



## Investigating Labour Dynamics of Small Peasantry in West Bengal: A Study of Proletarianisation Across Minorities

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### ABSTRACT

Proletarianisation refers to the process through which agricultural workers transition from self-sufficient peasants or small landholders to wage laborers who rely on selling their labour for livelihood. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent within the minority communities which includes Dalits, Muslims, and Tribals who are disproportionately affected by this process due to historical marginalization and lack of access to resources. This paper adopts the methodology of a survey based village study which aims to understand different nuances of labour dynamics within farmers. The traditional land-based approach of understanding peasantry is insufficient in the context of West Bengal, since land-reform were implemented in the state. As result the state acquired some unique characteristics of land-composition. Also due to the redistribution policies of land-reform, most minority communities gained the access of land, but after 40 years of reform most of the land-holdings have become fragmented. This along with the advancement of capitalism has resulted in high inequalities within communities and income from agriculture has fallen. Hence the poor peasantry is forced to work as wage labours in the rural wage market for additional income. A community-based approach of understanding proletarianisation and its effect on different communities are the key objective of this paper.

**Keywords:** *Small Farmers, Labour, Caste, Minorities, Proletarianisation, Land-reforms*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Caste and proletarianisation of labour in Indian agriculture are intertwined phenomena that have shaped the socio-economic landscape of rural India. Understanding the complex relationship between caste and other minority-based social

structures and the transformation of agricultural labour into wage labour is crucial for comprehending the challenges and dynamics within India's agrarian sector. Caste, deeply ingrained in India's history and society, has traditionally influenced various aspects of life, including land ownership, access to resources, labour relations, and social hierarchies. The caste system categorizes individuals into hierarchical groups based on birth, with Brahmins (priests) at the top and Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) at the bottom. This hierarchical structure has historically determined people's occupations, social status, and access to opportunities.

In the context of agriculture, caste has played a significant role in shaping land ownership patterns. Historically, upper-caste communities have held more substantial landholdings, often owning fertile and productive lands, while lower-caste and marginalized communities have faced challenges in accessing land or have been relegated to marginal and less fertile plots. This unequal distribution of land has contributed to socio-economic disparities and has influenced the proletarianisation of labour in rural areas.

Proletarianisation refers to the process through which agricultural workers transition from self-sufficient peasants or small landholders to wage laborers who rely on selling their labour for a livelihood (Ramachandran, 2019). Several factors have contributed to the proletarianisation of labour in Indian agriculture, including economic changes, land ownership patterns, globalization, and rural-urban migration.

One of the primary drivers of proletarianisation is the shift from subsistence agriculture to market-oriented farming or migrating for industrial work. As agriculture modernizes and commercializes, small landholders often struggle to sustain themselves due to fragmented landholdings,



rising input costs, and market fluctuations. Consequently, many farmers are forced to seek alternative sources of income, leading to an increase in agricultural labourers entering the wage labour market.

The unequal distribution of land ownership, influenced by caste dynamics, has also contributed significantly to proletarianisation. Large landholdings by upper-caste landowners limit the access of lower-caste and marginalized communities to productive land, pushing many farmers from these communities into wage labour as landless or tenant workers. This concentration of land ownership exacerbates rural poverty and reinforces social inequalities based on caste.

Liberalisation and economic policies promoting industrialization and urbanization have further accelerated the proletarianisation of labour in Indian agriculture. Rural-urban migration has led to the depletion of agricultural labour in villages as people seek better economic opportunities in urban areas. This migration trend has implications for agricultural productivity, rural development, and the socio-economic fabric of rural communities.

The intersection of caste and proletarianisation has profound social, economic, and political implications. Caste-based social hierarchies continue to influence labour relations, with lower-caste and marginalized communities often facing discrimination, exploitation, and limited access to resources and opportunities in the agricultural sector. The concentration of economic power and landownership among upper-caste groups reinforces caste-based inequalities and poses challenges for inclusive rural development.

Although the nature of caste regarding land-holding patterns are similar across the country, few states which adopted comprehensive land-reform operations show different trends. West Bengal is one of the few states where such exhaustive reforms took place, by which both landlessness and landlordism reduced substantially. The reforms also implemented one the country's largest redistribution program which was particularly aimed at lower caste groups, scheduled tribes and Muslim population. Hence the land-holding patterns of this marginalised communities are different in this state, compared to all India average. Although these reforms fragmented land-holding in state, as a result most peasants operated on lesser plots of land. This low land-holding pattern resulted in proletarianisation of labour as peasants engaged in wage-labour market and non-agricultural work to sustain their livelihoods.

