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**GENDER BIASED VARIABILITY OF WAGEPATTERN AMONGST
THE TEMPORARY LABOURERS OF SELECTED TEA GARDENS
OF SONITPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM, INDIA**

Anurag Hazarika¹, Samikshya Madhukullya²

^{1,2}Tezpur College, Assam, India

¹anuraghazarika2@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0005-4813>

²madhusami1000@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1206-1284>

Abstract. The tea garden labourers of Assam constitute an essential segment of the state's socio-economic and cultural fabric, playing a pivotal role in sustaining its tea industry and overall economic growth. Despite their contribution, they remain affected by low wages, gender-based pay gaps, and limited social mobility. This empirical study investigates the wage structure of temporary tea garden labourers in the Sonitpur district, identifying the extent and causes of gender wage disparity and exploring possible measures to address these inequalities. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research combines primary data from field surveys and interviews with secondary data analysis to assess the socio-economic conditions and livelihood challenges faced by workers. The findings reveal a significant gender wage gap, insufficient policy protection for temporary labourers, and the pressing need for government and institutional interventions to promote equitable compensation and gender justice within Assam's tea industry.

Keywords: gender wage gap, temporary labourers, tea garden, Sonitpur district

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Научная статья

ГЕНДЕРНЫЙ ФАКТОР В ИЗМЕНЧИВОСТИ СТРУКТУРЫ ЗАРАБОТНОЙ ПЛАТЫ СРЕДИ НАЁМНЫХ РАБОЧИХ ИЗБРАННЫХ ЧАЙНЫХ ПЛАНТАЦИЙ ОКРУГА СОНИТПУР ШТАТА АССАМ, ИНДИЯ

Анураг Хазарика¹, Самикшья Мадхукулля²

^{1,2}Колледж Тезпур, Ассам, Индия

¹anuraghasarika2@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0005-4813>

²madhusami1000@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1206-1284>

Аннотация. Работники чайных плантаций Ассама составляют важный сегмент социально-экономической и культурной структуры штата, играя ключевую роль в поддержании его чайной промышленности и общего экономического роста. Несмотря на их значительный вклад, данная категория работников по-прежнему сталкивается с проблемами низкого уровня оплаты труда, гендерного разрыва в заработной плате и ограниченной социальной мобильности. Настоящее эмпирическое исследование посвящено анализу структуры заработной платы временных рабочих чайных плантаций округа Сонитпур, выявлению масштабов и причин гендерных различий в оплате труда, а также поиску возможных мер по снижению указанных неравенств. Используя смешанную методологию, включающую полевые опросы, интервью и анализ вторичных источников, исследование оценивает социально-экономические условия и особенности трудовой занятости данной группы работников. Полученные результаты выявляют существенный гендерный разрыв в оплате труда, недостаточную эффективность существующей системы защиты временных работников и необходимость государственных и институциональных мер, направленных на обеспечение справедливого вознаграждения и гендерного равенства в чайной промышленности Ассама.

Ключевые слова: гендерный разрыв в заработной плате, наёмные рабочие, чайная плантация, округ Сонитпур

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Introduction

The tea garden labourers of Assam are part and parcel of the Assamese society which contributes to a rich cultural diversity. The tea-garden labourers may be treated as one of the vital parts of tea industry in Assam [1]. Their role is very much important in the economic development of the Assam as well as India as whole. At present there are more than 1 lakh regular tea garden labourers working in the tea gardens of Assam while the number of temporary labourers is also quite high. Apart from the regular tea-garden labourers, there is large number of irregular tea-garden labourers working in the tea-estates of Assam. The tea garden labourers; now constituted as a community are the descendants of those poor immigrants, whose fate forced them to come to the tea plantations of Assam. The immigration continued for more than a century; from 1841 to 1960; i.e., even after independence in 1947. Tea plantation in Assam was growing and the demand of such cheap labourers equally increasing. The working class in the tea gardens of Assam may be the most exploited class in the organized sector of economy. Low wages, poor housing and lack of avenues for social

mobility have been a recurring theme since its inception in the early 19th century. The tea garden labourers lives have unique identity as it is neither an urban nor industrial nor a rural area [2].

The Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951 did not provide for them and neither does the new Codes on Wages. For in-stance, in the new Codes on Wages, while the permanent tea garden workers can look for-ward to wage revisions every six months and the backing of Trade Unions to address grievances, there continues to be absolute no mention or reference to the temporary workers of the tea gardens [3].

Temporary labourers are those who work outside the tea garden commonly known as “Faltu” labourers and earn daily wages. Both males and females perform as temporary workers as regular work cannot be guaranteed in tea garden [4; 5].

Tea garden labourers are mainly trapped from various linguistic and ethnic groups from different parts of our country to work in tea gardens. They hailed from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa (present day Odisha), and U.P, Central Province etc. to work under the British company and to live side by side within the tea gardens. In course of time these labourers consolidated themselves as a group and came to be known as ‘tea tribe’. Though their languages were different but as they continued to reside and work on the same platform for centuries, they evolved a distinct composite dialect known as “Bagani Buli”. Now it is very much prevalent in both Brahmaputra valley and Barak valley. In addition to ‘Bagani dialect’, another prominent dialect that developed in this community in Barak valley is known as “Bhojpuri” dialect. However, they have different social customs and rituals. Another most important feature of labour community is that of a caste ridden society. Caste distinction and class multiplication are very acute and complex in their society. Rigidity of caste system in the Bhojpuri community has been greatly observed [5].

Gender-based salary variability is one of the most persistent patterns of economic inequality in both developed and developing countries. Contemporary gender economics literature stresses that income gaps are not entirely explained by productivity-related variables, but rather by structural and institutional asymmetries [6]. According to global meta-analyses, the gender wage gap remains due to occupational segregation, undervaluation of women's labour, unequal access to training, and discriminatory labor market institutions [7]. In rural economies like India, gender disparities are exacerbated by informal employment arrangements and traditional social norms that affect access to productive resources. The phenomenon of "sticky floors," in which women are concentrated in low-wage, low-mobility positions, and "glass ceilings," in which advancement avenues are inaccessible, is especially prominent in plantation sectors [6]. The application of these theoretical constructs to tea garden labour in Assam, where both permanent and temporary workers coexist, allows for a micro-level explanation of how economic gender disparity develops within tightly controlled but socially hierarchical production systems.

Moreover, the tea plantation economy of Assam provides a compelling framework for studying gendered labor relations. Historically, the tea industry in India developed under colonial industrial frameworks that relied primarily on cheap, sometimes unfree, and gendered labor. Despite legislative interventions and salary negotiations, multiple studies have found persisting wage gaps between men and women, especially among temporary or seasonal workers [8]. It is noteworthy to state that empirical studies in the Darjeeling and Dooars tea belts show that women workers are disproportionately concentrated in plucking and maintenance tasks—often paid on a piece rate—while men are more likely to work in supervisory, factory-based, or mechanical roles associated with higher pay and job security [9]. Similar gendered duty assignments may be seen in Sonitpur district, where temporary female workers frequently lack access to regular income, housing perks, medical facilities, and maternity leave. Plantation labor systems perpetuate gender hierarchies through institutionalized disparity in employment contracts and job appraisal. Furthermore,

feminization of labour in the plantation sector does not always equate to empowerment. While women make up a sizable proportion of the workforce, their participation is nevertheless mediated by patriarchal norms and household responsibilities [10]. This dynamic exacerbates wage disparities between male and female temporary workers, making the Sonitpur tea garden study both locally and globally important to discussions about gender and informal labor economics.

The purpose and objectives of the study

The goal of this research is to look into gender differences in wage trends among temporary workers in Sonitpur district, Assam, India. It seeks to research the degree and nature of wage discrimination experienced by female workers, as well as to examine how socioeconomic, cultural, and structural variables contribute to this imbalance. The study also aims to better understand the role of patriarchy, occupational segregation, and a lack of understanding about constitutional rights in perpetuating female wage discrepancies. By investigating these factors, the study hopes to highlight women's marginalization in the tea business and provide ideas for policy measures that promote gender equity and fair labor standards.

