

Encoding the Excluded: Economic and Livelihood Strategy of Tea Laborers The Plight of the *Gauro* Ethnic Community

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Abstract

*Tea is an important beverage and the world drinks more of it than any other beverage. The important tea growing countries are India, Sri Lanka, East Africa, Japan and Indonesia. It is also grown in Bangladesh, China, Georgia and Argentina. Tea was introduced as a plantation crop in 1854 at Malnicherra in Sylhet. The British planters developed the tea plantation industry based on low cost land and labor who will respond to strict discipline and hard work for subsistence wages. In order to create a steady supply of labor that suited the requirements of the industry the British planters brought in laborers from Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal who can be controlled through alienation from the local population without prospects of social integration with them and the authority tried to continue feudalistic trend under the capitalistic mode. Thus the landless laborers, mainly from the lower rungs of Hindu society, were brought in and housed on the plantations for work. The present generations of plantation workers have come from this stock of precarious immigrant laborers. At best the current generations are semi-literate but remain alienated from the mainstream of social and economic development. This, in other words, has resulted in the creation of a diversified social group as well as cultural heritage in the tea gardens of the country. Different small communities are engaged in this sector and the *Gauro* is one of them working in the tea gardens of Shreemongol and Kamalganj of Moulovibazar district. So, this is the time to look into their economy and livelihood strategy and record these for the sake of their valuable*

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contribution and distinct identification. While contributing so much to this sector, the Gauros, in particular, have not been properly studied and encoded to the vast socio-cultural and geographic settings literally. In this regard the present article entitled “Encoding the Excluded: Economic and Livelihood Strategy of Tea Laborers, The Plight of the Gauro Ethnic Community” is part of an ethnographic study and focuses on the economic and livelihood strategies of these people with a view to understand their plight.

The Problem: Tea Sector, Working Communities and their Plight

The tea industry has grown in importance over the years. There are 158 Tea Estates (covering an area of 1, 14,047 ha) in Bangladesh with a production of 55,830 tons (1998), which is 2% of global tea production. Bangladesh's share in the world export market is 1.9%. In terms of employment the industry employs 1, 69,239 workers, of whom permanent 86,769 and 22,082. The total population of workers and their dependents in the industry is 6, 87,139. The tea estates are grouped in 7 valleys or circles, namely *Balescherra, Laskarpur, Monodoli, Lungla, Juri*, North *Sylhet* and *Chittagong*. There are 91 gardens in *Moulvibazar*, 20 in *Sylhet*, 23 in *Habiganj*, 22 in *Chittagong* and one each in *Brahman Baria* and *Rangamati*. Bangladeshi Companies own most of the estates (81%). However, with 28 Tea Estates covering 50% of the area, the Sterling group, consisting of James Finlay & Co., Duncan Brothers and *Deundi* Tea Co., employs 40% of the total work force. Thus, out of total 158 tea plantations 51 are owned by multinationals (Sterling companies) and the remaining by Bangladeshi corporations or Bangladesh Government (Bangladesh Tea Board, 1999).

In spite of this economical prospect the situation of tea plantation workers is very much vulnerable and earlier it was viewed as ‘the history of the plantation workers is the history of exploitation’. The authority always maintained social distance with the workers from the fear to avoid labor organization and continue the process of work smoothly. Even they used to follow arbitrary rule to recruit family based employee and thus the laborers were exploited and deprived in terms of wage structure, actual domestic reproduction and working facilities from the very beginning. Again living in an estate boundary they were almost unsecured than any other groups; even their distinct culture was going to be intimidated by the dominant culture. The tea plantation workers were living like a parasite of their own house. However, their problem has been looked at in terms of the cultural contrasts that are employed to organize and form identity, social stigma, exclusion and interaction (Barth, 1994). Since plantation process was basically labor intensive, so they arranged strict hierarchical structure, and forced them as a kind of

captive laborers. The laborers' working spheres- production and domestic reproduction are determined on the basis of age, sex, and ability. In terms of gender women are engaged in plucking, seedbed preparation, nursery plantation, etc. as are most of the adolescents (girls); children are usually engaged in weeding and cleaning of bushes; and men are generally engaged in land preparation and development, construction or digging and maintenance of drains, roads or pathways, etc. Field management activities are mainly organized by men includes fertilizing, weeding, pruning, mulching, spraying and irrigation. The capable family members could best be viewed as the labor forces of the capitalistic mode of the estate and domestic reproduction. They not only sell their labor but also spent their life force for production of tea. The following chart-1 shows some statistics of tea industry in Bangladesh at a glance.