Despite these policies, their also exists certain caste rigidities within the village. This paper tries to explore the role of caste and other marginalised community (viz. ST and Muslims) in labour dynamics of peasantry in the state using primary village level data.

## II. LITERATURE SURVEY

There are certain important theoretical concepts that needs examination regarding this paper. The Scheduled caste and the marginalized communities have always lacked the control over means of production, but the state of West Bengal is different in this regard. Firstly, the state has witnessed series of peasant movements, from Kisan Sabhas to Tebhaga movement, which mobilized peasantry in the state to a greater degree. This led foundation to land-reforms as the peasantry in the state had a historically strong base. Also, the role of marginalized community in these movements were significant. Dalits, tribals and Muslims actively participated in this movement, which was important in empowering these communities in the state.

Secondly, it is important to understand the nature of small farming. Most of the farmers in south Asia and India operates on small plots of land. But this classification of small farming differs from country to country. According to the government of India, farmers who operate within 5 acres of land are small farmers and those who operate within 2.5 acres of land are considered marginal. Due to land-reforms, peasantry in the state operates on a much smaller plots of land. This small plot of land has resulted in proletarianization of farmers as they are forced work on other farms in the wage-labour market for additional income.

### *Caste in Peasant Movements*

The notion of caste is an institution of social discrimination, and it is mainly prevalent in the villages of India. The Scheduled caste (specifically called the "Dalits") of the country (traditionally known as untouchables) is at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, and this community is subject to maximum oppression. Caste is embedded in social relations and acts as a major hindrance to growth of productive forces. Ramachandran & Swaminathan, 2014, argues that "its main ideological function in the contemporary world is to create, by means of coercion or internalization, an acceptance of social hierarchy based on ascribed status, and to prevent revolutionary action against the cruel and abhorrent forms of oppression and degradation that characterize Indian society today." With the emergence of comprehensive village



studies, the research of caste and other communities have widened the ambit of production relations in the heartland of India. Among which a notable study is that of Thorat, Sabharwal, & Thorat, 2014, where he proves that majority of the Dalit community operates without the basic modes of production. His study across 516 villages and 10 states shows that in most of the villages the Dalit community is denied access non-Dalit houses, temples, burial grounds, water facilities. In addition, these communities operate on very little plot of land and their access to agricultural facilities like irrigation, credit availability, access to markets are less in comparison to other farmers.

Despite all these overall features of the scheduled caste community over the country, it is important to understand that there exists significant difference between this community across different states. Most of the states did not adopt any land-reform measures, which resulted in concentration of wealth and land among the upper castes. On the other hand, states like West Bengal and Kerala, which was governed by Left Front government resulted in some unique features. The Left in Kerala integrated three main socio-political struggles, viz. freedom movement against the British, movement against landlordism and the struggle against caste discrimination. Ramakumar, 2014, studied this aspect and analyzed how land reform measures transformed the living conditions of Dalit agricultural workers.

The other important state, in context of land reform is West Bengal, where the Left Front implemented comprehensive land reform measures which impacted the scheduled caste and other marginalized community extensively.

#### ***Impact of Land Reforms within marginalized communities***

The landholding pattern of West Bengal is significantly different from that of the other states. Most of the state governments in the country have been reluctant to implement land-reforms post-independence, although West Bengal is one of the few states who have implemented land-reforms to a large scale. This has resulted in some unique land-holding features, as these reforms transformed the landholding patterns of the villages in the state. Land-reform in the state of Bengal was witnessed during the late 1960's under the two United Front government. But post 1977, as the Left Front government came into power, land-reforms received a major policy boost. It is important to note that the state have a history of organized peasant movements against landlordism, unequal distribution of land and

securities of sharecroppers (Dasgupta 1984, Konar 2002, Bakshi 2008, 2015).

The land reforms of the state can be classified in three categories viz. surplus land distribution, tenancy reforms and redistribution of homestead land. It is important to note that the effectiveness of these reforms varied across the state as the pre-tenurial relation different across different regions. Basu, 2021, states,

“Success of the land reforms programme can be largely attributed to its two-pronged approach of combining administrative legal measures with political mobilization of beneficiaries. The involvement of peasant organizations and local-level institutions challenged the feudal hold of the landlords. This created an environment for beneficiaries to claim and retain their rights over themselves as sharecroppers under operation Barga.”