The followings are the major objectives of the study:

- a) to examine the present wage pattern and status of temporary labourers of selected tea gardens of Sonitpur district of Assam.
- b) to explore causes behind wage gender-based wage discrimination amongst the temporary labourers of selected tea gardens of Sonitpur district of Assam.
- c) to reveal the possible ways to minimize the gender bias wage pattern among temporary labourers of selected tea gardens of Sonitpur district of Assam.

Methodology and research methods

The present study is primarily empirical in nature and follows a systematic methodology incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Qualitative methods, particularly observation, have been used to gain an in-depth understanding of the behavioural and socio-economic patterns of tea garden labourers within their natural environment. Quantitative analysis was carried out through the preparation of master tables where all collected data were systematically tabulated and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. The results were further represented through graphs, charts, and maps to ensure clear visual interpretation and to identify recurring patterns while minimizing data inconsistencies. The study draws on a wide range of data sources – primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary data were obtained through a pilot survey using well-structured questionnaires and schedules, employing a purposive random sampling technique across selected households. The field survey ensured the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data. Secondary data were collected from books, government reports, journals, newspapers, periodicals, and official publications such as the *Assam Statistical Handbook* and *District Census Gazetteer*, as well as from various government offices and organizations including the Tea Board of India. Additionally, tertiary data sources like internet links, government websites, and district library resources were also utilized. To enrich the study, valuable insights were gathered from knowledgeable individuals and unpublished academic works such as theses and dissertations. The empirical analysis focused on 64 purposively selected labourers from five randomly chosen tea gardens of Sonitpur district in Assam, comprising 64 temporary labourers. This comprehensive methodological framework ensures a balanced integration of both qualitative and quantitative insights, enabling the study to provide a holistic and evidence-based understanding of the socio-economic conditions, wage structures, and livelihood challenges of tea garden workers in Assam.

Discussion and Analysis

Analysis of data

Accordingly, survey has been conducted in 5 selected tea gardens of Sonitpur district and data has been collected. In this case total 64 numbers of temporary labourers (table 1)

and 30 numbers of Permanent labourers have been surveyed for the study. After the survey all the data and information are depicted in a systematic manner and accordingly separate analysis has been made for temporary and permanent labourers' information. For comparative study different statistical methods have been applied in the study and represented with graphs for better visual interpretation.

Table 1 – Distribution of interviewed temporary labourers by tea gardens

Таблица 1 – Распределение опрошенных временных работников
по чайным плантациям

Sl. No	Tea Gardens	Temporary Labourers
		No. of Samples
1	Arun TE	12
2	Dhekiyajuli TE	14
3	Borjuli TE	10
4	Chariduar TE	13
5	Tezpur&Ghagra TE	15
	Total	64

Analysis for temporary labour. To understand the various issues related gender biased wages among the temporary tea garden labourers of Sonitpur district there are 64 numbers of labourers surveyed from five randomly selective tea gardens which is clearly mentioned in the above table. In this case both male and female temporary labourers with age group of 18 years to 59 years who are worked mostly outside of their tea garden have been taken into consideration for the study. Moreover, a labourer of both working temporarily with the tea garden as well as outside the tea garden has been surveyed for the study.

Respondents Gender Status. From the study it has been found that that out of the total 64 persons under survey, 25 numbers i. e. 39.06 % are male labourers and majority i. e. 39 numbers of respondents are female labourers. In this case mean age deviation is 7.00 whereas standard deviation of age corresponds to the values of 9.90 (table 2).

Table 2 – Respondents' Gender Type

Таблица 2 – Гендерный тип респондентов

Sl. No	Gender	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	Male	25	39.06	7.00	9.90
2	Female	39	60.94		
Total		64	100		

Respondents' Age Group. In the study there are 4 different groups has been categorized on the basis of their age. These are 18 years to 30 years which occupy 11 persons, whereas age group 30 to 40 occupies 31 persons. The age group 40 to 50 claims 14 numbers of person and rest age group i.e. 50 to 59 consists of 8 numbers of persons. In this case Mean age deviation is 7.50 whereas standard deviation of age corresponds to the values of 10.30 (table 3).

