NATIONALISM AND LABOUR: THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY OF BIHAR TILL 1947

ABSTRACT

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This research work entitled ‘Nationalism and Labour: The Coal Mining Industry of Bihar till 1947’, is an attempt to study the nature of emergence of labourforce in coalmine industry of Bihar including modern Jharkhand generally situated in the sparsely populated areas of the state. This study tries to trace the history of the coal mine industry of Bihar and its expansion, the labour supply and its expanding catchment area to cater to the ever expanding need of the industry. The system of recruitment, condition of works both underground and on the surface, their extent of incorporation in the emerging capitalist system and their resistance to their exploitation in the existing capitalist system. The work has been divided into five chapters excluding the Introduction. A brief summary of the five chapters are given below.

Chapter one deals with the emergence and growth of coal mining in India. The chapter is primarily concerned with stages of development of the coal mining industry. For simplification it has been divided into three major landmarks, the development of coal mines in pre-railway phase, post railway phase preceding opening of the Jharia mines and the rapid development after opening of Jharia mines and the ‘coal rush’

In the first phase the development was very slow and halting. It had its own litany of problem like transportation, the necessity of *ghat* (river banks) near the mines and problems associated with overland transportation of coal to the nearest *ghat*, the problem of lease of lands and legal tangle that followed
after. We have also tried to study the development of mineral study undertaken by the Government during the period with the appointment of D. H. Williams possibly the first qualified geologist appointed as Geological Surveyor on 5th February 1846 for five years. It was during this time that Geological Department assumed a distinct entity, with a permanent headquarter at Calcutta with its own publication of its findings in, *Memoirs of Geological Survey of India*, and *Annual Report of the Geological Survey of India*, and establishment of the Museum of Geology during 1858-59.

The second phase starts with the entry of the railways into the Raniganj coalfield. This phase also saw: the formation of large coal companies, the floatation of the Equitable Coal Company, which was registered in the year 1863, the Raneegunge Coal Association Ltd., founded in 1873 and the role of managing agent in 1870s and 1880s as a hired manager. This phase also saw the expansion of coal mining to new areas. Dr. T. W. H. Hughes was deputed in 1868 to study the Giridih Coalfield and mapping of the coalfield area. The transportation of coal was a great problem for the mining industry and this phase saw some private initiative to built their own railway lines.

The third phase started with the opening of the Jharia field. The firms which helped in the development of the Jharia coalfield were an outgrowth of the Agency Houses. This phase showed how the managing agencies became the paramount power for the development of the coal industry, its stress on profit, and expansion of the mining industry.
The second chapter deals with issue of the labour supply. It deals with the changing composition of the labour force with the evolution of the coal mining industry. This chapter deals with various forms of recruitment followed by the mining industry and underlines the short comings of the various methods of recruitment pursued to meet the fast expanding requirement of the coal industry. It also deals with the expanding catchment area of the coalmine workers and gender division of labour. An attempt has been made to chalk out the involvement of women labour in the coal mines, the various works done by them, their exclusion from underground work and their re-employment and and how they eventually excluded from underground working. The chapter highlights the exploitation of female workers at the work places, and the material condition of the female workers due to their low wages and web of exploitative structure built around them.

The third chapter deals with the duality of workers opting for working in mines and their simultaneous dependence on agriculture. It tries to show the unchanging pattern of labour supply impacting shortage and fluctuation of labour supply during the reaping and sowing seasons and the failure of the creation of a labour force completely divorced from agriculture for their livelihood.

The second section deals with the hours of work. The hour of work was the most unregulated aspect of the mining industry. The issue of hours of work varied from mine to mine and area to area. It was only with the adoption of
Indian Mines Act, 1923, that some concerted efforts were made to regulate the hours of work to 60 hours for surface workers (above ground) and 54 hours for underground with a weekly holiday. Along with this, other legislation dealing with the hours of work had been discussed in the section under consideration.

The next section deals with the wages paid to the mine workers. There were two methods of payment: first was piece rate and second was time-rate. Piece rate was more prevalent among the miners as they were considered 'notorious' for being 'idle', 'careless' and 'unsteady'. The skilled workers were paid time rates. This section deals with the gradual movement of the wages during our period of study and the forms of reduction to which it was exposed.

The fourth chapter deals with the initiatives undertaken by the coal companies to secure a settled labour population around the collieries. It also explores the residential facilities provided by the mining companies, the deplorable sanitary conditions, the extent of overcrowding and the periodic occurrences by the epidemics like plague, cholera, malaria etc. The second section deals with the underground working condition in the mines. The lack of sufficient light, the smoke from kerosene kupis, the smoke due to explosions, and the ever present hookworms, the unscientific method of working all compounded to make the underground working as dangerous too demanding for the workers. The next section deals with accidents in mines. It
tries to study the accident by classifying under various head and then trying to seek the general cause of such type of accident as grouped under the heading.

The last chapter deals with the forms of resistance offered by the workers against their exploitation. These are studied under two phases. The first phase deals with the early resistance offered by the miners at individual level or in small groups against dangerous working condition, unsanitary residential facility and exploitation by the superior officers. The second phase deals with the organized resistance offered by the mine workers against their exploitation by the capitalist class. I.B. Sen, who had then come to Dhanbad to defend certain clerks involved in a criminal suit for assaulting a colliery manager, became the first President of the the Indian Colliery Employees Association was formed in the year 1920 itself with headquarters in Dhanbad. The swing in the intensity of the labour movement during various phases and the coming up of new organizations, the linking of the miners resistance with the national movement are also highlighted.
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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis, ‘Nationalism and Labour: The Coal Mining Industry of Bihar till 1947’, submitted by Md. Shakeeb Athar is the original research work of the candidate and is suitable for submission to the examiners and for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

(Dr. Ishrat Alam)
Supervisor
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Aligarh
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(Md Shakeeb Athar)
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>B.L.E.C.</td>
<td>Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission, 1940.</td>
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<td>E.P.W</td>
<td>Economic and Political Weekly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>R.C.L</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931.</td>
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<td>T.M.G.I</td>
<td>Transactions of the Mining and Geological Institute of India.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The coal mines in Bihar were situated in formerly jungle areas largely inhabited by aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes. These tribals or *adivasis* practised a crude and rudimentary type of shifting agriculture. The soil of the region was not very fertile so they had to depend upon the gathering of jungle products. It were these tribals, semi-tribals, along with low castes Hindus of adjoining areas that provided the earliest labour forces for the coal mines in Bihar. They continued to dominate the workforce throughout the colonial period. This study tries to trace the early history of the coal mines in Bihar, study various stages of emergence and growth of workforces and stimulating factors impacting various stages of development of the coal mine industry of the area.