Chart-1: Statistics of Tea Industry in Bangladesh at a Glance

Tea Industry in Bangladesh at a glance	
Total number of tea garden in Bangladesh	160
Total size of land for tea cultivation	114014 (Hectors)
Total size of land under tea cultivation	50470
People engage in the tea cultivation	353535
Total number of registered tea workers	87535
Amount of yearly tea production	54.20 (Million KG)
Percentage of total export of Bangladesh in the global market	1.74%
Contribution in GDP	0.81%
Internal consumption in per year	33.28 Million KG
Consumption in per person	0.266 KG

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Bangladesh-2002

Form the above discussion it can be said that the tea workers are facing enormous constraints to fulfill their daily livelihood though they are provided with some rations from the estate. Their deep root engagements in the tea plantation and production process and lack of education have deprived them from diversified opportunity for occupation. However, in this article an attempt has been made to understand the plight of their economic and livelihood strategy. Again this understanding has become possible as this article is part of an ethnographic record of the *Gauro* tea workers.

Objectives

The prime objective of this study has been to understand the economic and livelihood strategy of the *Gauro* tea workers. However, the specific objectives of the study include-

- Making a record of ethnic origin and identity of the community;
- Understanding their economic activities;
- Observing their livelihood strategies;
- Identifying their nature of plight; and
- Providing recommendations.

Methodology

This intensive anthropological and ethnographic research has been conducted among the tea plantation workers. Primary and secondary data has been collected from a variety of sources using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Comprehensive and thorough reviews of the relevant scholarly literatures were a major mode of conducting the research. Following an integrating approach of research combining qualitative and quantitative methods of enquiry and data collection, this study included different types of methods and techniques such as intensive fieldwork and participant observation, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), case study, Key Informant Interview (KII), structured and unstructured interviewing, walk-in observation and sharing sessions. Necessary statistical tools and techniques, SPSS for instance also used for processing and analyzing the collected data. Detailed checklists and questionnaires has been prepared for conducting FGDs, KIIs, case studies, interviews and general discussions.

Sample Size

As being part of an ethnographic study conducted at the micro-level the sample size was the whole community of the selected study areas.

Selection of the Study Area and Criteria for Selection

Study District	Sample <i>Upazilas</i>	Sample Unions/Villages
<i>Moulvibazar</i>	<i>Kamalganj</i>	<i>Harinchara</i>
	Do	<i>Mechnichara</i>
	Do	<i>Biddabil</i>
	Do	<i>Hosnabad</i>
	Do	<i>Kamalganj</i>

This intensive anthropological study has been conducted in the following areas of *Moulvibazar* district. The numbers of sample unions and *upazilas* of the respective district are presented in the chart-2. In terms of criteria for the selection of the study area some of the most rationale and important points have been taken into consideration. For the purpose of the study it has been carefully maintained that the selected study areas should fulfill the objectives of the study and should also support in collecting reliable and meaningful data, easy access to the study area, time, budget, etc. However, the criteria followed for the selection are:

1. it is maintained that the areas must support the objectives of the study;
2. easy accessibility;
3. time and money or budgets; and
4. finally and most importantly the areas are selected particularly for the issue that the people of *Gauro* community lives mostly in these areas.

The History of the *Gauro*: Ethnic Origin and Identity

The natural and quality of social life of an individual and group are shaped, to a large extent, by the social setting in which they live. Any attempts to understand their society and culture, without reference to the larger society, would mean approaching the reality from a wrong angle. Therefore, an attempt has been made to describe the social setting of the society of which the villages under study constitutes a part. This will not only enable us to understand the structural realities, but also provide an insight into the process of the metamorphosis that is affecting the *Gauro* community in the Tea estate.

