to stereotypically ponder over it and analyse it again and again but to draw and derive a proper and accurate meaning without, which weaker section, as remained, will further continue to trigger immense unrests and manifest to be why for such a long Why it happens so often and because, it is the general perception of people that since its origin, the concept has undergone many mutations and, over the period of its continuous career, it does not maintain and retain its same/similar nature. This view is directly or indirectly contested and opposed by another section with altogether a different world view and approach that weak or weaker section is not merely a 'Social Fact', indeed a popular concept, and any attempt to contest or contradict it is regarded as brahminic, anti humanist and adverse to social change. Extreme polarity of views, between different scholars/communities/sections about weak or weaker section, hence unwittingly created / left unresolved cleavage contributing fathom less tension brewing day by day, which overtly and covertly affect people's social relationship and normal behavioural pattern.

Introduction

Weak encompasses everything, all-inclusive, structural-phenomenal and consists of weak and strong underpinning. Its usage and nomenclature vary, depending upon text and context, but it is universal and all pervasive. The word or vocabulary may be generic and loathe with individual pursuit to regard/disregard mirror of society. One may agree to disagree about nature and character of social stratification and hierarchy, but one definitely comes across with immutable existence of weak regardless of societies. Successive evolution or so-called growth of/in society does not augur to discard weak as an evidence and social reality. History of hitherto society unambiguously reflects about undyingness of weak. Rather passage of time justifies weak becomes more weak sharpening cleavage in human relationship and society. Weaker section or weak in India represents history of humankind and may be to certain extent the term weak occupies many things-politico-economic, socio-cultural, local-regional and ethnic based. Hence what is weak and how its origin functions in India to reflect its entirety is main objective of this paper.

Construction of Weak

Etymology of weak is vast, complex and problematic. What is seen and experienced over time is weak does not remain confine within selected construction or categorisation of scholars and policy makers. All branches of knowledge-history to computer science to life science and biotechnology to medical science- work on weak. May be historians' concept of weak is different from scientists and former's usage varies before latter, even sometimes interpretation depends upon convenience of scholars-weak as a class or category always remains homogeneous. Evolution of society justifies such trend of development. Auguste

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Comte, Herbert Spencer, E.B Tylor, Max Muller, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Robert King Merton, to name a few in sociology, regard weak in different scheme but they all accept basic structure of weak. Adam Smith, Marshall, Ricardo including contemporary-modern economists' say weak is a decisive and divisive factor.

Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hegel, Kant, Dilthey including others from politics and philosophy directly or indirectly delivered on different dimensions of weak as a social reality. But among of all, Karl Marx developed a crystal clear and well balanced idea about weak and its continuation across societies and age. Hence weak is a structural phenomenon.

In simple vocabulary weak represent a class, race, community or group whose social condition is poor and mostly determined by ascription. Ontology of weak is cumbersome and epistemology augurs weak spreads across territorial boundary and society at large. Classification or evolution of society reveals weak-be in any nomenclature and strength-existed and exists strongly in current society. In no society or age weak is unseen- structural than mere integral. Construction of identity, class, caste, religion and ethnicity absorbs more culture-space in capitalism-imperialism disregarding genesis of human suffering inclusive of poverty, illiteracy, exclusion, subordination, marginalisation or in totality weak. Present society considers former most powerful and latter insignificant and baseless category. Value-principle of society, being product of historico-material condition, constructed or constructs weak according to convenience.

History of humankind exemplifies hierarchy, contradiction and competition willy-nilly notch up society to influence human conscience. Present society having above three pillars augurs randomisation of stratified social structure. Regardless of Europe, America, Africa, Asia or sub-Sahara, weak is found everywhere. Historico-civilisational pursuit may reiterate weak is structural, universal and categorical. Other may consider weak is not elusive and merely represents a class or category. Contemporary-modern utilitarian scholars define weak according to convenience. But a very simple confession though appears ordinary and simple, weak is not an easy idea, concept or to that extent ubiquitous institution uniformly understood by everybody everywhere. Has it been so, question regarding its appropriation and organisation would never have risen again and again. Fact or irony is manner in which the concept is often conceptualised and contextaulised more problems get surmounted. The concept becomes/creates more ambiguity vis-à-vis controversy contributing to social holocaust and clash between people, culture and civilisation per se. In such a situation of intellectual laxity as well as continuation of panoramic pandemonium, it becomes imperative to understand and analyse whether the concept is really difficult to define or is it highly pejorative—generic and can never be simplified, understood, conceptualised, or it is purposively misunderstood and distorted? Second ambiguity is how it is regarded as a process to be amenable to large community? Third but very significant issue is what it constitutes in India?? Though enormous confusion prevails about its nature, structure and feature, in totality it is understood covert and overt situation failed to construe proper meaning or definition of the term.