The first attempt to study the problem of labour was made by Margaret Read when she published her classic *The Indian Peasant Uprooted: A Study of the Human Machine*, 1931. This book was based on the Royal Commission on Labour, 1931. The author had opined that the modern social-economic world industrial commissions and surveys were like a seismograph and their findings recorded the changes that were taking place. It was a very comprehensive study of the transformation of peasants to industrial labour force, the invisible forces drawn to the industrial sector, the effect of upheaval due to modern industry on the individuals who had swapped the village for the slums and the plough for the pick. The working condition in mines, the effect
on women and children, wages and spending of the working class were of paramount interest for her.

This was followed by B.R. Seth, *Labour in Indian Coal Industry*, 1940. It was another significant work on coal mine labour in India. It proved very informative work on colliery labour, and provided a vivid description on labour and its problem of the time. It dealt with the recruitment of labour, source of supply of labour, the wages of the mine workers and explored the reasons for the low wage of the mine workers and other factors which contribute to the low earnings of the workers. He described the poor housing conditions of the workers, the extent of overcrowding and the affect on the health and moral condition of the labour the standard of living of the workers their expenditure pattern on various necessities of live, their drinking habits and its baneful effect on their material condition of their life and indebtedness. The wide arrays of tables and data provided by him help in the understanding the discussed text. But the distinguishing aspect of the book was noted for author’s personal investigation of the condition of the workers. To gain the confidence of the workers he stayed with them in their *dhowrah* and interacted with subordinate supervisory officials and *sardars* and labour leader to gauge their exact moral and material conditions. At best it also serves as one of the contemporary sources.

R.K. Mukherjee’s *The Indian Working Class*, 1951, was another classical work dealing with the formation of Indian working class. He dealt
with the agricultural background of the Indian working class, the factors that pushed them to the industrial centres of the country. He provided an excellent account of recruitment in various plantation and factories, the role of the Jobbers or Sardars in the recruitment of the workers and discussed the need to regulate them to overcome the glaring abuses related with the prevailing mode of recruitment. He had also dealt with the question of employment of women and children in factories and mines and deals with the economic consequences of exclusion of women from underground working in mines. He had discussed wages of the workers in various mines, factories and in plantation, their standard of living and housing conditions provided to the workers etc. But his advocacy for evolving a national minimum wages policy was appreciated.

Next important work was done by Dilip Simeon in his book *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism: workers, Union and the state in Chotanagpur 1928-39*, 1995. This has been an excellent work on the workers movements in the Chotanagpur region. This work dealt primarily with the workers movement in Tata Iron and Steel Company and the Jharia coalfield region. The keen contest between the workers, the management, the bureaucratic intervention to bail out the capitalist and the political intervention to garner the support of the workers in phases for the national movement have been appreciated as the salient features of the book. The author had used wide range of sources to highlight every aspect of movement and the clash of personality of ‘outsider’ and its effect on the movement.
Biswa Mohan Prasad, *Second World War and Indian Industry 1939-1945: A Case of Coal Industry in Bengal and Bihar*, 1992, tries to study the effect of the impetus provided to the coal industry by the Second World War. The increased demand for coal to feed the war industry and efforts to increase the output, without any consideration for safety or preservation and the condition of the workers and their set of problems during the period, and their trade union movement against the exploitative system have been dealt by him.

The above glossed works, unique and significant as they are however do not deal with the issues of labour in coal mines in the manner in which they could be termed as exclusive on the theme. They are either touching upon certain aspects of labour in coal mines as a part of a larger narrative or deal with the theme for certain limited number of years. In our present thesis, an attempt has been made to deal exclusively with the problems related to labour in the coal mines till the overthrow of the colonial regime. However our attempts is confined to the coal mines located in the province of Bihar and its adjoining areas.

In attempting such a study our pursuit has particularly benefitted from the fresh as well as re-examination of the following major sources, some of these have been possible for the first time.

Mark Fryar’s, *Report on the Coal Mining in the Raneegunge*(Raniganj), 1868 dealt with the prevalent mode of extraction of coal( the pillar and stall method), the primitive methods of raising coals(gins), and the use of steam
engines for pumping and winding and the manual loading of coal in the coal mines. It deals with the early history of mining methods prevalent during the period. For safe working and to avoid future complications, he recommended keeping proper plans of the mine, the use of machinery, and also a system of proper ventilation of mines and also recommended appointment of supervisors to check and correct dangerous error and recklessness in the operation of mining.

*Labour Enquiry Commission, 1896* and *Foley and Fremantle Report on Labour in Bengal and United Provinces, 1906*: both deal with the problem of shortage in labour supply in coal mining industry which was aggravated by exponential growth in number of mines in Jharia during the period under consideration. Both pointed out that caste of labour played significant role in their employment. They indicated the district from which the future work force could be drawn. Besides the castes composition, population density, agricultural production and propensity of the population to migrate were also taken into account. They also recommended for the formation of central recruitment agency for streamlining constant supply of labour to the mining industry.

*Trehane Rees Report* of 1919. It had noticed the deficiency of the coal mines and recommended measures to install the coal mining industry on sound scientific methods for the better economy of extraction of coal. It examined methods of extraction of coal which were causing huge loss of coal, issue of
inadequacy of generation and use of power in coal mining industry and the extravagant method of coke making. The principal recommendations were the appointment of an inspecting and controlling authority for the supervision of the term of lease, more efficient method of coal extraction, hydraulic stowage and more general use of electricity for the mining industry.

The next important source was the Coal Committee Report of 1920, submitted by B. Foley. It studied the recommendations of Rees Report. It was constituted to recommend measures to be adopted to expedite the possible implementation of the feasible recommendations and to suggest legislative remedial measure.

The other major source consulted was the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931, the first comprehensive study of the condition of labour in India. The volumes IV (A) and IV (B) dealing exclusively with the coal mining industry were of special interest for us. This was the first comprehensive study on all aspects of labour in the mining industry of the country. The volume IV (A) contained written evidences received by the Commission from every possible interest group related to the mining industry. The volume IV (B) dealt with the oral evidence gathered by the Commission from every factor of the mining industry. Apart from the top echelons of the industry the interviews with the trade union leaders and the labourers proved extremely rewarding. It helped in understanding the web of exploitation of the miners by various section of the managements. It also enlighten us on the issue
of housing condition, extent of overcrowding and other welfare activity carried by some individual colliery for their workers.

The *Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission, 1940* is another repository of information for our work. It was a very exhaustive enquiry into socio-economic base of the coal labour, their cause for the migration, their mode of recruitment, the character of labour force, wages, various modes of exploitations and victimization, the trade union movement in Industrial sector, leaderships etc. It suggested ways of creating a content labour force completely dependent on the industrial enterprise for their livelihood. It also handled issues dealing with the routine topics like, hours of work, housing conditions, standard of living etc.