Ethnic Origin and Language

Language is the main element and media of any culture. People express their feeling by language. All the ethnic groups of the world have local languages, which represent their identity. Similarly the tea laborers, belonging to several ethnic communities, have their own languages. According to *Sham Narayan Gauro*, one of the most knowledgeable and respected persons among the *Gauro* community in *Shreemongal*, “*Bhojepuri (Hindi)* is the language of *Gauro* and this community (also known as *Pachcima jati* to local people) was mainly the hill dwellers and came from *Lachnow, Uttar Pradesh, India*”. One part of this *Gauro* community wants to establish themselves as the original follower of *Gauro* descent as the *Bhojepuri Hindi* is the originated sign of the community. But now-a-days, an evaluated language namely *Deshwali* is the language irrespective of *Gauro* as well as some other ethnic communities of tea estate. Actually, local *Bangali* and tea laborers’ language are accumulated to create the new language, locally called ‘*Deshwali*’ language. The cause of *Deshwali* language is that the *Gauro*, other tea laborers and local Bengali communicates are living together in the same area. But there is no alphabet of local ‘*Deshwali*’ language.

Besides the *Gauro* tea laborers are communicated with Bengali local people in Bengali language and they speak Bengali predominantly. For communication with other community and for mode of education they use *Bangla*, though they have their own language. In *Shreemongal*, the *Gauro* community has six other hierarchical types and social relations between those types are almost similar like the caste system. These types

are- *Bilashpuria gauro*, *Jobolpuria gauro* (*Kochamora gauro*), *Survhuja gauro*, *Rajgauro*, *Goria gauro*, and *Jongli gauro*. As a Hindi word the ‘*Gaur*’ has some synonyms such as ‘*Durgo*’, ‘*Dewar*’; ‘*Khowar*’, ‘*Koria*’ – all that means the surrounded place like confinement with fencing all around. Here there is a self recognition of the community that the *Gauro* likes to live united under a territory surrounded by palace wall- one sense of native stigma.

According to *Narayanbabu*, a local people, “currently the *Gauro* are very much affiliated with the communities who have come from *Urrissha* and other distinct areas of greater India. Due to this assimilation the ‘*Adi Sonatoni Chorcha*’ – i.e. the ancient religiosity of *Gauro* has changed in some aspects over time”. Moreover, the rapid evolution of the language indicates changes in the cultural aspects in tea estate.

Historical Background and Migration

To explore the history of this community, a question arises that ‘why the British brought the *Gauro* from *Uttar Pradesh* as Tea Laborers?’ In 1813 a ‘*Mohonga*’ (originated from Hindi word ‘*mehengi*’, which can be related to ‘*monga*’ as found in the northern part of Bangladesh) occurred in Indian subcontinent. At that time the British government planned to make tea estate in the then *Assam* province which was extended from *Mukundupur* to present *Hobigonj* district of independent Bangladesh. Due to this tea industrialization lots of people were convinced to migrate to *Sylhet*, *Moulovibazar*, and *Hobigonj* regions from different parts of Indian subcontinent. Capitalizing the hardcore poverty of different regions the authority brought the laborers and engaged them in tea plantation. These people think that “the British authority thought to bring people from far distances as it would be easy to control those communities within their territory and exclude them from entitlement”. For this the authority occupied some collaborators called ‘*dalal*’ or broker (who were also the community people) to bring the laborers. These *dalals* were able to explain a utopian story to convince the *Gauro* community who were actually the inhabitants of *Lacknow*, *Jobolpur*, and *Bilashpur* regions in India. The *dalals* brought them by the cost of 10 rupee (Indian currency) and this was a huge amount for the poor people of that historic period. There is a popular tale which is very much familiar irrespective of all communities of tea laborer that could competent to convince the people of their very past generation, “*Hai Ram Singh tumh Assam chalo, gach hilaile paisa milega*” – means “let’s go to *Assam* where shaking of trees will give lots of money”. The folktale also exists like –

“*Gach hilaile phul porb,*
Phul porle paise paiba”

This means “shaking of trees will drop flower which in turn gives money”. According to one of the oldest *Gauro* people, it was one of the most popular reasons behind the settlement of their very past generation. It was also ordered to the ‘*dalal*’ to bring laborer of different communities from different regions so that the authority could exploit them, make them culturally isolated from each other and protect them from any united revolution. Consequently, the *Bhojepuri Gauro* came in *Longla* Tea Garden, *Kulaura* in between 1855-1856. And due to the above circumstances, the *Gauro* people were settled scattered in different tea estates of the territory, so that they would never be able to unite them. A brief look into the historical background of *Gauro* community is shown in the chart-3 below.

