

# Disappearing Dalit Haruwa-Charuwa labor in Tarai Agriculture: Causes and Consequences of Land Fragmentation

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## Abstract:

*This research is conducted in Tarai agriculture practice in Baijanathpur village of Morang District in eastern Tarai to explore why Haruwa-Charuwa labor has been disappearing from Tarai agricultural works? It is based on qualitative historical methodology; field observation, key informant and life history interview method to collect reliable and valid data from field. This study manifested the problem why Dalit labor has disappeared in agriculture and how they are getting survive without proper livelihood opportunity. It has signified to acknowledge that Tarai is changing its agriculture structure in its relation of labor disappearing from agriculture works. After the continuation of change and development in Tarai(migration, population growth, technology), agriculture could not consume enough labor power, so that, Dalit Haruwa-Charuwa labor has been facing job scarcity and livelihood problem due to causes of land fragmentation. This study provides a deeper conceptual understanding linkage between land fragmentation and consequence of farm labor declining in rural Tarai and investigates this relationship empirically.*

Key Words- Jamindar/Landlord, Tarai Agriculture, Land fragmentation, Haruwa-Charuwa, Dalit Musahar, Livelihood

## Introduction

Since a past history, Eastern Tarai has been dominating by plenty of fertile agricultural land. So forth, Tarai is domain of crop storehouse in Nepal for all. The agriculture in Tarai has been dominated by great landlords /Jamindars (Regmi, 1976). Most of the land cultivation and harvesting in Tarai depended on Dalit as labors contract that were bounded with landlords known as Haruwa-Charuwa (plough man) relation in production system. Most of Haruwa-Charuwa labors livelihood depended with landlords to survive their life sustaining (Dhakal, 2007, P 3). All of the landlords used oxen to plough land and Haruwa labors as plough man for land cultivation. Although, Dalit Haruwa- Charuwa depended

in land working but his livelihood could not sustain. They have no access to own land and other reliable resources. After the continuation of change and development in Tarai (migration, population growth, technology), agriculture could not consume enough labor power, so that, Haruwa-Charuwa labor has been facing land job scarcity and livelihood due to land fragmentation where land depended labor are declining in Tarai agriculture and getting transition for jobs.

Both of historically and traditionally land is natural resource (Dhakal & Khadka, 2012). It is allied agriculture activities that have been the principle source of livelihood, socio-economic status, political power and human dignity in Nepal. It is significant measure of subsistence livelihood for the majority of the Nepalese households (Dhakal, 2007, P. 3). Land is productive asset and important source of livelihood and landholding position determines one's social power and relation, prestige and dignity in the complex social structure with in the class and caste hierarchy of the society (Shrestha & Upreti, 2011, P. 57). Concerning to this, Dalit Haruwa-Charuwa agriculture workers constitute the most deprived, lower caste hierarchy and neglected class in the rural economic structure in Tarai of Nepal.

This study provides a deeper conceptual understanding and debate of the linkages between land and Haruwa-Charuwa labor disappearing in rural eastern Tarai agriculture (Hatlebakk, 2013) and investigates this relation empirically in a more direct way of in-depth interview. It mainly exposes the causes of Haruwa labor decline from agriculture in rural Tarai. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and symbol of status of rural people in Nepal in general and rural Tarai in particular has been embedded in social structure since a long past. It is also a major source of economy for both landlord and Haruwa-Charuwa labor (Ghimire, 2016). The land fragmentation is arising major problems in agriculture and on its bonded labor force.

### **Objective/Purpose of the study**

This study aims to explore the process of Haruwa-haruwa declining in Tarai agriculture. This study provides a deeper conceptual understanding and relationship between land fragmentation and Haruwa-Charuwa labor decline in rural Tarai agriculture. (Hatlebakk, 2013) and investigates this relationship empirically in a more direct way of life history interview.