*Report of the Indian Coalfield Committee* of 1945 (better known as *Mahindra Committee Report* of 1945): It is an elaborate report on the coalmine workers. It dealt with issues relating to mechanization of mines electrification, use of coal cutting machinery in coal mines, use of safety lamps loading and screening of coals. It utility lies also in the fact that it also provides summaries of previous recommendation of preceding committees and action taken on them.

*The Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mine* were also consulted to seek information regarding the number of mines under operation during the year, the figures of productions of different collieries, prevailing wage rates, total number of workers in coal industry in different fields, number of workers
working underground and over ground, gender breakup of the labour force, details of accidents in mines and general health condition of mining areas.

Transactions of the Mining and Geological Institute of India and Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India were also gleaned during the period as these contained some very important information provided by writers who are themselves involved in the industry holding some important post so we get contemporary information regarding the state of the industry, the labour problems, about the conflicts of interests between various machinery of the governments and the problems arising thereof.
CHAPTER - 1

EARLY STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF COAL MINES IN INDIA

The development of coal mining industry in India is a very important aspect of the industrial expansion of the country. It was prime energy fuel that propelled the rapid expansion of the railways and other industrial concerns in India. The earliest recorded reference to coal mine in India can be traced to an application of 11.8.1774, which Messrs S.G. Heatly and J.Summer of the Bengal civil services sent with 'proposals for working coal mines and selling coal in Bengal' to the Council of Revenue at Calcutta. An application made to Government for the right of working mine of coal in 'Panchete and Bheerbhoom'. S.G.Heatly was at the time collector of Chotanagpur (modern Chhotanagpur) and Palamow (modern Palamau) and he was in all probability, the first discoverer of the existence of coal in Bengal. Redferne subsequently joined the firm, which applied for an exclusive right for eighteen years, to work and sell coal in Bengal and its dependencies.¹The limits of the area, within which they applied for and obtained permission to mine were the Adjai (modern Ajoy) and Damuda (modern Damodar) rivers on the north and south, a semi circular line drawn from the village Aitura with a radius of 10 miles to

the west (this carried their boundaries for some distance beyond Barakar) borders on Burdwan district in the east. They agreed to pay one fifth of the produce to government, and to supply for five year 10,000 maund per annum at a price of 2 rupees 12 annas per maund probably the value of English coal at the times\(^2\). The mines first worked by Messrs Sumner, Heatly and Redferne and subsequently by S.G. Heatly alone are said to have been six in numbers three of which were at Aitura, Chinakuri and Damulia. It is stated that S.G. Heatly procured English miners and made preparation for working the coal upon a large scale.\(^3\) At least several thousand maunds of coal were raised of which some 2,500 maunds were delivered to government in 1775. Only after few reminders the government could obtain the supply to be sent to the Military Board on 24\(^{th}\) December 1777 to check the efficiency of the coal. According to the report of the Military Board dated 20\(^{th}\) January, 1778 it was found comparatively inferior to British coal.\(^4\) Apparently the coal supplied to the Military Board was undoubtedly worked from surface mines.\(^5\) So it seems due to comparatively higher price of coal extracted in India the first mine was

\(^2\) Ibid., p.155
\(^3\) Ibid.
closed. After the fiasco of Summer and Heatly project, a setback was felt in exploration of chances of commercial use of Indian coal by the Company.

In 1808, the Court of Directors in consequence of the expenses incurred in procuring and importing coal from England and difficulties they experienced in procuring coal in sufficient quantities from England, made some enquiries concerning coal on the Damuda (mod. Damodar). It was with the efforts of Warren Hasting in 1814 that Rupert Jones was sent by the Government to survey the coalfields and submit his report and recommendations to the government. He could trace the evidence of coal, in a place called Jurwah (Jirwaghār). Rupert Jones got a shaft sunk at Jirwaghār at a depth of 9 feet in coal. He stopped at that depth but reported that the quality of coal improved with the depth of mining and found that it fared well in comparison to British coal. During the course of survey he also rediscovered Heatly’s working site. Rupert Jones also found coal seams at Raniganj. He opened a coalmine at Egara village near Raniganj and invested a sum of 40,000 rupees borrowed from the public treasury at a low rate of interest to enable him to accomplish his enterprise. He got the coal extracted from pit and not quarries, and

6 D.H.Buchanan, p.255.
7 L. J. Barraclough, p.156.
9 The place where he found the coal, in the 7th section of the Rennel chart beyond Ruggoonathpoor
10 Ibid., p.156.
12 William Blamford, p. 156.
probably was the first to introduced Indian coal into the general market. But either he did not succeed in extracting it profitably, or as has more probable he failed in other speculation for he was unable to repay the government loan; and an agency house, Messrs Alexander and Company who had been security for Jones were obliged to do so. They became the owner of the colliery (in) about 1820. This was the first regularly constituted mining company with European capital in Bengal.

The study of development of the coal mine in India can be broadly divided into three major landmarks as follows:

1. The development of coal mines in Pre-Railway Period.

2. Post railway phase preceding opening of the Jharia mines.

3. Post Jharia mine’s opening and the ‘coal rush’

In the first phase the development was very slow halting, and episodic. After the initial enterprise the industry started growing at snail’s pace.

In 1823-1824, Chinakuri Colliery was opened by Bates, which had formerly been S.G. Heatly’s working site. In 1824 Messrs Jessop and Company opened mines at Damulia, but lost it in a law suit against its


14 William Blamford, p.157.

operation and subsequently opened Narrainkuri mines and worked them until
1839 when the mines were transferred to Messrs Gilmore Homfray and
Company.\(^{16}\) The quarries at Chanch and Nuchibad were also commenced about
1830 by Gilmore Homfray of Jessop and Company. In 1843 Messrs Gilmore
Homfray and Company and Carr, Tagore and Company amalgamated to form
the Bengal Coal Company.\(^{17}\)

On the wake of failure of many large agency houses in 1835 Raniganj
mine was purchased by Dwarkanath Tagore, and subsequently worked by the
firm Carr, Tagore and Company. It proved a disastrous venture. The whole
estate, including several valuable *patni* and other tenures, together with
buildings and works, steam engines, nearly 250,000 maunds of coal (above
9000 tons) at market, and even a larger quantity at the mine, together with all
advances made to the boatmen was sold for 70,000 rupees: less than the value
of the coal at market alone.\(^{18}\)

Daltonganj field was worked by the Bengal Coal Company up to 1857,
when the work was attacked by the protesting people and destroyed. Since then
coal has been mined or rather quarried on limited scale.\(^{19}\)

It was constant endeavour of Messrs Alexander and Company, and
their successors, to obtain the monopoly of the valuable coal districts around

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16 William Blamford, p.158. see also B.P.Guha, *Wage Rates in the Indian coal Mining
17 William Blamford, p.158; B.P.Guha, p.11.
18 H.D.G.Humphrey, p.152.
19 V. Ball, 'On the Aurunga and Hutar Coalfields and the Iron Ores of Palamow and
them, and to prevent others from operating there. For every mine it was necessary to have, not merely a lease or pattah of the land on which the coal was to be extracted, but also of a ghat or shipping place from which the coal could be sent through the river to Calcutta, the construction of road to connect the ghat with mine passing through land of other person, all were very contentious issues. On all these points, there were many litigations. When endless lawsuits were the price at which alone it was possible for anyone to commence mines in Raniganj district, it was not surprising that the greater number of speculators were discouraged, and the one with longest purse would in the end, have all the advantage.  