It is also important to consider the phenomena of land reforms and their positive impact of on Dalits (also Adivasi and the Muslim communities), which is a result of series of social movements that happened in the state, dating before the independence. Starting from the formation of Kisan Sabha in the 1930s, the Tebhaga movement and other important agitations helped shaped the socialist ethos of the region. Moreover, an important fact the participation of Dalits and Adivasis in these various movements were significant. The fundamental demand of the Kisan Sabha was the abolition of Zamindari system and recognition of the ownership rights of land to the actual tillers of the region. This organization urged for an alliance of all sections of peasantry and agricultural workers which included Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, Rajbanshis and other tribals. After the formation different Kisan Sabha's were set at different districts of West Bengal which started organizing peasantry.

This movement had a significant impact State Acquisition and Tenancy Bill for the abolition of zamindari was passed in 1947. Although the bill did not address the problems of the sharecroppers. After this several legislative changes happened regarding land, but the struggles of the 1930 peasant movement finally yielded result in 1977 after the Left Front came into power.

The Land Reform movement adopted by the Left Front government incorporated significant measures through three main measures viz. Operation Barga and distribution of surplus land. Again, this movement on the surface was not caste-



specific but the Dalit and Adivasi's of the state were its major beneficiaries. According to Bakshi, 2014, "In a state where 23 percent population is Dalit and 5.5 percent is Adivasi, of the new title-deed holders, 37 percent were dalit and 19 percent were Adivasi." The West Bengal Human Development Report of 2004 acknowledged this economic empowerment due to the granting of 'patta' rights to the Dalit and Adivasi community.

This 50-year peasant struggle of the region, starting from the formation of the Kisan Sabha's to the Land Reform measures adopted by the Left Front Government, was an important historical event in the country. As in many states, where land reform measures were not adopted, high inequality is observed regarding land among different sections of the community. On the other hand, the picture of West Bengal regarding this, is significantly different. According to Konar, 2002, "the social

empowerment of Dalit and Adivasis in West Bengal was achieved through the historical role played by them in anti-feudal agrarian struggles and for the economic empowerment of the rural working masses. Land reforms and the participation of Dalits and Adivasis in local decision making through panchayets also played a role in weakening traditional caste relations in Bengal." (Bandyopadhyay, 2000)

#### *Small-Peasantry of West Bengal*

Besides caste and other social hierarchy, a key feature of Indian agriculture is small and marginal farming. Small and marginal farming account for a high proportion of all family farms across borders. It tends to dominate the agrarian economy in all developing nations across Asia in terms of their share of all farms.

**Table 1: Small farms as a proportion of all farms, and extent of land under small farms as a proportion of extent of all farms in per cent**

Country	Share of number of farms	Share of extent of farm land
India, 2011	84.98	44.32
Pakistan, 2000	57.63	15.64
Nepal, 2002	92.44	68.72
Sri Lanka, 2002	45.25	5.36
Myanmar, 2003	56.92	19.03
China, 1997	97.91	-
Philippines, 2002	69.06	25.57
Indonesia, 2003	88.73	-
Vietnam, 2001	94.81	-
Thailand, 2003	64.5	-
Laos, PDR, 1998-99	73.5	42.82

**Source: T. Haque (2016), (Small farmers are classified as farmers who have land less than 2 hectares)**

Small farming is a phenomenon that is prevalent across south Asia, which can be observed from table 1. Although small farmers, as a share of total peasant population is high; their share of land differs across countries. Except for Nepal, most countries, with the majority of small farming base, operate on a relatively low share of land, implying high land-inequality. In India, almost 85% of farmers are small farmers but they own only 44% of total cultivable land. It is also important to note, that the definition of small farming differs from country to country. In India, small farmers are classified as those peasants, who have land less than 4.97 acres.

The Agricultural census (2011) of India explains that there exist 138.35 million operational holdings, with total area operated being 159.59 million hectares and the average size of an operational holding was 1.15 hectares. India's average size of all holdings of size less than 2 hectares, which constitute small and marginal farmers, was 0.60 hectare. Moreover, with landholdings of less than 2 hectares accounted for 85% of all holdings and it operated in 45% of total operated area. Hence small and marginal farmers accounted for almost half-a-billion.