Problematic of Weak

Weak, weaker section or backward caste/class conveys multiple meaning and probably no scholar agrees with view of another scholar because each scholar's notion of weaker section or backward class varies from others. Further this is such a field and topic that scholars across disciplines flock and feel free to write anything about weaker section conveniently, construing the term as they like. In a simple sense weak represents mainly three communities of people in India. They are Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Caste/Class.

Mostly sociologists and social scientists conceptualised weak but not necessarily touched upon pertinent problem of the concept with fact and figure. Policy of protective

discrimination, compensatory discrimination (Marc Galanter 1984) and affirmative action do not fit everywhere and look alike (TOI 2003). Moreover in India the earlier two measures engendered and upheld discrimination and historical prejudice and latter justifies a normative concern for greater mobility and representation to those, who have been victims of institutionalised inequality (TOI 2003). For example policy of protective discrimination, compensatory discrimination and affirmative action do not correctly set with all weaker section or backward class and help them to remain united because they justify weaker section in India is not a monolithic community and does not possess same or similar value due to caste, class, ethnicity, religious difference and moreover lack of solidarity and compatibility among them (M N Srinivas 1989; S C Dube 1990; T K Oommen 1984; A Beteille 1990; K L Sharma 1997; B K Roy-Burman 1998; Dipankar Gupta 1998, 2002).

While some scholars opine that protective and compensatory discrimination are only for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Marc Galanter 1984; E Zelliott 1992) hardly any scholar say how affirmative action could be fruitfully used for weaker section or backward class. It is found that most scholars who support or oppose idea of weaker section have pre-mindset loyalty and individual biasness, instead of trying to study objectively genesis of problem of weaker section. For example M N Srinivas (1989) always forcefully emphasised on caste mobility, that is from a lower caste to high caste and called that process sanskritisation but till end of his career he could not come out of his ascriptional caste identity, and most importantly he failed to classify intriguing nature of backward class since he was not clear about definitive boundary in which backward class besets with. S C Dube (1990) with his modern outlook and pro-backward and Dalit approach called caste reservation policy a retrograde fetish without making backward class concept clear and understandable. K L Sharma developed static approach (1997) to problem of backward class. Andre Beteille (1990; 1992) and T K Oommen (1984, 1994) though looked at backward class with a sympathetic approach; they failed to develop adequate understanding on backward class. While Beteille directly attacks very idea of backward class and term it 'fraud on the constitution', Oommen finds difficult to evolve an appropriate meaning of backward class or weaker section.

Dipankar Gupta (1998, 2002) being a protagonist of post-modern, neo-liberal, western, American approach- interrogates quota and reiterates reservation in India and affirmative action in America completely polemical and dichotomous. To his testament of idea and understanding extensive reservation policy in India, in any form and character precludes meritocracy, stalls development and endanger inter-subjectivity character of fast coming modern India. Hence his entire writing highlights his failure to conceptualise fundamental aspects of weaker section.

Besides, to name a few more scholars i.e. Nandu Ram (1988, 1995), Gopal Guru (1991) Sukhadeo Thorat (1996), S.M Michael (1999), Gail Omvedt (1994), Ghanshyam Shah (2001), Eleanor Zelliott (1992) and others also extensively deal with Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Weaker Section or Backward class (OBC). But their analysis does not adequately address to concept of weaker section. On other hand contemporary scholars construction and constellation of weaker section or backward class also remain imprecise, improper, confusing and of course full of contradiction.

In light of above discussion, it is clearly understood that weaker section in India is yet to be properly, systematically and adequately conceived and conceptualised, whose reflections, articulations of weaker section are diverse and situational – territorial oriented than identifying any common attributes which help them to remain united. The scholar's different likings and concern vis-à-vis constructions of weaker section are mostly ideology based than economy driven. Unlike Western and American societies, the scholars in India hail from two different

backgrounds viz. conformist and non-conformist and adhere to socialist or capitalist ideology. But almost all scholars in India ironically partake with latter ideology rather than former. Therefore, there is no such similar or universal method, which could be appropriately used to distinguish weaker section from others that address their alarming problems. But one thing is clearly evident that, whatever difference is/are seen with weak, they are uniformly and everywhere poor, deprived, neglected, marginalised, exploited and moreover alienated. Problematique further reveals in absence of economic viability and emergence of identity, weaker section as a concept and category becomes imprecise. Therefore, with attainment of identity weaker section will simultaneously develop its class-consciousness and character.