Table 3 – Respondents' Age Structure
 Таблица 3 – Возрастная структура респондентов

Sl. No	Age in Years	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	18-30	11	17.19	7.50	10.30
2	30-40	31	48.44		
3	40-50	14	21.88		
4	50-59	8	12.50		
Total		64			

Respondents' Marital Status. It is found from the study that out of the total 64 persons under survey 45 numbers of persons i. e. 70.31 % are married and rest 19 numbers of respondents i. e. 29.69 % are unmarried. In this case Mean age deviation is 13.00 whereas standard deviation of age corresponds to the values of 18.38 (table 4).

Table 4 – Respondents' Marital Status
 Таблица 4 – Семейное положение респондентов

Sl. No	Status	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	Married	45	70.31	13.00	18.38
2	Unmarried	19	29.69		
Total		64	100		

Work Type. From the study it is found that out of the total 64 persons under survey 41 numbers of persons are associated with domestic work as labourers whereas 13 numbers of persons belong to the category of Industrial labourers who are worked in hotels, shops, as well as different industries. Remaining 10 numbers of persons fall under the category of temporary labourers within the tea garden which popularly known as Faltu labourers. It is interesting to note that labourers are working contractual basis in the tea garden for two years. His appointment may be extended as per company's requirement. In this case Mean age deviation is 13.11 whereas standard deviation of age corresponds to the values of 17.10 (table 5).

Table 5 – Respondents' Work Type
 Таблица 5 – Тип работы респондентов

Sl. No	Status	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	Domestic	41	64.06	13.11	17.10
2	Industrial	13	20.31		
3	Other	10	15.63		
Total		64	100.00		

Respondents' Daily Working Duration. From the study it is found that the working duration of the ranges in between below 4 hours to above 8 hours. Majority of the labourers works 6 hours in average daily. There is provision of double shift duty especially for commercial labourers but it purely seasonal (table 6).

Table 6 – Respondents Working Hours
Таблица 6 – Время работы респондентов

Sl. No	Hours	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	Below 4 Hours	6	9.38	9.00	10.92
2	4 - 6 Hours	29	45.31		
3	6 - 8 Hours	21	32.81		
4	Above 8 Hours	8	12.50		
Total		64	100		

Respondents' Daily Wages Pattern. From the study it is found that out of the total 64 persons under survey 3 persons earn daily wages up to 100 Rs. in Average, whereas 19 persons have daily income in between Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 only. It is interesting to note that 26 persons under survey have earned average daily wages in between Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 per month while 14 of them have daily wages in between 300 to 400 Rs. The rest 2 persons have daily averages wage above Rs.400 (table 7).

Table 7 – Respondents Average Daily Wages
Таблица 7 – Средняя дневная заработная плата респондентов

Sl. No	Amount	Nos.	% of Total	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	Up to 100 Rs.	3	4.69	8.24	10.33
2	100 - 200 Rs.	19	29.69		
3	200 - 300 Rs.	26	40.63		
4	300 - 400 Rs.	14	21.88		
5	Above 400 Rs.	2	3.13		
Total		64	100		

Nature of work. It has been found from the study that temporary labourers have performed different duties in different field. Those who are domestic worker they are associated with cleaning works, washing works, wood cutting, tree cutting, gardening works, cultivation works, fencing works etc. On the other hand, those who are associated with commercial workers mostly works as helper in the field of construction, industry, service boy in hotels, etc. Those who are working as temporary labour in the tea gardens they are associated with work like plucking tea leaves, factory helper, bungalow servant and so on.

Provision of Holiday. It has been understood from the study that there is no such holiday for temporary labourers but during 'Assam Bandh' they avoid to go to their working field. But there is pay cut system prevails both for domestic and commercial temporary labourers. It is very rare among the temporary labourers who are working outside the tea garden they got paid leave. Only few workers got medical leave which quite restricted. Maternity Leave is purely leave without pay for both commercial and domestic temporary labourers. But those temporary labourers who work within the tea garden they have some sort facility like maternity leave, bonus and so on.