Chart-3: Historical Background of the *Gauro* Community

Period	Location and Migration
British India (1757- 1947)	They were the citizens of Indian Subcontinent.
Pakistan Period (1947- 1971)	They were the citizens of Pakistan. The then Pakistan termed them as migratory community.
Bangladesh Period (1971- till date)	The achieved the status of Bangladeshi Citizenship simultaneously they are termed as migratory community till date.

Source: Fieldwork at Kamalganj, 2009

Table-1: Age Grade of the *Gauro*

Ages (in year)	Number	%
10-20	06	06
20-30	11	11
30-40	24	24
40-50	40	40
50-60	15	15
60 and above	04	04
Total	100	100

Source: Fieldwork at Kamalganj, 2009

Age and Family

Following an integrated approach and being a micro level study, the research work has been carried out in a north-eastern district of the country where the tea workers are living in different *Upazilas* of *Moulovibazar* district. Thus the people of *Gauro* community are more concentrated in this area as most of the tea gardens exist here. However, the whole of the *Gauro* community has been selected for study, living scattered in different parts of the study area and it has been identified that

they are very few in number. The table-1 shows the age grade and number of *Gauro* people and indicates that apart from other age groups a large number of people (40%) belong to the age group of 40-50 years and they are contributing much to the plantation and production procedures in the gardens. At the same time they are 100 in number. Accordingly, it has been observed that these tea laborers have a tendency to enlarge the size of their family. Usually there are a lot of families residing in the estates that have in an average 6-9 family members residing in their small shelters. Table-2 shows the average size of their family in the gardens. From the table it can be said that 56% of the *Gauro* families have a family size of 06-09 members, which is comparatively high as well as distort in the context of their poverty level. But day by day they are becoming habituated in increasing their family size.

Educational Aspects and Barriers for the *Gauro*

Education is the most important aspect which plays a dominant role in the scope of occupational and social mobility i.e. increasing economic opportunity. Schooling and education can provide flexibility in making choices and devising strategies to enter the occupational sector from which the non-Bengali people are excluded by the prejudiced Bengali majority (Shafie and Kilby, 2003). Again the earning advantage of the more educated relative to the less educated is important as the earning advantage of the less educated declines as the minimum qualifications for given jobs rise over time (Schultz, 1961; Mincer, 1974; Becker, 1975). But among the *Gauro* education is very limited. Most the workers are illiterate, but trying to educate their children. This study reveals that the *Gauro* tea workers are significantly backward and out of infrastructural educational facilities. Above all of them are illiterate. A nominal numbers of educational institutions belong to them, but the quality of education of these institutions is not satisfactory. However, the following table-3 shows the educational qualification of the *Gauro* community.

Table-3 Educational Qualification of the *Gauro* Community

Level of education	Parents		Children	%		
	Father	Mother		Father	Mother	Children
Primary	09	14	129	09	14	37.50
Secondary	02	02	37	02	02	10.75
No education	89	84	178	89	84	51.75
Total	100	100	344	100	100	100