Weaker Section, Dalit and Class

One of the major components of weaker section is Dalit and it is imperative to make it clear whether Dalit is a weaker section or not! If yes do they represent any class character and which class do they belong to!! If no where do they locate them in India's hierarchical social structure? About the question whether Dalit is a weaker section or not it is a fact to augur that like other communities Dalit in India is not an insular and homogeneous bloc and does not live within a stipulated socio-cultural, religious and ethnic boundary. It is also true that among Dalits numerous sub-divisions and a wide variety of gaps exist between one Dalit community and another. But Dalits are untouchables and known by various names like, Harizan (Gandhi), Exterior Caste (J H Hutton), Depressed Classes (British Officers), outcaste, Pariahs (Deliege), Mlechha, Chandala, Panchama, Avarna, Nishada, Paulkara, Antyaja, Atisudra etc. could never be challenged by any body. It is also not a dispute since time antiquity Dalit is not merely look down upon but snubbed, prejudiced and exploited by *Savarna* (upper) caste as per discursive classification made by Hindu law giver – Manu.

Successive growth and development of Indian history and society reveal Dalits have regularly been provided with constitutional safeguard and state patronage to ameliorate their economic, social and political condition viz. articles like 14, 15, 16, 29, 38, 46, 334 and 335 (Kashyap 1994: 259-261). Different Governments also declared that over period of time Dalits as a whole came up to a different level where they become mobile and changed their socio-economic and political condition and given up some old habits and practices for what they were discriminated earlier. Again some-Dalits scholars social workers, non-Dalit theoreticians and champions-argue that protective discrimination and compensatory discrimination have a positive impact upon Dalits and helped them to come up higher in social ladder. But another section of scholars argues that along with two policies, affirmative action needs to be implemented and encouraged. In such process and over passage of time, as seen, they say Dalits will certainly benefit and able to compete with other dominant caste and community and part strongly with global order and fast changing society. Quite few others at the same time opine that after some time Government given facility and reservation need to be scrapped and discontinued one's a community availed it for some time and changed its earlier status and condition.

Now one really needs not to be database alone but to investigate into prevailing social order and reality in which Dalit as a community live, construe and compete with others. Is it true and acceptable that over time Dalits have enjoyed certain benefit and right to change their socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions by programmatic action oriented schemes provided by both governmental and non-governmental organisation? If this point is true, then one needs to find fact and figure about what is percentage of Dalits really enjoying such benefit to enhance their economic, social and political conditions?? Is there any concrete, reliable and authentic data, which could fortify this! Surely not. In name of democracy, secularism and welfarism Indian state so far, has not ensured nor implemented in totality any announced

policy, plan and programme to needy-deserving people. Census data and empirical study often found to be exaggerated, distorted protecting ruling class interest to legitimise its hegemony. Due to this, long after India's grand and glorious Independence condition of Dalit remains not only poor but more worsening in nature. Till now Dalit lives below poverty line, unhealthy and unhygienic condition and caught of in vicious circle of poverty, exploitation and alienation. This all happens due to poor economic conditions and lack of class consciousness and in such a process, day by day, they seldom able to move ahead and achieve any thing. Capitalist state monopoly continuously hammering upon them and keep them always stratified into numerous (Karl Marx 1948) caste, class, religion and ethnic communities. Hence, Dalits in India are not a weaker section as they do not belong to homogenous community with similar caste identity but clearly belong to class category and regard themselves Have – nots or proletariat. Contemporary Indian society, in its present form and drive would not only further hierarchies Dalits and others but also trigger and sponsor atrocity and violence's against them. Unless Dalits develop their class-consciousness and fight against imperialist, monopolist Indian capitalist state with solidarity, their history long exploitation and alienation could not be checked or ended. Under present social fabric and economic condition of India it is hard and tough to mobilise people and gather under a common platform, strengthen unity and raise voice against predatory, capitalist state regime and bring structural and qualitative change in Indian economy and society, because main motto of capitalist state is to tactfully create cleavage between each other in name of class, caste, religion, ethnicity and protect its interest and keep status-quo unchallenged. Therefore, any community and particularly Dalits in India without understanding intricacy and deeper implication of capitalist state monopoly easily getting mesmerised and swayed away with legitimised hegemony of capitalist state.

Weaker Section, Democracy and Class

It is essential and contextual to bring to focus nature of relationship that exists between weaker section, democracy and class because if three issues are not adequately understood and discussed, weaker section as a class will not emerge but may remain incomplete and blur.