It is quite evident that small and marginal farming constitutes a large section of agriculture, locally and globally, hence the theoretical debate regarding small farming requires a deeper understanding.

The 2012-13 NSSO 70<sup>th</sup> Round data presents the trend of land-holding pattern and land distribution of West Bengal. Table 2 presents a comparative study of the distribution of land-size class of operational holdings and operated area for West Bengal and India. The land-size categories are those which are used in the NSSO surveys of Land and Livestock holdings, wherein land ownership included all land under possession of the household including homestead land. In the 70<sup>th</sup> round, area operated refers to land used for agricultural production by the household and is thus a better

marker to study distribution of agricultural land. The table shows 95% of the households in West Bengal operates in less than 2.47 acres of land in comparison to 73% at all-India level. Although it is important to note that 73% of total operated area in the state of Bengal consists of marginal holding where-as at the national level this figure falls to 27%. This high concentration of small and marginal farming in the region is a result of land reforms in the state, where-as in states like Punjab, 1.2 percent of households had operational holdings in the largest land-size category but controlled 12.6 per cent of the total operated land. Lastly, the data also reveals that West Bengal had the smallest average operational holding of 0.186 hectares (0.46 acre), compared to all India average of 0.639 hectares (1.58 acres).

**Table 2: Cross-comparison of different categories of farmers of India and West Bengal**

Land-size	West Bengal		India	
	Household	Area	Household	Area
Landless (<0.005 acre)	0	0	0.03	0
Marginal (.005 - 2.47 acres)	95.17	73.05	73.17	27.71
Small (2.47 - 4.94 acres)	4.05	18.79	15.3	23.44
Semi-medium (4.94 - 9.88 acres)	0.67	6.15	8.1	23.5
Medium (9.88 - 24.7 acres)	0.11	1.88	3.04	19.33
Large (> 24.7 acres)	0	0.12	0.37	6.02
All	100	100	100	100

Source: NSSO (2015), Cited by Basu (2021)

### ***Proletarianisation of peasantry***

The process of small farming has resulted in some unique features in the labour dynamics of the country and of the state of West Bengal. The small and marginal farmers are heavily relied on hired labours and they are also forced to work on other farms, for agricultural and non-agricultural work. This process of self-exploitation is a common phenomenon throughout the country. The concept of 'work' is a debatable definition in agricultural economics and official databases deals with the changing definitions of work. The concept of 'work' in the Census of India (1951-2001) concentrated specifically on the transition of 'work' as an 'earning' criterion, to work as 'gainful' and an 'economic activity' (Agarwal, 1980, Krishnamurty, 1984). This paper adopts a broader definition of work indicating any individual participation in any economic activity except housework for at least one day.

One of the principal features of peasantry in pre-capitalist and early capitalist societies were subsistence farming and the engagement of family labour to cultivate their own land. Here they used to be engaged in various manual works and this process of subjugation of this class of peasants to the market led them to hire addition labour than family labour on their farms to sell their labour power for livelihood.

Bakshi and Modak, 2021, argued that "it was expected that the traditional small peasant, who was seen as unproductive and incapable of adopting new technologies, would exit agriculture and join the ranks of the industrial workforce." Although instead of joining the industrial workforce, this class of peasantry, whilst cultivating their own land also joined the rural labour market to sustain themselves.

This paper tries to assess the process of proletarianisation through the lens of caste and other backward communities.



### III. METHODOLOGY AND HOUSHOLD COMPOSITION

The major objective of the paper is to understand the caste-dynamics and relations of other backward communities within the process of proletarianisation of labour among peasantry in the villages. This study is based on field survey conducted in the year 2019 and 2021, in Bankura district. For this a study of 200 households have been selected. The district of Bankura has been purposively chosen since the population and topography is highly diverse. Bankura also is advantageous in terms of agriculture as this is a purely agricultural district not close to state capital or international border. It is given that districts closer to state capital will have higher development as policymakers are more focused in those regions ensuring infrastructural development and inflow of credit. Hence the scope of bias and over-estimation gets reflected in analysis.

Along with the Dalit population the region also has a significant share of tribal and Muslim population.