### **Methodology and method**

This article attempted to explore the conceptual discourses of land fragmentation

and its role in Haruwa-Charuwa decline in agriculture. This study argues that Haruwa-Charuwa decline in Tarai agriculture which consequences as a result of land fragmentation. Methodically it used historical process of landlord and Dalit Haruwa-Charuwa labor relation; applied narrative analysis with purposive sampling, interview, and participation observation as a data collection method. This study endeavors to explore the Dalit work practice in agriculture as Haruwa-Charuwa bonded labor relation with his landlord, land fragmentation and declining labor from agriculture in Tarai as a research objective and result is presenting to apply qualitative methodology to explore Dalit perception towards declining from agriculture in Baijanathpur Village. During the time of interview and observation, our target group is 20 persons Dalit Musahar Dalit recognized as local agricultural labors who were bonded as Haruwa-Charuwa labor practice in the past. The labors considered here, as samples are mainly adult and elder male labors as well as 5 landlords key informant were chosen who provide reliable, confidential and enrich data information.

### **Conceptual Debates in Haruwa-Charuwa and land fragmentation in agriculture: A historical overview in Tarai agriculture**

The concept of Haruwa-Charuwa is both system and practice in Tarai agriculture associated to bonded agricultural labor similar as to Kamaiya and Haliya bonded system in western and central Nepal (Giri, 2010, 2011, Giri, 2012) as a long run time duration. Conceptually agrarian labor classified as Haliya, Haruwa-Charuwa, Hali, Bonded labor, attached and unfree labor practice in agriculture. The term Haruwa denoted ploughman and Charuwa indicated Cow/Buffalo/goat herder as a bondage labor in landlords household. In eastern Tarai, Haruwa system was prevailed in agriculture production in relation to landlord mostly consider as Dalit Caste groups; like Musahar, Bantar, Dusad and others. There were two types of Haruwa was prevailed, one due to debt bondage for long time other is landlord yearly contract basis. Both of them called as Haruwa-Charuwa in native language. Haruwa himself is not only a debt bondage but landlord verbally contact mostly to the Haruwa's family members or someone else to yearly basis agricultural works in Tarai landlordism; however, Musahar Dalit as Haruwa-Charuwa in Tarai agriculture basically found as migrated from India to do labor work (Sharma, 1987) since the time of forest cutting and cleaning in Tarai. Haruwa were indebted to jamindar and would be bounded to work continuous for long time until he is not capable to repay or return the debt. They usually get in to trap in debt call bonded labor to fulfill their basic family needs. The re-

payment of debt was more or less impossible and they drop into permanent bondage labor even for generation.

Haruwa-Charuwa system is as like to the remaining face of slavery system which is related to the evolutionary process in society. Haruwa-Charuwa is a byproduct of landlord and labor mutual relationship in agriculture in Tarai according to his own necessity. Historically, the Haruwa Charuwa system is evolved in Tarai with the consequences of forest cutting of state's policy to distribute land to its functionaries and service providers; such people used to be the dependents of the royal family, army men, priests, and so on (Thapa, 2000, P 145). There were various forms of feudal land tenancy such as Birta, Jagir and Rakam practices prevailed in Tarai (Regmi, 1976). These land tenure practice shaped Haruwa and Charuwa social relation in Tarai agrarian system mostly determine power structure in state as well as local level. Feudal structures in Tarai have provided considerable power to the land owning elites (Jamindar) at the local level (Pyakurel & Nepali, 2008, P 85). Jamindars are becoming richer and powerful at the cost of the labors and control and subjugate them as their interest. The feudal institution of land owning intervene in local power relation offering to and control over land and production resource in local level. The Musahar Dalits are associated with the traditional form of production relation with Jamindari/landlord (Blakie, et al., 2007), had widespread power used upon Haruwa-Charuwa labors to work and cultivate their land.