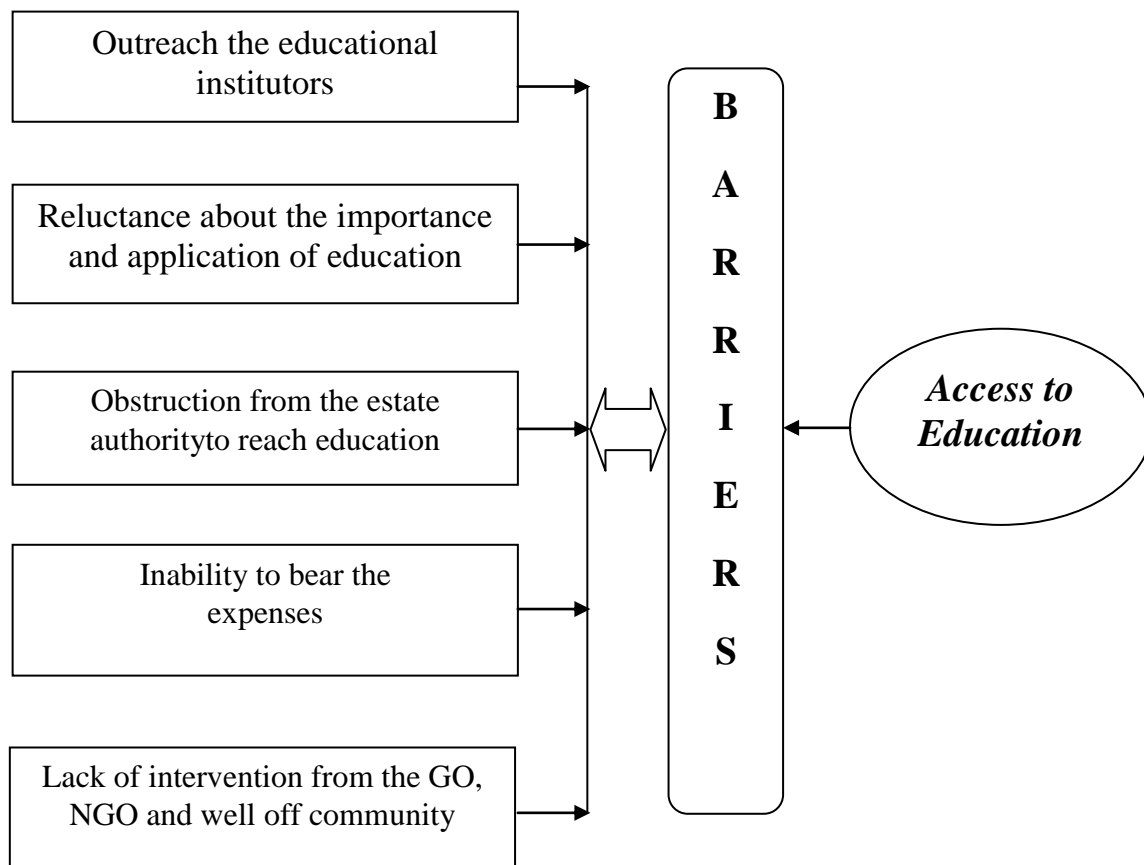
Source: Fieldwork at Kamalganj, 2009

Among the *Gauro*, the rate of education is low. The table indicates that for father and mother 89% and 84% have no education respectively and for children it is 51.75%. To minimize the financial constraint of the family the parents engage their children as tea workers from tender age

cannot send their children to schools. The quality and facilities for education are below standard. Currently many of them are realizing the importance of education for their children.

Article 20 of the Tea Garden Labor Rules-1997 demands for education facility of all the workers, but reality is different. They have not been offered any modern education. There is no single primary school in some of the tea gardens. So the tea laborers' children are studying in the school of another Bengali inhabited village, where the local Bengali students behave roughly with them. Even the teachers do not get pleasure to school. But at present there is a high school besides the tea garden opening opportunity to study. The authority never pays attention to improve their educational facilities. The workers think that there is no opportunity for education in the locality because their children would not be appointed in the garden after being educated. Again workers cannot bear the educational expenses of their children. So they are forced to drop out of the desire. This is one significant reason for their plight in economy and livelihood strategy. Following figure-1 shows the hindrances of access to education for them.

Figure-1: Hindrances of Access to Education



Economic and Livelihood Strategy and their Plight

The Division of Labor

The division of labor is determined basically on the basis of production and habitual interaction. In this process labor community and its socio-economic life are led towards the change. To adopt this changing situation laborers have to engage themselves in various activities. This activity led to determine the division of labor. In the context of *Gauro* community workers involve themselves in domestic as well as production activities. Basically domestic and estate production units fix their nature of work. Domestic unit include domestic production, household work and extra household activities, while dynamic estate production unit relates to the planting and processing of tea production with both units. Women perform special duty to produce labor force as per the laws of production. For organizing work well, division of labor has been created on the basis of age, sex, ability by the estate and existing social system. On the other hand social system, especially patriarchal motive, allows sex based work to determine the responsibilities of men and women. Sex based division of labor is visible in the household activities. Again age based division of labor is mostly determined by the estate authority and to some extent by the family. Here age is determined by the ability to work rather than by physical growth. Mostly after the adolescence, a male is supposed to be in the estate as a temporary labor. But in the house they perform simple and easy work, which are helpful to their parents. Before adolescence most of the boys are engaged in extra household activities such looking after the domestic animals (cows, goats, etc.). Some boys and girls are involved in cleaning their homes and look after the younger brothers and sisters. Some of them also cook their lunch specially boiling rice, *dal* and vegetables in absence of their mother.