During the first phase (till coming of Railway) under consideration only mode of transit of coal was by boat on the river Damuda (mod. Damodar), which could only be carried out during the rainy season which meant it can be navigable for four months only. This by implication meant those mines that were away from the river had to depend upon the bullock carts to reach the river for further transportation by boat. In addition, other problems during the rains was created by the unmetalled muddy roads, bridgeless nullas full of water, and the carting was held up for days. Transportation of coal by carts had the additional disadvantage in the form of villagers carrying away coal which while the carts passed through them. The carters levied a small charge for

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20 S.Heslop, ‘Presidential Address’, Transactions of the Mining and Geological Institute of India. (henceforth referred as T.M.G.I), 1910, Vol., V.,p.18
21 Ibid.,p.18
every maund of coal taken. The consequence of this pilfering was
discrepancies between output and despatches for which the Colliery Manager
was held responsible. So large was the problem of transportation that
Dwarkanath’s firm, Carr, Tagore & Co., is reported in 1844 to have offered to
raise one-third of the capital required for laying a railway line from northwest
Calcutta to the coalfields above Burdwan. After Dwarkanath’s premature death
a few years later, the other Indian businessmen adopted a pessimistic approach.
They at best became followers of British merchants and railway promoters.
The conception, promotion, and launching of India’s railways were all
British. Talking about the coalmines, H. McLeod, Chairman of the Indian
Mining Association, had observed: ‘From the old records of my own
Company, I find that 45,000 tons, or expressed in maunds, 12½ lakhs, were
raised during the year ending September 1848. The whole of this quantity was
transported in boats, a fleet of over 1,500 being required for the purpose.’

By mid 19th century, systematic survey of the mineral resource of India
remained undone. Several appointments were made in India for geological and
mineralogical investigations. There were several enterprising civil, medical and
military officers in the East India Company who took interest in similar works
in their spare times for promoting the economic development of the tracts for
which they were responsible. These were individual efforts. McClelland, one
of members of the Coal Committee, 1835, who raised the question of employing trained geologists in India to investigate the coal formations of the country. D. H. Williams was the possibly first qualified geologist appointed as Geological Surveyor on 5th February 1846 for five years. He surveyed the Raniganj field, followed by the Kymore range of hills to the west of the Son river and lastly the Karanpura coal field. But he died on 15th November 1848. Thomas Oldham, a very experienced man was appointed as Geological Surveyor of the East India Company in November 1850, for five years and his appointment was renewed periodically until he retired in 1876. It was during this time that Geological Department assumed a distinct entity, with a permanent headquarter at Calcutta with its own publication of its finding in, *Memoires of Geological Survey of India*, and *Annual Report of the Geological Survey of India*, and establishment of the Museum of Geology during 1858-59. He used to describe himself as Superintendent of Geological Survey of India. The first geological map on the scale of 1 inch to a mile was published in 1863 along with the *Memoirs of the Raniganj Coalfield*. The first mineral statistical return published in 1869, was entirely related to the Raniganj Coalfield.

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27 He was a local Director of the Geological Survey for Ireland in 1846, was also occupying the Chair of Geology in Dublin in 1845, and was President of the Geological Society, Dublin in 1848 and was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, c.f, K.S. Murthy, p.172.

28 Ibid.
The study of India's coal supplies for running steamers for inland navigation was discussed in 1835 and a Coal Committee dealing with the question presented a report or a set of reports enumerating 'all the sites of coal at present known to exist on the continent of India'. The list included not only the Bengal fields—Raniganj (Damoda), Rajmahal and Palamow—but also those of the Nerbudda (Narbadha) valley, Chanda and Wardha, the Mahanadi valley, Assam, Sylhet and Burma. By the time the final report of the coal committee was issued in 1845 there was an impressive increase in the quantity of coal mined in Bengal. According to Homfray, coal brought from Raniganj into Calcutta was around 10,00,000 in 1839 and it touched a figure of 25,00,000 maunds by 1846. The Coal Committee entrusted 17,00,000 maunds as the probable consumption and 12,00,000 maunds as the average for the previous years. However Homfray calculated it to be around 20,50,000 and 16,30,000 maunds for the respective years.

The second phase starts with the entry of the railways into the Raniganj coalfield. The line to Raniganj was opened early in 1855 and this was held to be the termination of the first or experimental line. During the eleven months of 1855 contract were entered upon to carry over 100,000tons of coal from Raniganj to Calcutta. In the 2nd half of 1855 the revenue from coal was

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29 H.D.G.Humphrey, 189
30 Ibid.
31 William Blanford, Mineral Statistics, 180
32 Ibid
33 G. Huddleston, *History of the east Indian Railway*, Calcutta, 1906, p.15
The weight of goods carried was £7,856. The weight of goods carried was 299,424 ton in 1859 against 190,566 tons in 1858, and the increase in mineral traffic was so great that it was decided to extend a branch to the collieries from Raniganj to Barrakar. The extension of the branch line from Raniganj to Barrakar coalfield in 1865 relieved many collieries of their transport difficulties and gave fresh impetus to the industry. This phase also saw the formation of large coal companies. The floatation of the Equitable Coal Company disturbed the noncompetitive position of the Bengal coal company. The Equitable Coal Company was registered in the year 1863, and there were five collieries in full working order, particulars of which are as follows: In the Raneegunge field there was the Dishergarh Colliery, 2,000 biggahs in extent; Jamuria, with an area of 5,588 biggahs; Bejdih, 1,983 biggahs; Chowrassie, 3,533 biggahs; and Hurriladih, in the Jherria field, consisting of 950 biggahs. The capital of the company consisted of Rs. 400,000, in 6 per cent, cumulative preference shares divided into 4,000 shares at Rs. 100. together with Rs. 20,00,000 in ordinary shares, divided into 200,000 shares each of Rs. 10.