The Household composition of the 200 households is elaborated in table 2. The composition indicates that among the total households, 93% have

landholding of less than 2.5 acres, confirming the overall land-composition of the state. This is primarily due to land-reform measures, which although ensured less of landlessness over the state, the land-size is also substantially less. This table also elaborates on the caste-tribe household composition and land-holding patterns of the Muslim population. The Dominant caste mainly comprises of OBC caste the general category where-as the SC are the Dalit households of the region. ST population is the tribal population.

It can be observed from table 3 that 51% of the household belongs to the dominant caste. Although majority of them are marginal farmers, among the small category of small and medium farmers who are present in the village, 78% of them belongs to the dominant caste. This indicates that the dominant caste operates on larger landholdings. Among the 23% Muslim households which have been surveyed, 93% are marginal farmers and 7% of them are small and Medium, although the composition of the tribal households is different. The 20% ST households which have been surveyed, 14% are small and medium farmers. It also important to observe all the SC households which are surveyed, all belongs to the marginal category.

Table 3: Household Composition peasantry

Households	Marginal farmers	Small and Medium Farmers	Total
Dominant Caste	91	11 (78)	102 (51)
Muslim	45	1 (7)	46 (23)
SC	13		13 (6)
ST	37	2 (14)	39 (20)
<b>Total</b>	<b>186 (93)</b>	<b>14 (7)</b>	<b>200</b>

Source: Primary data from Village survey

The modal value of agricultural land in the region is 1 acre. Moreover, the dominant caste has 66% total land where-as the SC population have small share of 4%. The SC and ST have a share of 14% and 16% respectively.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

It is often accepted that the class of wage labourers comprises a major share in rural labour market in any capitalist agrarian system. Ramachandran, 2019, argued that there exists a strong tendency of proletarianisation within Indian agriculture and West Bengal in particular.

The traditional Marxian belief was that as the proletariat class of peasantry will not have any

access to means of production, they will be compelled to sell their labour power to earn their livelihood. Although in West Bengal, due to Land reform measures the poor peasants got the access to land, still they became a net seller of their labour power to the rural labour market, and this wage comprised a major share of their income. Bakshi and Modak, 2017, argued that inflated input costs and unfavourable market conditions, post the liberalization period, made small farming unviable. Dhar, Nagbhushan & Patra, 2021 argued that "given income poverty among the poorer sections and even the middle peasantry due to unsustainability of farming, the section of the peasantry engaging in wage labour crowded and significantly expanded the



rural labour market.” Mishra, 2007, added this process of crowding by the peasantry has further intensified the crisis of unemployment employment.

Although class remains a major lens to understand proletarianization; the role of caste in this process is of particular importance. As discussed earlier, due to the adoption of land reforms the SC and ST section attained some land (more access to mode of production compared to other states). Despite this, why farmers in the state are getting absorbed in the wage labour market?

This section will investigate the process of proletarianisation of peasantry and assess how different caste and religious groups operates within this process. The process of proletarianisation will be investigated through two parameters. Firstly, engagement of labour power within one’s own farm, and labour power used on economic activities outside their own farm. Secondly, the process of hiring in and hiring out of labour by the peasant households.

It is important to note that the arguments while discussing these parameters have two versions two it. The process of proletarianisation is directly correlated with small farming. The events of land-

reform, despite eradicating landlordism, has also resulted in fragmented small land-holding patterns all over the state. Hence this process is very much present across all communities. Still, certain caste rigidities in labour dynamics are still prevalent in the villages, and this aspect will also be investigated.

#### **High degree of family labour participation**

One of the principal features of rural agricultural households is high degree family participation in rural work. The participation rate is calculated by taking the ratio worker to total family members in the household (members below the age of 15 years are excluded). Table 3 demonstrates that the overall participation of family workers is 55% with an average operated land of 1.60 acres. Although this composition varies within caste hierarchy. The Dominant caste operates on the largest land, and they have a 48% participation rate. This is followed by the Muslim households who operates on the least amount of land (1.08 acres) and have a participation rate of 56%. The ST population have a larger participation rate of 64% with 1.36 acres of land. But the ST population has a staggering 79% participation rate with only 1.29 acres of operated land.