Labor bonded draws heavily upon traditional social relations and the caste system in agricultural sector and non- agriculture sector, but can be observed directly in agriculture and in bonded labor relationships involving mostly tribal's in India. (Srivastaba, 2005, P. 8) and called Dalits in Nepal . Thorner & Thorner (1962) has drawn attention to three types of 'unfree' labour relations – the long-duration relations, the 'beck and call' relationship, and the system of 'forced' free or underpaid labor of tenants – each of these forms are being underpinned by a relationship of dominance and dependence (Thorner & Thorner, 1962, P. 9). It is argued that bonded labor refers to a long-term relationship between employee and employer (landlord and labor) in agriculture which is cemented through a loan, by custom or by force, which denies the employees various freedoms including to choose his or her employer, to enter into a fresh contract with the same employer or to negotiate the terms and condition of her/his contract. (Srivastava, 2005, P. 2) Bonded labor that is an indication of traditional social relations such as agriculture, Brick kilns, mines, informal economic sectors etc. The conceptual differences are polarizing bonded such as Attached labor, Force

labor and un-free labor; in Nepali language it calls Bandhua Mazdoor (Bonded labor). It is characterized by a creditor-debtor relationship between the employer and the employee which can then spill over to other members of the family, be of an indefinite duration, and involve adverse contractual stipulations not justified by law or even by the prevailing state of the market. (Srivastab, 2005, P. 2).

### **Land fragmentation in Tarai agriculture**

Fragmentation of land in Nepal as well as in Tarai is a common characteristic and growing problem of agricultural land (Pandit et al., 2013). The trend of land fragmentation in Tarai is rapidly increasing tremendously. Land fragmentation in Nepalese agricultural society is rooted in conventional in-heritance practice where by the parental estate is divided equally among sons (Sapkota 2004). By inheritance provision of equal division of property among sons and recently to daughters also caused fragmentation of land. The structure of the land inheritance system, haphazard housing and urbanization planning, and loosely-enforced policies are all responsible for land fragmentation in Nepal (CRSC, 2012). Due to lack of non-farm employment opportunities, parental land inheritance is frequently indispensable for highly agriculture-dependent families in Nepal (Ghimire, 2022).

Fragmented landholding has been an issue for the reason that the arable plot size is decreasing with each generation, especially because of inheritance laws. The land owned through the parent is inherited via his/her property rights and receives divided into fragments (Thomas, 2006). These lands finally emerge as economically unviable in terms of agricultural produce. After seventy years of independence, we are now left with less than 0.2 hectares of land according to character in a rural poor family (CBS 2011). Similarly, Dhakal and Khanal (2018, P. 96) has conceptualized that Land fragmentation is the division of land into a great number of distinct plots among lineage. It is also ongoing process of decreasing in the average size of farm land holdings; increasing in the scattering of each farmer's land; and decreasing in the size of the individual plots in a farm holding (Agrarwal, 1972).

The landholding concept treats fragmentation as an exogenous imposition on farmers, resulting e.g. from inheritance, population pressure, and land scarcity (Shuhao, 2005, P. 16). The demand supply theory versus cultural practice (Shuhao, 2005) (generational transformation of property or (kinship, family inheritance), of land fragmentation is rooted in traditional in- heritance practices whereby the parental estate is divided equally among

sons (Sapkota 2004; Pandit et al., 2013). It implies the subdivision of land property into undersized units that are too small for rational cultivation (Shuhao, 2005, P. 12) and little labor consuming. According to lineage and kinship system practices in Nepali society, family and household have much family members and they must be distributed the land property equally among sons.

## **Result and Discussion**

Most of the people of Nepal have been living in rural areas and their livelihoods depend on agriculture. Changes in agricultural land use have a deep impact on the personal, family and social lives of people living in rural community (Dhakal, 2019, P. 21). The Nepalese agriculture structure is sustaining with the help of agriculture wage workers in Nepalese rural landscape. The Jamindars/landlords control to Dalit labors in different ways (Thapa, 2000) as bondage, Haliya, Haruwa-Charuwa in Tarai. Haruwa-Charuwa labors frequently expose to the hazards of unemployment and irregular employment and have neither private nor social security. The Haruwa\_Charuwa Dalit Musahar is continuously hard working in agriculture to survive but they have no enough assurance to survive.