The Raneegunge Coal Association Ltd., was founded in 1873 by taking over from Messrs. E. D. Kilburn and others' the lands known as Lot Jamgram and Bansra in the district of Burdwan; but other properties were acquired from time to time with the result that the Association was by 1916 in possession

34 Ibid p.17
35 Ibid p. 27
thirty-four separate villages, having a total measurement of 39,586 bighas. Nearly 37,000 bighas have been leased for periods ranging from 99 to 999 years, at an annual rent of about Rs. 44.368.\(^\text{37}\) The principal colliery, Kustore, was situated in the Jharia field, and covered area of 2,428 bighas. It was divided into three parts known as Kustore North, Kustore South, and Alkusa District including Gundudihand part of Keska, and each was managed by a European holding a first-class certificate of competency, while the colliery as a whole was supervised by a General Manager.\(^\text{38}\)

The Bengal Coal Company, usually referred as “the premier coal company of India”, was formed in 1843. The Company had acquired over about 80,000 acres of land, but the area in which coal deposits were located lied scattered over 50,000 acres in Raniganj, Giridih, Jharia, and Palamu.\(^\text{39}\) Further the main collieries were located at Seetalpore, Sanctoria, Sodepore, Banksimulia, Damudarpore, Koilhi, Bhatdee, Murulidih, Chanch, Dumarkunda, Dhobidih, and Raniganj\(^\text{40}\).

The first systematic geological examination of the Giridih Coalfield was done in 1848 by Dr. J. MacClelland soon after assumption of the office of the


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p.230.

\(^{40}\) Ibid
Geological Survey of India. The vacancy was created by the death of D. H. Williams. In 1852, Dr. T. Oldham visited the field and afterwards arranged for the completion of the geological map by Dr. W. L. Wilson; but on account of the unsatisfactory nature of the topographical maps, the geological work had to be abandoned until the ground was re-surveyed. After the completion of this map, Dr. T. W. H. Hughes was deputed in 1868 to revise the previous observations, and to express the new results in the form of a general geological map of the field.

The Giridih coalfield was acquired by the East Indian Railway Company in the early years due to the intelligence and foresight of Mr. Macdonal Stephenson. Initially, there was a dispute between the government and the Company on the question of the use of coalfield. The government was against the utilisation of guaranteed capital in excavating the coalmine. The East Indian Railway Company on the other hand argued in favour of such an investment to ensure uninterrupted supply of coal for its moving stock. The East Indian Railway Company, on the contrary, launched ‘the Auxiliary Railway Company’ to lay line to develop the Giridih property. Eventually it was Sir Charles Wood who could see the reason and permitted construction of

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the chord line to access those mines.\textsuperscript{45} Consequently the East Indian Railway Company could reach the Giridih field in 1871.\textsuperscript{46} The coal worked out by the East Indian Railway Company collieries not only ensured a steady supply of coal against the vagaries of market production but also helped the Company to make a substantial saving in fuel component of the working expenses as can be seen in the table given below. However it had a detrimental impact on the health of the mining industry of the country. Being the largest consumer of the coal industry and also producer of the same helped it to keep the price at the bottom line.\textsuperscript{47}

**Table-1.1: Consumption of coal by different coal companies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coal used by different railway companies (in tons)</th>
<th>Half year ended 30\textsuperscript{th} June 1885 (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Indian Railway</td>
<td>100,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Indian Peninsular Railway Company</td>
<td>108,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay - Baroda</td>
<td>24,987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table-1.2: Cost of coal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East Indian Railway</th>
<th>Rs 479,422</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Indian Peninsular</td>
<td>Rs 1,678,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay - Baroda</td>
<td>Rs 493,112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: G. Huddleston, *History of the east Indian Railway*, Calcutta, 1906, p. 96.)

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p92.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p.96.
Giridih coal worth rupees 3 a ton in wagon at the collieries cost rupees 30 a ton by the time it reached Lahore, while at Calcutta the freight charge from Sitarampur was no less than rupees 3-13 a ton.48

In 1870s and 1880s it became a normal feature to appoint a managing agent for the companies to handle day to day activities of the company. The managing agent need not hold shares in the company; he played the role of a hired manager. The remuneration of the managing agent in the early period was a in the form of commission on the sale of the Company, irrespective of the Company’s profit.49 During this phase not only the numbers of mines increased but also the demand started. In 1873 some Bengal coal was taken to Madras for the use of Madras Railway and some was conveyed to Singapore for the manufacture of gas and some to Bombay for cotton spinning works. The quantity exported was small, but this was the first recorded trade in export of coal.50

The problems of the collieries were aggravated by the slow expansion of railways in comparison to the expansion of the coalfields. Only those collieries that were on the line of railway were served with sidings, and such sidings had to be paid for in full by the colliery using it. Collieries distant from the railway had to rely on the bullock-cart for their carriage. Every ton of machinery had to

48 Ibid. p.116.
be conveyed across country. The expensive labour was required to transport heavy boilers, large flywheels and other parts of colliery machinery, to distant road deficient parts of coalfields. One Apcar and Company, had to purchase and to engage an elephant to carry machinery from colliery to colliery, and this method proved satisfactory. The railway magnates of the time held court at Jamalpur, and they looked upon every colliery and every colliery owner as a nuisance. It is attributed to a certain Railway Official that he had remarked, "it would be a very good thing for the E.I.R. if the collieries did not exist, as they were always wanting something." The railway officials were not known for any taking any keen interest in the extension of railways to the mines which were one of the reasons for slow pace of development. It was left to private 6" narrow gaugeline of over 5 miles that Messrs. Apcar and Company constructed in conjunction with Messrs. Shib Kisto Daw and Company, in 1876, which had enabled them to make their Charanpur collieries a commercial success. Messrs. Apcar and Company was the first to lay down at their own expense a broad gauge line from Sitarampur to their Lachipur Colliery in 1881. The success of this undertaking was assured from its beginning as the neighbouring collieries belonging to the Bengal Equitable, and native owners were too glad to avail themselves of this line for the despatch of their output to

51 Frank J. Agabeg, Presidential address, T.M.G.I, 1914, Vol. IX, p.18
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. p.18
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p.19
Sitarampur by paying a comparatively small royalty.\textsuperscript{56} In some cases the saving was estimated to be as much as 12 annas to Rs. 1 per ton, and an average of 20,000 tons a month was transported by this branch of only two miles in length.\textsuperscript{57} By 1860 fifty collieries were at work in Raniganj field and by 1868 they contributed over 99\% of the half million tons produced in the area.\textsuperscript{58} In 1872 six companies, namely—The Bengal, Raniganj Coal Association, Equitable, Barakar, Beerbhoom and Messrs. Apcar and Company operated in the area along with approximately 44 small and native-owned concerns. More than half of the latter category produced less than 10,000 tons per annum.\textsuperscript{59}