Testing of Hypothesis

To understand the level of variation of gender bias in wages in terms of domestic and commercial a hypothesis has been taken into consideration i.e. "There is significant

variation in between earnings of male temporary workers and female temporary workers with respect to lime of devotion". Accordingly, there are four categories of temporary labourers that have been identified based on gender as well as type of work. These are:

- a. Male domestic temporary labourers;
- b. Male commercial temporary labourers;
- c. Female domestic temporary labourers;
- d. Female commercial temporary labourers.

In this case, null hypothesis H_0 has been taken as there is no variation between low genders based domestic and commercial labourers. Alternative hypothesis H_1 has been taken as significant variation of wages in terms domestic and commercial labourers.

To find out the level of significance of the hypothesis, chi square (χ^2) test analysis has been calculated based on 'types of gender-based workers and their average wages. Here an average of 64 labourers has been taken as the observed value of four different categories as mentioned above.

Hence Observed values are – 350, 400, 250, & 300.

While in this case expected value has been taken as the sum of observed value divided by 4 i. e. = $(350 + 400 + 250 + 300) / 4 = 325$.

Hence Expected Value $E = 1300/4 = 325$ (table 8).

Table 8 – Chi square (χ^2) test analysis
Таблица 8 – Хи-квадрат (χ^2) анализа теста

Type of labourers	Actual Average Wages (O)	Expected Wages (E)	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
Male Domestic	350	325	-25	625	1.92
Male Commercial	400	325	-75	5625	17.31
Female Domestic	250	325	75	5625	17.31
Female Commercial	300	325	25	625	1.92
					$\Sigma(O-E)^2 / E =$
					38.46

Here the calculated chi square (χ^2) value is 38.46 at (n-1) i. e. $(4-1) = 3$ degree of freedom. Tabulated value of chi square (χ^2) at 5 % level of significance the value of chi square (χ^2) is 7.81 and at 1 % level of significance chi square (χ^2) value is 11.34. The computed value 45.45 is much more than the tabulated value hence the statement is significant and hypothesis is accepted.

Major findings

From the study following points has been considered:

- Age group of the tea growers of the region is varies from 18 years to 59 years both for the temporary and regular labourers though in this study child labour has been excluded.
- Almost all the labourers of both temporary and regular labourers of Sonitpur tea garden area belong to BPL category and all of them are staying in pukka quarter given to in favour of their family members.
- All the permanent tea garden labourers living in pukka houses which is known as labour quarter. While temporary labourers also live in such houses as their relatives are working as permanent in the tea garden. It is noticeable joint family system among the tea tribes is common through the district as well as in the whole state of Assam.

- Majority of population are Hindu and most of the workers of the locality are married. Though Christianity influence still exists among those tea gardens of Sonitpur districts.
- Among the temporary labours, daily income i. e. wages varies from below Rs.100 to above 400 Rs. perday in the district those who have worked outside the tea garden. While for the regular labour their fixed pay is 167 per day.
- Temporary labourers do not get any holiday and there is pay cut for every single day absent especially those who are working in shops and hotels. Though there are some considerations for domestic workers but it is purely depended the mood of the landlord.
- For the regular / permanent tea garden labourers in Sonitpur district, their holidays and leaves are strictly limited. They do not get wages for the days of weekly rest. There is also provision of double shift duties with double wages among the tea garden.
- There is a provision of extra income i. e. during national holidays like 15th August, 26th January etc. regular tea garden labourers earn double wages for single shift duty. But there is no pay cut for absence during such holidays.
- In many families of tea garden laboures of Sonitpur district, some common domestic violence has been found such as beating family members after drinking, stealing money, quarreling with neighbors and so on. Sometimes such violence lead to major criminal activity.
- Regular tea garden labourers have various facilities within the tea garden such as quarter, free education, free medical checkup and treatment, ration, paid leave, bonus, double wage for double shift duty, double wage for single shift duty during national holiday, and so on.
- The nature of duties widely varies for temporary tea garden labourers those who work outside the tea garden. While for the temporary and regular labourers who work in the tea garden itself, their nature of duty is more or less same throughout the year.
- There is need of some awareness program to make the local people aware about the human rights as majority of the tea tribe population are not aware of human and legal rights.