Eastern Tarai is a hub of agriculture production from past history whereas, Tarai is only one of the major regions of country for agriculture food sufficiency not for itself but support all over country. Rapid land fragmentation correlated to accelerate rate of population growth and high pressure in agriculture (Bizimana, 2009, P. 81). It is also traditionally rooted in inheritance provision of equal division not only son, daughter also caused fragmentation of land (Dhakal & Khanal, 2018, P. 97). The existence of fragmented land holdings is regarded as an important feature of less developed agricultural system. The main triggering factors of land fragmentation such as inheritance; population growth (internal/external causes), land market formation and other historical and cultural background (Niroula & Thapa, 2005; Tan et al., 2006). The structure of the land inheritance system, haphazard housing and urbanization, land is major challenges for food security of Nepal (Poudal et.al 2013). The landscape of agriculture viewed as landlord or Jamindars and Haruwa-Charuwa labors interrelated and interacted field since Jhora(forest) cleaning and malaria eradication. Since feudal production system, Jamindars needed a various amount of labors to cultivate their land. Apart from it, Jaminder could not cultivate and harvest their land. It was acknowledged that Tarai was a danger zone for malaria, peoples could not survive easily in Tarai so; Jamindars always suffered from labor shortage problem since the past. After the malaria eradication and finished the land clearing in Tarai, most of

the Jamindars employed Dalit labors as Haruwa-Charuwa who were brought from Indian border states and both Jamindars and labor together cultivated land smoothly and converted them to bonded Haruwa-Charuwa.

Land fragmentation is a recognized problem in present day in Tarai agriculture to both of land owner and Haruwa-Charuwa labor. The lineage base land fragmentation confronted with the Challenge of agriculture modernization (Sapkota, 2004). The question arises as how this process affects Haruwa-Charuwa agricultural labors and the condition of labor consumption in land. It is sharply acknowledged that government policy has been focusing agriculture mechanization, intensification and increase job opportunity in agriculture in planning (Chandrakishor, 2006). Contrasting to above, agricultural wage labors are decreasing continuously from agriculture sector as well as landlord has not been succeeded to accumulate them in agriculture occupation, subsequently; they are shifting their human capital from agricultural labor institution (Sharma, 2006).

Tarai is not only a food grain stockpile of nation but also center hub of industry and job opportunity. In flowing the time, the landscape of Tarai has been changing. Although Tarai is not properly prioritized by sociologist (Chandrakishor, 2006), due to so, the changing landscape of Tarai has not been documented yet. For the result, the identity of Tarai has been constructed as one way process like citizenship and language in central agenda of politics; witchcraft, dowry, caste discrimination, and land related conflicts are recognized as a social challenge. These problems and challenges are focused to aggravate highly in social and political flavor, though, the changing socio-economic landscape of Tarai has not been understood.(Chandrakishor, 2006, P. 281). In Tarai, agriculture assumes traditionally a job central. Industry is recognized as an alternative job provider but the inactive and slow moving industrial sector, increase attraction and competition to employ Indian labor in industry has increased burden in agriculture sector. On the other hand, there is lack of seen alternative job opportunities. Thus, for the sake of job opportunities, people have force to disappear other alternative sectors for jobs.( Chandrakishor, 2006, P. 282-85)

After the change in social, political and economic sphere in 2046 democracy in Nepal the agriculture sector of Tarai has been seeing great agricultural transformation (i.e.land fragmentation, land degradation urbanization, migration, Mishra, 2010). In relation to it, land fragmentation is raised as problematic issue and challenge for Haruwa-Charuwa Dalit labors. Parental inheritance of land distribution among family members (Mishra, upreti & Pandey, 2000) and sale the land piece to the migrated people and others