The third phase started with the opening of the Jharia field. The Jharia field was discovered even earlier than Raniganj by Rupert Jones but the inaccessibility of it made working impossible without improvement of the means of transport. The Collector of Birbhoom (Birbhum) had admitted that coal had been discovered at Jharia but the bed were superficial\textsuperscript{60} and never been worked. He had also observed that the cost of transport to Calcutta by 'new land route' would have amounted to 85 rupees per 100 maund or alternatively if sent down by boat during the rain, the cost would have been

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} H.D.G.Humphrey, p.152.
\textsuperscript{58} D. H. Buchanan, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{59} T.M.G.I, Vol. V, p.18
\textsuperscript{60} H.D.G.Humphrey, p.152
Rs.12 per 100 maund.\textsuperscript{61} This meant that there was enormous difference of Rs. Per 100 maund of coal.

In 1856 Messrs Brodaile & Company applied for lease of Jharia mine but denied by Court of Wards. The first geological survey of Jharia was done by T.W.H. Hughes in 1866\textsuperscript{62} and further attention was drawn to the field in 1887 by Dr. V. Ball\textsuperscript{63} of the G.S.I. The field was next examined by T.H. Ward, Mining Engineer, on behalf of the East Indian Railway.\textsuperscript{64}

The Jharia Coalfield contributed to the extension of railway across Barakar River. A proposal was made by the East India Railway Company to extend the Barakar Branch across the Barakar River in 1886,\textsuperscript{65} and despite the support of Directors of the Board, the Government, refused to sanction it till 1889\textsuperscript{66}. Notwithstanding this decision, the then Chairman of the Board, Sir Richard Strachey, had deputed T. H. Ward, the Colliery Superintendent to examine and report on the prospects of the Jharia coal-field, who submitted the report in August 1894.\textsuperscript{67} In 1892 the government of India had sanctioned the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} V. Ball, 'On the Aurunga and Hutar coalfields and the iron ores of Palamow and Toree', \textit{Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India}, vol. XV, 1878.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Huddlestone, p.145.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} \textit{T.M.G.I.}, Vol. XVI, pp.75-76
\end{itemize}
work and it was at once started and by 20th May 1894 railway linked Ghootrya some seven miles beyond Barakar, carrying 100 tons coal and 50 passengers. 

The firms which helped in the development of the Jharia coalfield were an outgrowth of the Agency Houses. These Agency houses collapsed in the 1830s, and their successors, the Managing Agencies, began controlling joint-stock associations by proxy, a practice initiated by Dwarkanath Tagore. The typical form of remuneration of the managing agent in the early period was a commission on the sale of the company, irrespective of the company’s profit. But in this phase the newly established coal mining companies, usually paid the managing agent a fixed percentage of their profit, where the commission was paid on the basis of ‘net profits’ the interests were not identical. The net profits were calculated before depreciation on investment and funds put on reserve.

The chances for the success of any newly established company in Bengal in 1890s were judged by the composition of the companies under the control of the same managing agent. A certain degree of vertical integration guaranteed a good demand for coal, a certain degree of horizontal concentration guaranteed the necessary know-how and distribution facilities in the industry, a high number of companies under their control a substantial financial backing. The entry of managing agencies also started the period of

68 G. Huddleston, p. 147
69 Dilip Simeon, p. 46
70 Henner Papendieck, p. 190
distorted growth for the rapidly expanding Jharia coalfield with the corresponding expansion in the coal trade. Much closer to finance and markets, the agents were able to supplement the work of men in actual charge of operation....\textsuperscript{71} Focusing on immediate rather than future gain, they transferred profits from one company to another, and manipulated the price of fuel supplied to their non-mining concerns.\textsuperscript{72} From 1890 to 1920 the number of coal companies witnessed a phenomenal growth in Bengal and Bihar; it increased from six to 227; and between 1890 1918 coal production increased tenfold, capital invested in coal twelvefold, and the size of the workforce fivefold. In 1911, seven Managing Agents controlled 55 per cent of the jute, 61 per cent of the tea and 46 per cent of the coal companies\textsuperscript{73}

The Agents' remuneration consisted of commissions on proceeds, raisings or dividends. The calculation of net profits before making deductions for depreciation and reserves rendered this form of management detrimental to the collieries.\textsuperscript{74} Commissions paid were apart from salaries and share dividends, and agents could make poundage even when the firm was facing loss. In certain areas more machinery was installed than was required, owing to

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\textsuperscript{71} D.S. Buchanan, \textit{The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India}, New York, 1934, pp.167-68.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Report of Indian Coalfields Committee, 1946}, p.28.

\textsuperscript{73} Dilip Simeon, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{74} C.f, Dilip Simeon, p.46. There were marked and arbitrary differences between prices for independent and associated buyers (CMC: 27; Papendieck 1978: 204-12.)
'the fact that although the coal was near the surface, the advisors had an interest in the sale of mining equipment.'

In November 1894, the General Traffic Manager of the East Indian Railway announced that the coal traffic from the Jharia field had increased from 500 tons a month in the early period of the year to 1,000 tons a month in the later half of the year. The coal trade from Jharia field witnessed regular growth. It was 1,000 tons a month at the end of 1894, and by 1912 it was over 14,000 tons a day. The East Indian Railway could touch the fringe of the fields in 1894 only and by 1912 the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, the East Indian Railway and the collieries themselves had amongst them a network of several hundred miles in length.

Glancing at the returns of the two railways serving the Jharia and Raniganj coal-fields, it was found that in the seven years between 1895 to 1902 the internal consumption had increased from 31/2 to 51/2 million tons, or by 2 million tons. It was in 1911 that the Board of the East Indian Railway had introduced the new carrying rates.

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75 D.S. Buchanan, p.221.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Huddleston, p.190.
Table-1.3: Coal traffic from Jharia branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>38,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>1,310,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>2,827,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1891 the freight earnings of the East Indian Railway from coal were little more than 63 lakhs of rupees and within five years 1896 they had risen to over 97 lakhs and by 1901 it rose to over 180 lakhs of rupees.  

Between 1890 to 1920 the number of public limited companies engaged in coal mining in Bengal grew from 6 to 227, their nominal capital increased from 5 to 87 million rupees. The average capital per company sank from 9 lakhs of rupees to 3.5 lakhs. With the exception of two companies all were registered in Calcutta.