Recommendations

- a. Each and every people in the society should value equally to the females as with the males in all the sectors. It may be economic, political, social or any other fields.
- b. There should be some alternate source income like business, hired pay system etc. for temporary labourers of tea garden so that they can survive by their choice of income rather than monopoly market.
- c. Management body or the owner of tea garden should equally judge for both male and female workers for their wages as they perform their duties at equal time duration with similar efforts.
- d. Government should take some strict rules and regulations regarding wage pattern for the temporary labourers both in the domestic as well as in industrial sectors.
- e. For the regular labourers mode of payment i.e. weekly-paid wage system should be changed to monthly salary payment system so that their economic standard may increase.
- f. As far as possible Govt. should provide job opportunity for the temporary labourers especially for the women who are getting very less daily wages.
- g. The wages and salaries of the tea garden labourers should be increased with an immediate effect with comparison to those other industrial sectors in order to maintain their better standard of living within the tea garden.
- h. Basic education is very much essential for all the labourers so that they can transact their earning money through proper banking system and go for alternate source of income.
- i. NGO, as well as other society should raise voice for gender equality not only in wage

- but also in various sectors like domestic violence, crime against women and so on.
- j. Tea garden labourers should know their constitutional and legal rights which they are very less aware about. Hence, there is urgent need of awareness program at certain interval of times.
 - k. From the study, several new ideas have come to the light. Researchers and scholars may take it as the reference for their study. This study may also help in decision making as well as regional planning and development regarding implementation of wage rules and regulation in the tea gardens of Assam or India as a whole.
 - l. Since long period the colonial plantation system has been practiced in tea gardens. Hence, it is quite difficult for all round development of the labourers. Therefore, an alternative farming system should be developed in the tea gardens as earliest possible.
 - m. To reduce unemployment among the tea garden labourers in Sonitpur district as well as other tea gardens of Assam, owners and management body should develop alternative factory or project or cultivation like coffee, timber cultivation, sugarcane, biodiesel and so on.
 - n. There should be implementation of effective social welfare programs both for present tea garden labourers as well as ex-tea garden labourers to develop their standard of living.
 - o. Special importance should be given to extend proper welfare facilities to the labourers particularly the provisions of health facilities. In many tea gardens of Sonitpur district unhygienic lifestyles prevails.

Conclusion

Tea garden labourers form an integral part of Assamese society, yet they continue to face significant gender-based wage disparities, particularly when employed outside the gardens. The gender wage gap remains a major issue of social justice, equality, and economic mobility, despite decades of legal measures like the Equal Pay Act. Contributing factors include occupational segregation, discrimination, family responsibilities, and limited access to education. The study emphasizes that education alone cannot bridge the wage gap; rather, comprehensive measures such as fair wage policies, improved childcare facilities, and flexible work arrangements are required. The tea industry, vital to Assam's economy and global trade, generates substantial employment but suffers from government and managerial neglect. Strengthening this sector is essential to prevent rising unemployment and economic instability. Moreover, developing alternate industries such as secondary cultivation and small-scale enterprises could reduce dependency on wage labour. While regular tea garden workers often express satisfaction and a strong cultural identity as "Adibasis," their lack of education and awareness about rights hinders progress.

The tea tribes are peace loving people living in the tea garden with a very simple life. Without visit in the locality it is difficult to understand about their devotion towards the tea garden. As the education level among them is comparatively low therefore majority of them are not aware of human rights. By adopting some special ways like awareness program, road show etc. we can help them to become aware about their rights, its importance so that they can have a better standard of living in the society.

Therefore, continuous awareness programs, community engagement, and training initiatives are crucial to empower tea garden workers, ensuring gender equity, better livelihoods, and sustainable development within Assam's tea-growing communities.

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Information about the authors

Dr. Anurag Hazarika – Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce;

Dr. Samikshya Madhukullya – Ph.D, Teaching, Faculty of Sociology.

Информация об авторах

Анураг Хазарика – доктор философии, доцент кафедры коммерции;

Самикшья Мадхукулья – доктор философии, преподаватель факультета социологии.

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