**Table 4: Caste-wise composition of operated land and labour participation rate**

Households	Operated Land	Participation Rate
Dominant Caste	1.97	48%
Muslim	1.08	56%
SC	1.29	79%
ST	1.36	64%
Total	<b>1.60</b>	<b>55%</b>

**Source: Primary data from Village survey**

There is a clear indication that the small farmers involve more family members in economic activity. This phenomena of high involvement of family labours stems out because of several reasons. Firstly, due to small land-holding patterns, income from agriculture is low, hence the farming households are forced to work as wage-earners in the wage labour market. Secondly, due to high rents, the overall cost of production of agriculture rises, forcing them adopt additional avenues of income. Thirdly, a substantial amount of work is engaged in rearing animals which increases family participation in rural work. Lastly, certain crops like potato are highly labour intensive which enforces more family participation in the cultivation process.

These are the various reasons behind a high overall family participation of small farming. In addition to this, caste plays an important role in family labour dynamics. Among all the different caste and religious groups, the dominant caste has the lowest participation rate where-as, the scheduled caste has the highest. The reasons being, firstly, the dominant caste have more control over the various means of production which enable them to extract more surplus from cultivation. Where-as the marginalized community (the SC being at the bottom of caste-hierarchy) are forced into additional work as income from agriculture is way less. Secondly, the scheduled caste has been traditionally landless, and they consisted of a major share of



landless labourers in the wage labour market. Although land reform measures have ensured them with land, still the small, fragmented landholdings are not sufficient to make them self-sufficient from agriculture and they still work heavily in the rural wage market. Lastly, the scheduled caste group, due to their historic marginalized nature have less access to basic amenities like health, education etc. Therefore, lack of education and inaccessible means of production compel them to send a large section of their youth to enter the wage labour market at a very early age.

It is also worth noting that there is no clear relation between land and participation rate. The Muslim population for example operates on the least amount of land, still they have a significant participation rate of 56%.

#### High dependency on hiring in of labour

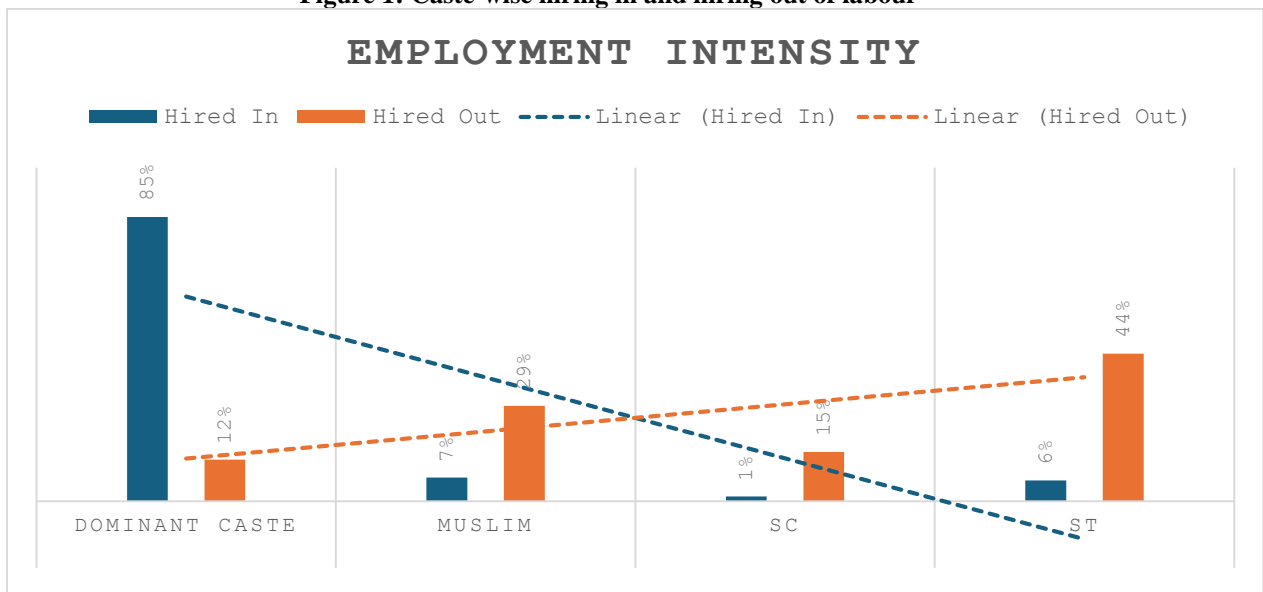
Traditionally, peasants were only dependent on family labour to cultivate their own land. But, with the advancement of capitalism in agriculture, the peasants were forced to join the labour market for additional income. In the village surveys, no traditional peasants were encountered. Both the rich and poor peasants were dependent on hired labour for agricultural activities. Even within

caste groups, all households belonging to the dominant caste, Muslim, Dalit, and ST categories use hired labour for cultivation process. Although, the degree of hiring differs along within class and caste lines. Considering that these peasants primarily cultivate rice, the hired labour is primarily used for transplanting and harvesting operations.