Andrew Yule and Company was one of the largest managing agency houses in Bengal. It managed about 120 industrial companies in Bengal. It handled the affairs of jute industry (about 10% in Bengal in 1907), inland steam shipping, cotton industry and tea garden etc. Its bank was Bank of Calcutta, latter the Mercantile Bank of India Ltd. It successfully launched Katras-Jherria Coal Company. It established the Seebpore Company in 1900

81 G. Huddleston, p.154.
82 Henner Papendieck, p.184.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., p.193
86 Ibid
by selling a part of its property to new share holder. Similarly a second dependent coal company was launched in 1908 known as the Minto Coal Company. In 1893 the Adjai Coal Company was launched. It took over the management of The Bengal Nagpur Coal Company in 1896. But its single significant gain was the takeover of the management of the Bengal Coal Company, during the boom year of 1908. This group excavated the largest quality and at same time owned the largest reserve of lands. So by the end of 1908 Andrew Yule & Co's coal department controlled around 13% of the total production of Bihar and Orissa: 1.4 million tons of a total of 11.6 million tons raised. The group capital reached 6.5 million rupees or 10% of the capital invested in coal mining in India by that time. 

M. V. Apcar & Company founded by Mr. Minas Vertannes Apcar commenced business on his own account, holding jute agencies, then becoming successively a Zamindar and a colliery owner. They were the proprietors of the M. V. A. coal concern at Joyrampore, in the famous Jhariah field ; and they were also agents for the Seang line of steamers plying between Chinese and Indian ports.

The Lodna Colliery Company, Ltd., formed in 1896, were owners of mines in Mouza Lodna, Puttiadih,Mankanali Chuck, and Madhuba, all of which are situated in the famous Jharia coal-fields in the district of Manbhum, (Mod. Jharkhand) and they subsequently acquired the Chasnala property, about five

87 Ibid, p.194.
88 J. A. Sandbrook, ‘Commerce and Industries’, p. 221
miles distant from Lodna. In 1913 an extensive coal-bearing tract of land was purchased at Sripur in the well-known Raniganj area. Later they obtained from the Jharria Coal Company the property known as Bhaga, adjacent to Lodna colliery.89

W. C. Banerjee started as a coal broker and merchant, before shifting to financing other concerns and by 1907 shifted to promotion of few limited companies and then started purchasing collieries. The following particulars relate to half a dozen collieries owned by Messrs. Banerjee and Company. The Poniati Coal Concern and the Poniati Coal Company in Raniganj field, Joogidih Coal Concern in Jharia, Sinidih Colliery near Katrasgarh Station, on the East Indian Railway route and South Baraboni Coal Concern, New Baraboni Coal Concern on the East Indian Railway.90

Another important managing agent was Messrs. Bird and Company. From the various collieries controlled by Messrs. Bird and Company by 1911 the annual output of coal was 1,500,000 tons. These collieries were electrically equipped and installed with modern machinery for the preparation and screening of coal, and were situated at Loyabad, Mudidih, Teetunmuri, Budroochuck, Katras, Choytoodih, and Jumoni, in the Jerriah field; and Saltore, Lutchipore, Hatgoori, Bhaskajuri, Charanpur, Burelia, Bankola, Kantapahari, Jamgram, and Joba, in the Raniganj fields.91

89 Ibid., p. 221.
90 Ibid., pp.229-230.
91 Ibid., p.226.
Messrs. F. W. Heilgers & Company, of the Chartered Bank Buildings, Calcutta, was managing agent for the following colliery and coal companies, namely: the Borrea Coal Company, Ltd., the Bhulanbararee Coal Company, Ltd., the Govindpur Coal Company, Ltd., the Khas Jherriah Colliery Company, Ltd., the Sendra Coal Company, Ltd., and the Standard Coal Company, Ltd., with mines of first-class coal in the famous Jhariah fields in the district of Manbhum together with the Ondal Coal Company, Ltd., whose works were in the Ranecgunge coal area, in the district of Burdwan, of the Bengal Presidency. These companies had a total authorized capital of Rs. 40,25,000. By 1918 these companies started paying satisfactory dividends: the Khas Jhariah Company alone having declared 170,200, and 180 per cent, per annum for 1913, 1914, and 1915. Nearly 1,000,000 tons of coal were extracted annually from the various mines by 1918.92

The area of the Bokaro coalfield from the Koonar river to the eastern end of the field was described by Thomas H. Ward in 1908. No further steps were taken till 1913 when, the East Indian Railway and Bengal Nagpur Railway companies acquired this property known as the Joint Colliery. The area was around 3,750 bigahas (1/3 to 2/3 of an acre). Actual development work started in August 1914 only. It was a forest area and was being connected with Mohuda by railway. The railway eventually reached the colliery towards the end of 1914, and was opened for passenger traffic on the 1st April, 1915. In August 1915 coal raising commenced and the output from that date up to 1919

92 Ibid. p.230.
registered ascendancy in terms of output and by 1919 30,000 tons per month were mined.  

The price of coal reached such a height by 1908 that it encouraged numerous Companies to get involved in this sector. About 50 companies with an aggregated capital of 283 lakhs rupees had started mining by March 1908, or in other words, on an average of about one coal company in per week. It reached a record in February 1908 when some 14 companies were registered, or one every other day. The previous year had seen an average of about one nearly every fortnight, while prior to that, it had not reached an average of even one a year in the whole history of mining and joint stock companies. The demand had exceeded the supply. There was a kind of coal famine, and it was observed that anything that was black seemed to sell so long as it would burn.

Old abandoned places were re-opened and new mines were started, even with indifferent quality of coal. The price of properties and establishment of new companies soared in such a manner that this phase was characterised as of the ‘coal boom’ of Chhota Nagpur. There was a race for opening mines. The floating of a coal company became quite exceedingly popular enterprise. This sudden and enormous increase in the number of coal companies with the capital invested, however, received a heavy set back by 1909, when a sharp

95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., p.21.
decline was witnessed both in demand and price with a resulting slump in
shares, and speculators became as anxious to get rid of it as they had been to
take it up.\textsuperscript{97} Many of these new concerns had been floated by investing on
enormous amount of capital. This had created a situation, in the face of fall of
demand and price, where infrastructural cost diminished the rate of profit
which further prevented them from opting for deep mining. In fact, the never
care concerns found it difficult to compete with, well-established companies with
strong financial foundation, large properties, and good coal. Consequently a
number of mines were closed or hampered considerably. In many cases, most
part of the profits made in heydays were paid away in dividends. Therefore the
excellent opportunity of building up and strengthening the concerns against
monsoon rains was lost. The commercial journal \textit{Capital}, a few months ago,
gave a comparative statement of prices of some 22 companies of 1909-1910
and showed that nearly five crores of rupees were lost.\textsuperscript{98} The situation started
changing after 1919. The prices of coal rose and the industry witnessed
growth.\textsuperscript{99} The strike in Australia had enabled the industry to ship coal there and
get to the Straits Settlements and it was hoped only good coal would continue
to be exported in order to permanently retain the hold. The working up of an
export trade was undoubtedly of the greatest importance. It was realised that
inland consumption would increase considerably with the extension of