Both male and female workers work for tea production and household. In the households responsibilities are basically divided by sex. Every worker has to do additional work throughout the day without any vacation. Basically male workers work in the tea processing factory and tea plantation. Besides they are involved in other works such as driving, security guard and water supply in the tea estates. Females also work in various situations. But they are expert in plucking the green leaves. Finally males and females work jointly in the tea garden. In contrast to household activities, tea production system organizes labor on the basis of ability to work. Below in the chart-4 is given the gender based daily activities of tea laborers.

Chart-4: Gender based Daily Activities of *Gauro* Tea Workers

Time	Men	Women
6.00 am – 11.00 am	Wake up	Wake up
	Feeding the cattle	Cleaning the utensils
	Breakfast	Cleaning the household
	Joining the tea garden	Take Bath
	Working in the tea garden	Morning prayer, prepare breakfast, serve breakfast to others, joining the garden works, working in the garden
11.00 am – 6.00pm	Snacks in the garden	Weight the plunk leaf
	Garden works	Lunch and Rest
	Return to home	Garden works
	Take bath	Fuel Collection and return home
6.00 pm – 12.00 am	Take tea in the shop	Take bath
	Shopping grocery in debit	Household maintenance and child care
	Leisure	Evening prayer , Cooking
	Gathering in the Bar	Serve meal to others and for self, gathering with neighbor
12.00 am– 6.00 am	Sleep	Sleep

Source: Fieldwork at Kamalgonj, 2009

From the information of chart-4 it can be said that *Gauro* women have to do more work (both at home and in the garden) than the men do. This illustrates the nature of their involvement into daily activities.

Economic Reality

Economical growth is the prime condition of development and capital is required for this economic growth. Through the proper utilization of capital it is possible to ensure better development. Initially this capital may come from two ways: savings and credit. Proper planning, expertise, implementation strategies, network and stable market linked and correlated with the capital can enrich the savings. Economic surplus may rise from different sectors. Health, education, excursion and socio-cultural condition might be upheld due to this economic progress. Here, economical progress means vertical rising of the savings. That means gradual increase of savings and its use as capital in the growth sectors. Generally, by savings we understand the result of subtraction from income to expenditure (income – expenditure = savings).

Moreover, economic theory posits that competitive forces in the economy will lead to a gradual elimination of wage and employment discrimination over time and that divisions based on race and ethnicity

will diminish in modern societies where social mobility is based achieved rather than ascribed status (Hirschman, 1983; Linton, 1936). But the reality is different and the above mentioned this formula is not applicable for the tea workers because they have no option to deduct their expenditure from their income. Tea workers have no such expenditure ability as an individual can afford within below poverty level. That is why savings, capital, capital integration, economic surplus and any other development activities are not applicable for the tea workers. This, in other words, shows that the inequality of distribution of material and other resources between Bengali and non-Bengali people demonstrates the deep and pervasive disjunction between the ideal of equality and the reality of inequality (Shafie and Kilby, 2003:3). As a consequence these people considered to be the most impoverished sector among the poor. However, the savings formula for the tea workers is something like: expenditure – reduced expenditure= savings. The workers do not know in which demands they would reduce their expenditures. It may be possible if both the workers and employers bilaterally decide to take initiatives for savings. In case of cut off expenditures the following demands can be considered-

- expenditure for drinking wine;
- reduce the debit of grocery shop;
- overestimated cost in rituals;
- reduce the fee for large temple construction;
- stop gambling;
- *Fagua* (rag day) expenditures; and
- stop paying for local healers.