The other important aspect is the process of hiring out and participation of wage labour market in the villages. This process is also prevalent across all caste and communities. Again, the degree and proportion changes.

It can be observed from figure 1 that among the total labours that are hired in, 85% are concentrated within the dominant caste, where-as among the hired-out labours their share is only 12%. Hence it is evident that the hired-out labourers are mainly belonging to the marginalized communities, i.e. the Muslim, SC, and ST population. The Muslim population have only a 7% share of hired in labour where-as the SC and ST population have 1% and 6% share respectively. In-terms of hired out labour the Muslim population have a 29% share where-as the SC and ST community have 15% and 44% share respectively.

Figure 1: Caste-wise hiring in and hiring out of labour



Source: Primary data from Village survey

Hence it is to be understood, that the process of proletarianisation is present across all caste groups. Although the dominant caste has a disproportionate share of hired in labours, where-as the share of Muslim, SC and ST community is less.

This is primarily because the marginalized community are heavily relied on family labour in total labour use, compared to the dominant caste. Secondly, due to the overall process proletarianisation, class of wage labour markets had





expanded beyond landless labourers. All sections of the peasantry participate in wage employment. Lastly, the caste dynamics reveal that 88% of rural wage employment is concentrated within the backward communities.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is observed throughout the country that the Scheduled-Caste population work as landless labourers in the villages. This has historical routes as the upper-caste communities have held more substantial landholdings, whereas Dalits have mostly operated without much means of production. The scheduled caste as well as the scheduled tribes and the Muslim population are considered as the most backward sections of the country. However, in few states like Kerala and West Bengal, which have been governed by Left Front governments, Dalits and tribal population have been a major part of different socio-political movements. In Kerala, they participated in three-fold struggles, viz. freedom movement against the British, movement against landlordism and the struggle against caste discrimination; where-as in West Bengal their participation is observed historically in peasant movements; from the formation of Kisan Sabhas to Tebhaga movement and so on. This resulted in a series of land-reform policies which benefitted the backward communities significantly. The state implemented the largest land redistribution policy by which landlordism got eradicated from the state and the backward communities got access to land.

Since agriculture in India is dominated by small farming, high degree of proletarianisation is observed within peasantry, as farmers move towards wage-labour market for additional income. This phenomenon is interlinked with caste as Dalits and other backward communities are more drawn towards wage labour market, primarily because, they are landless. In West Bengal, however, Dalits, tribals and Muslims have access to land but still reflect a high degree of proletarianisation amongst themselves. The major reasons behind this are the following,

Firstly, Muslims, SCs, and STs have historically faced marginalization and exclusion from mainstream economic opportunities. This has limited their access to landownership and other productive assets, pushing them towards wage labour and proletarianisation.

Secondly, In many cases, landholdings in SC and ST communities are fragmented due to historical land reforms or inheritance practices. This leads to smaller land parcels that are often

insufficient to sustain a family, forcing them to seek alternative sources of income such as wage labour.

Thirdly, the limited access to quality education and skill development opportunities among these communities results in a workforce that is predominantly engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled labour. This lack of education and skills further contributes to their proletarianisation and dependence on wage labour for livelihood.

Fourthly, discriminatory practices based on caste and religion continue to persist in many parts of India, leading to unequal access to resources, employment opportunities, and social mobility. This discrimination exacerbates the proletarianisation of Muslim, SC, and ST households by limiting their options for upward mobility and economic independence.

Lastly the progress of capitalism, have also contributed to the proletarianization of these communities. As traditional agrarian economies evolve and non-agricultural sectors expand, there is a shift towards wage labour and informal employment, affecting marginalized communities disproportionately.

These factors combine to create a complex socio-economic landscape where Muslim, SC, and ST households often find themselves marginalized and relegated to the lower strata of the labour market, leading to a high degree of proletarianisation within these communities. Addressing these structural inequalities requires comprehensive policies that address land reforms, education and skill development, social inclusion, and equitable economic opportunities for marginalized groups.

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