to fulfill their needs are the main causes of land fragmentation in Rural Tarai. When the land is fragmented among multiple family members as small pieces, the scattered pieces enable farmers to better allocate their labor over the seasons (Shuhao, 2005, P. 17). The agriculture base labor household cannot find jobs in land. In one hand the pressure of leisure labor power has been increasing and in other hand available works in land is shortage; thus shortage of land, labor consumption is highly competitive in land cultivation which has been decreasing labor jobs. So working Haruwa labors in land has been shifting continuously. Sharma (2006, P. 154) also supports that the tendency of wage earning in urban sector from rural agriculture base Haruwa-Charuwa labors are increasing; Haruwa-Charuwa in Tarai like Musahar Dalit decline from agriculture and diversify nearly in urban sectors for works is increasing in last few decades. An old Haruwa Dalit Musahar respondent stated that " in the past time a large scale landlords consume more labor power apart from his own Haruwa-Charuwa. When large land lord converted to medium size, land owner and some became small farmer, they use their own family members as labor power in his land wherein he excluded us as labor force. We Haruwa-Charuwa in present day, free from bonded Haruwa-Charuwa identity from agriculture working ".

It is empirically found in field study that the modern trends of farming; land fragmentation is an issue because it decreases labor utilization, agricultural productivity and diminishes the economic opportunities. A fragmented small piece of land usually produces just about enough only for the farmer and his family, not for others. Land holder respondent said that "we have no proper access to land; so we could not operate Haruwa-Charuwa and outsider labor. We have no enough access to resource so; we cannot bond them in our land cultivation. We ourselves manage production through our family and kin members, some time we practice labor exchange". It significantly reduces labor consumption rate and produces fragile landlord labor relation. Sharma (2006) pointed out in his research that in Tarai villages there was tremendously decreasing rate of agriculture labor force from agriculture. Because of lack of basic growth in agriculture production, lack of reform or change in production relation, feudal structure in agriculture is existing to prevail till days, the majority of agriculture wage labors are yearly disappearing in agriculture. Lack of enough industrialization, this labor compelled to shift in service sectors.

Agriculture depended Haruwa-Charuwa labor force (mainly are Dalit Musahar) suffer from low income earning due to inadequate employment and productivity in agriculture (Sharma, 2006, P. 151). It is contrasting that "A young Musahar respondent claim that, not



only we Dalit Musahar but landlord family members also work with us together in urban sector rather than his own land because of his land fragmentation". It is explored by scholars in his research that the negative effect of highly fragmented farm structures is examined in agricultural society (Lili & Martin, 2014). The impact of land fragmentation is seeing in its efficiency in production but also in labor consumption (Ngeuyen, 2014, Rahaman & Rahaman, 2008). It is acknowledged that the life and livelihood in southern countryside are increasingly separated from agriculture occupation due to land fragmentation. This established research idea is similarly connected to Nepal Tarai agriculture perceived that fragmentation is proved as root structural cause and consequence of Haruwa-Charuwa disappearing from agriculture. All active Haruwa-Charuwa family members have not got job opportunities in agriculture works. In the past, landlords produced a large amount of job opportunities in large agricultural sector which facilitate to protect labors family life. Contrast to the past, present day job opportunity in agriculture is declining due to land fragmentation or shrinking the land size. It is observed that the causes of land fragmentation among landholder families, land size became shrinking and it cannot produce and reproduce enough jobs for all Haruwa-Charuwa and his family members.

## **Conclusion**

It is acknowledged that there has been a large-scale movement of workers from the rural agriculture. The Dalit Haruwa-Charuwa labors in Tarai were attached to survive their life, working with landlords land in the past. Haruwa-Charuwa labors in Tarai have to make a living by cultivating land but the family base landholding or Jamandari system could not bond together to land owner and labor relation. Although, Haruwa labor was mandatorily depended in agricultural work contrasting to their interest because they have no access to reliable alternative livelihood resources for family feeding (i.e. land, forest, economy, and job opportunity). The places where they function as labor practice as bonded labor with hard working to get income sources for life survival since a long past, now have in transition due to causes of land fragmentation. Work and total income through agricultural work have not guaranteed and insecured their livelihood for a month and a year in present day compare to the past. Haruwa Charuwa's income is very low and employment is irregular in agriculture.

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