Wages and Earnings

The vast majority of labor forces in the gardens are employed on price rates in the plucking seasons and on time rates for the rest of the year. Thus two systems are prevalent in tea gardens for wage payment to laborers and these are: a) time rate system; and b) price rate system. Under the ‘time rate system’ the laborers are required to complete the task allotted to them within a period fixed for the work. It is the task which is considered mainly irrespective of the time devoted by the laborers. The operations carried out on a task basis are: pruning, stiffing, cleaning out, cultivation, manure, planting tea, planting shade and miscellaneous like uprooting bushes and cutting new drains. Under the ‘price rate system’ the laborers get paid as much as they can pluck from the garden. Usually it is counted by price and number of leaves (in kg) collected. However, year wise wages of tea workers from 1984-2007 is shown in table-4 below.

Table-4: Year Wise Wages of the Tea Workers (1984-2007)

Year	Adult Wage*	Teenage Wage*	Wage* for Children
	Male & Female	Boys & Girls	
1984	13.80	12.95	11.80
1985	Do	Do	Do
1986	14.50	13.80	13.20
1987	Do	Do	Do
1988	Do	Do	Do
1989	17.25	16.55	15.95
1990	Do	Do	Do
1991	20.00	19.30	18.70
1992	Do	Do	Do
1993	Do	Do	Do
1994	22.00	21.30	20.70
1995	Do	Do	Do
1996	Do	Do	Do
1997	23.85	23.10	22.50
1998	Do	Do	Do
1999	26.75	26.05	25.45
2000	Do	Do	Do
2001	Do	Do	Do
2002	28.00	27.00	26.70
2007	31.25		

*Source: Agreement between BTA and BCSU, 2002; *Wage structure applicable to 'A' grade Tea Garden*

Though there is an acute unemployment problem among the workers' offspring, they have come forward to the outside world of the tea garden, gradually attaching themselves with the mainstream culture and community. A trivial change is going there. A few of the workers diversified their forefather's profession. Some of them engaged with rickshaw pulling, small trading and in small services like peon, messenger etc. A few workers' children have established themselves as doctor, teacher and government officials through higher education. But these are very small in number comparing to their overall condition.

Profession, Income and Expenditure

All most all the *Gauro* people work in the tea gardens to make their living. Besides, they have extra earnings by working in the different offices managed by the tea garden and also they have engaged themselves in rickshaw pulling, small trading and grocery. The economic condition

of the *Gauro* tea laborers is below poverty line. Workers' economic condition depends on two factors- one is earning wages from the garden and the other is individual extra economic activities. Both are contributing to the household. This income is spent in various purposes of basic needs and also enjoying performing various rituals. Basically these earnings determine the living condition maintaining both material and non-material needs.

These influence their socio-economic life and livelihood. Earlier they lived as slave but estate is growing liberal in giving minimum economic freedom to the workers. For this reason they get opportunity to engage with other economic activities. Even workers are exploiting natural resources such as collecting firewood, grass, hunting animals, etc. By selling firewood and grass in the local market the workers can earn some amount of money. But in the case of rainy season they cannot sell their grass or firewood. Sometimes they are engaged in holidays as physical laborer in different private gardens such as lemon, banana, and pineapple garden. They earn Tk. 60 per day from this temporary work. Some of them have engaged themselves as rickshaw pullers and agricultural laborers in the Bengali community. Finally, their income is very low for their subsistence and so they always remain below poverty line. The following table-5 shows the sources of income and expenditures of the *Gauro*.

Table-5: Sources of Income and Expenditures of the *Gauro*

Income	Expenditure
Weekly wages	Bette leaf, Tobacco, Wine.
Ration	Hospitality, <i>Chanachur</i> , biscuit, vegetables, dry fish, fish, Fee for labor union and other programs, Treatment and others, Rice, <i>Dal</i> , Oil, salt, spice, Clothes and Rituals.

Source: Fieldwork at Kamalgonj, 2009

Additional Facilities to their Livelihood

Besides their different economic activities, the *Gauro* tea laborers used to get some additional facilities from the estate which further enhances their livelihood options. In other words these facilities, provided by the tea estate, have demanding contribution to generate their income and expenditure. These facilities are briefly sketched below.

1. Risk allowance: they get an amount of Tk. 1.95 per day for spraying insecticides.
2. Incentives during religious festivals: i) daily rated workers get an amount of Tk. 460 per year in two installments; and ii) monthly rated workers get Tk. 545 per year in two installments.