Abraham Lincon, meant democracy is of the people, by the people and for the people that usher in equality before law irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex and irrespective of level of economic, educational or professional background. But in India we have Indian style of democracy what some call representative parliamentary democracy but prominently by some other 'Distorted Democracy'. Further Indian state is regarded a Republic state, a state in which the people are supreme and there is no privileged class and all public offices are open to all citizens without discrimination. There is no permanent and hereditary ruler and head of the state is elected and selected by people for a time bound and fixed term. Hence it shows that the Indian state and society is not only diversified but also unique, since it has the largest democracy in the world ordained with liberal values and humane character. But in reality the democracy and republic in India are over emphasised and over simplified. In reality neither equality before law is followed nor the people are supreme in India. Fundamental right and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) highlight that right and duty are seen to be laden with discourse, towering preaching and palpable speech. And both mega institutions have seriously been failed and distorted and become instrument in hands of vested interest politicians and so-called welfare state. Democracy has become a mockery in hand of a few, as its basic tenets and objectives have lost relevance and gone to oblivion. Otherwise weaker section, protected by law, would not have moved in down ward direction and become pauper to poorer. This is happening because; democracy in India has always remained in clothes of self-style politician, governing elite and capitalist enterprise. Indian style of democracy treats weaker

section useless, worthless and unfit. It firmly believes in principle of 'Preaching Democracy' than 'practicing democracy'. Due to this, for centuries together weaker section loiters with poverty, literacy and subjugated life. It has worsened its conditions and waiting to greater deprivation, inhuman exploitation and doom. Trend is not going to be easily reversed and will further deteriorate unless full democratisation of weaker section takes place and, people of weaker section get their due place, treatment and equality of status. With real democracy, weaker section may elevate its economic, political and social condition. Once these three aspects are met, weaker section could easily attain class identity and character with grater solidarity and be able to fight against multi dimensional problems created by capitalist state.

Weaker Section and Emerging Trend

In contemporary-present India weaker section faces enormous plight which are mostly construed, state-sponsored and directly imposed from outside upon them. By way of providing amenity and reservation, instead of understanding their problem and without bringing any structural, radical measure to overhaul their economic subjugation and without bringing an end to politics of democracy and nation-state, no possibility of hope for weaker section to alter and change its present structure and status. It's true that not all weaker section is economically subservient, subordinate and live below poverty line. Among them, a very few are economically viable and relatively rich, but most of them are poor without even a patch of land, illiterate without schooling facility and lack of capacity to afford for education. They remain malnourished, as they do not get two square meals per day to eat. On other hand it is seen that weaker section, who is relatively economically well off is yet to change their over all condition and match with multiple modernities. Just because a handful of Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri of Bihar and U P, Jat, Ahir and Gujjar in Haryana and Punjab, Lingayat and Okkaliga in Karnataka, Kaibartya of West Bengal and part of Assam and Teli of Orissa are to some extent living in better conditions is it correct to justify they are no longer weaker section and should not be given any benefit further? As Gunnar Myrdal said 'Planning is a political programme'; in India now dominant capitalist state has been politicising weaker section in name of governmental safe guard and programmatic action. Besides, Indian economy and society – government at large- follow diktat of so-called super powers and imperialist forces and, therefore, India's emerging trend embarks on Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) and intensifies cleavage, rift and communal disharmony, which keep its capitalist monopoly ever unchallenged. In process weaker section so far a generic category did suffer a lot and remain ever exploited and subjugated with emerging trend. Their suffering aggravate in multitude because very community is yet properly and adequately understood and construed and conceptualised. Emerging trend in India is definitely divisive and trying to keep community under bondage, slavery and intimidate them regularly, as capitalist monopolist states like to do. Hence till the community does not attain class-consciousness and free itself from economic subjugation of dominant capitalist state no change is likely to occur among them.

Conclusion

Indian society, a diverse and nebulous society beset with different attributes through which it can be studied to develop a holistic, comprehensive or world view is further problematic due to its historical mooring and socio-cultural and economic trajectory. In such a backdrop weaker section conspicuously remains misspelled and undiscovered. Problematique of weaker section keep its basic meaning or concept intriguing, yet massive camouflage of weaker section rather than conceptualisation. Dominant theory and empirical study so far failed to conceptualise and derive a suitable meaning of weaker section either. Great irony is that while a cross-section of scholars and more particularly sociologists extensively studied and written about weaker section, simple concept is yet to acquire proper form, convey clear

meaning, be conceptualised and emerge with adequate fact and figure. This happens due to two broad problems firstly, interventionist nature of Indian capitalist state does not allow intellectual capacity to grow and secondly, wrong and shortcoming of Indian constitution, which is failing to provide protection to all communities equally. Shrewd and tactful underpinning of Indian imperialist state does not allow weaker section to attain a unified class status too and, therefore weaker section in India is have-nots. Unless it is accepted and agreed upon and proper conceptualisation is made, concept of weaker section remains incomplete, vague and politically designed. Therefore, social scientist and sociologist should immediately ponder over and reinvestigate upon such kind of burning and significant issue and suggest redressal to end of historical injustice, exploitation, alienation and of course marginalisation of weaker section.

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