3. Rationing: one worker gets 3.27 kg wheat per week and maximum for 3 dependent children.
4. Housing: Management provides housing facilities to the workers.
5. Maternity benefit: i) payment of maternity benefit has been continued as per Maternity Benefit Act-1954 of tea estates. It is settled by negotiation between BTA and BCSU. One female worker gets 12 weeks maternity leave and 90 days average wage benefit settled by the management; and ii) husbands can take privilege of leave during this period from 10-20 days.
6. They get supply of plucking *gamcha* (local towel) and hand tools by the management.
7. Management provides hand gloves, shoes, musk and apron for workers for spraying insecticides, weedicides and other chemicals.
8. Monthly rated *Sardars*, *Jugali Sardars* and peon or messenger get an umbrella each after every two years.
9. Office Peon gets a set of uniform.
10. Supply of torch light to night *Chowkidars* from the authority.
11. Latrine is provided by the management, but maintenance is the responsibility of the workers.
12. Management provides pure drinking water as per Tea Plantation Labor Ordinance-1962.
13. Facilities for birth control: i) for ligation: an amount of Tk.210 is to be paid with 14 days leave by the employer for undergoing ligation with the prior approval of the management; and ii) for vasectomy: an amount of Tk. 180 is to be paid with 7 days paid leave by the employer for undergoing vasectomy with the prior approval of the management.
14. Facilities after retirement: the National Assembly (*Jatiyo Sangshad*) of Bangladesh recommends for the tea workers to pay an allowance of Tk. 37.00 per week to daily rated and Tk.52.00 per week to monthly rated workers, who retired at or after the normal agreed retirement age of 55 years having completing minimum 15 years of service with the estate or group prior to retirement. It is to be clearly understood that payment of such allowance will not be linked with the issuance of ration and he or she will continue to draw ration as per his or her entitlement as a dependent of a worker.

Socio-economic Reality of the *Gauro*

However, overall socio-economic realities of the *Gauro* community, as identified from the study, are- i) the daily food menu of the workers is few dried bread and home made salty tea. A few workers could manage

rice for twice meals; ii) majority of the workers survive below the poverty line. About 85% workers possess single set of dress; iii) as the parents are illiterate so there are no favorable surroundings for child education. Along with this reluctance from the garden authority bridge the barrier in terms of education; iv) water and sanitation system is very much deplorable and unhygienic. Lack of health consciousness and education, diarrhea and dysentery is the common reality in their daily lives; v) the daily wages of Tk. 31.25 and 3.5 kg of *atta* (wheat flour) in the weekend make their live very much shocking economically; vi) as the workers have no savings so they have no capital. As a result they cannot escape from the poverty cycle; and vii) Unemployment is the acute problem in their social life. The following figure-2 shows the problems of the tea workers and the process have been identified from studying the *Gauro* community.

Figure-2: Problems of the Tea Workers



Source: Fieldwork at Kamalgonj, 2009

Conclusion

The study findings revealed that colonial legacy had introduced tea plantation in the subcontinent, grabbing the yield profit, simultaneously the tea plantation workers had to migrate amid the reality of acute poverty and for aiming economic emancipation. The *Gauro* community is one of them who desired to establish themselves and their future generation through hard work and sound income generation. But after a century the present study on the *Gauro* tea workers at *Moulibazar* district in Bangladesh has come up with the result that everything has changed except the poverty and deprivation among the workers as it was during the period of their migration to this estate.

Indigenous, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities worldwide are in an inferior economic and social position. The ethnic concentration of poverty and inequality is increasingly being recognized in the development literature (see, for example, Birdsall and Sabot, 1991; Kiltgaard, 1992). The colonial regime has ended, British and other multinational company significantly lessen their investment but in place of these the other national and international companies have invested a huge amount of money for making more profit. And finally they become succeeded, but the working community, who are the actual actors and producer of the tea, has remained static considering their economic livelihood and future. They are clustered and scattered among different class and caste. All these have resulted from the intentional and exploited motive of the British ruler as well as their successors who are the present estate owners.

However, the present study for this article has attempted to explore the reality of the *Gauro* tea cultivators who are, in fact, out of focus. Thus the plight of these people is characterized by poor health, disease, hunger, malnourishment, illiteracy, restricted access to resources, poor housing, unemployment and lack of access to basic services such as water, sewage and electricity among others.

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