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p.20.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p.21.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
railways and the expansion of industries. But at the same time it was felt that the size of export of coal to foreign destinations should be stabilised.\textsuperscript{100}

The opening of Jharia coalfield and establishment of large numbers of coal mines by last decade of nineteenth century, the gradual expansion in the demand for coal combined with pressure from the philanthropist forced the government's intervention in the coalfield for the first time to regulate development of the industry by promulgation of Indian Mining Act of 1901. The Indian Mines Act came into force in 1901 and has been productive of much good in causing mines to be better managed generally by appointment of Chief Inspector of Mine for whole of British India, and appointment of Inspector of mines at provincial level to see the condition of mine, safety of the workers and ventilation in mines.\textsuperscript{101} All the mines were to have certificated managers causing mines to be better managed.\textsuperscript{102}

The Mining and Geological Institute of India was successfully launched on the 16th of January 1906 for providing service to the mining industry of the country. This was backed by scheme of organising academic lectures to enable mine officials to get the necessary technical knowledge to qualify for the certificate of competency as mine manager and to improve the mining

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. pp.22-23.
\textsuperscript{102} This act will be dealt in detail in subsequent chapters.
knowledge in general.\textsuperscript{103} As a consequence, 86 of the trained mine managers were produced by 1910.\textsuperscript{104}

So by the end of the third phase there was a mad rush to open a coal mine. The demand for coal increased with the opening of new markets and the extension of railways, increasing industrial demand and also due to the export of coal. Large number of coal mines were opened to reap the benefits in form of profit, large investment of capital without concerning itself with the future prospect, and closed when the profit declined. There was a saying; anything that was black seemed to sell so long as it would burn. But in spite of all the shortcomings the coal mining industry acquired a structure and basic infrastructure propelled the growth and unequal growth till the end of our period. So this chapter is an attempt to highlights the broad development pattern of coalmine in India and its auxiliary departments and the capital structure which will be used latter for the lopsided development of the industry. Subsequently the production pattern will be dealt with the labour section.

\textsuperscript{103} S. Heslop, Presidential address, \textit{T.M.G.I.} Vol. V, 1910, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
CHAPTER - 2

LABOUR SUPPLY IN THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY

The coal mining industry was a highly labour intensive industry during colonial period. All the processes like cutting, hauling and loading were mostly done manually. Since its inception in 1774 in ‘Pachete and Birbhum’ to its expansion in Raniganj coal mining area, the labour was supplied by the adjoining villages who were known as “Bauris”.¹ There are references to the fact that during the earlier stages of coal mining in India, few miners were brought from England but they died very soon due to fever and vacancies thus created were replaced by local labour working under European supervision.² The Bauris belonged to a low caste of mixed Hindu origin and, proved successful coal cutters. They were appreciated both for underground and surface work. Later certain other castes such as the Dhangars and Koras, who specialized in digging earth to uncover the coal seams and in raising coal from the quarries, but avoided to drive a gallery into a pit or to cut coal underground.³ They were acquired from the villages possessed by the collieries, either as zamindars (patnidars), or acquired on lease. But the expansion of the mining industry especially with the coming of the railways in

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Raniganj coalfield by 1855, the character of labour supply in the coal industry underwent a change. The next stream of coal cutter came from the Santhals, pure aboriginal tribe from Santhal Pargana who were lured by offer of free land for cultivation. They were joined by their women folk.\(^4\)

The Geological Survey of India, conducting the first scientific exploration of the Raniganj field noted in 1860 that: ‘the workmen are mostly agricultural peasants, some by being! Hindoos or Mussulman... but the majority of them belong to the quasi-aboriginal groups, Bhauris, Sonthals and others who form a large proportion of the inhabitants of the district’.\(^5\) They furnished the under-ground labourforce, the supply of whom was naturally one of the most important items connected with the working of any colliery.

The mining company started by Rupert Jones and latter taken over by Messr Alexander and Company was by 1831 producing 14000 to 15000 of coal annually. By 1839 the coal production in British India was 36000 tons and by 1846 it had reached the figure of 91000 tons.\(^6\) According to J. Homfray, the coal transported to Calcutta from Raniganj coalfield amounted to 5917000

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4 Ibid.
maund in 1839 and by 1846 this reached the figure of 25,00,000 tons.\(^7\) According to the mineral statistics of the mines in Raniganj Coalfield, the coal produced in 1858 was 5917000 maunds and it rose to 8559097 maunds by 1860. Similarly the mines in Rajmahal produced 21900 maunds in 1858 and by 1860 it touched the figure of 1222860 maunds. The production of mines in Kurhurbari rose from 4000 maunds to 275256 maunds between 1858 to 1860. In Palamau district it was 30900 maunds in 1860. The total number of collieries worked during (1858-1860) the period for which the returns were filled in Raniganj was 49; in Kurhurbari there were 2 coal companies while in Palamau only Bengal Coal Company was working.\(^8\) From 1815 to 1860, or a period of nearly half a century, the output of India had reached the annual total of about 370,000 tons.\(^9\)

The extension of the branch line from Raniganj to Barakar in 1865 also increased the mobility of the labourforce and more labourers started coming from far off places to work in the coal mine such as Santhals from Santhal Pargana. By 1872 there were six big coal companies in the Raniganj coal field: Bengal, Raniganj, Equitable, Burrakur, Beerbhoom and the Apcar coal Company along with about 44 small and native-owned companies out of which

\(^7\) J.Homfray, ‘A Description of the Coalfield of the Damuda Valley and the Adjacent Countries of Bheerbhoom and Poooroolleah as Applicable to Present Date,’ *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. XI, Cf. William Blanford, p.6

\(^8\) William Blanford, appendix, Mineral statistics, p.10.

more than half turned out less than 10,000 tons per annum. With the continuous expansion of railways from 300 miles in 1857 to 6000 miles in 1877 to 20,000 miles by 1897 the industry began to draw upon a wider population for its work force. The labour was drawn predominantly from semi-tribal and low-caste neighbouring peoples. No fewer than 50 different jatis were listed by the East Indian Railway Company as working in Giridih collieries in 1894 which included a number of Brahmins, Banias, Dhobis, Chamars and Muslims. The number of labourers employed by different mines became available with the publication of Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines. The question of different systems of labour recruitment prevalent in coal mines is worth consideration.

Every colliery had its own mechanism and system for recruitment. For purpose of studying the labour recruitment in coal mines, it could be broadly divided into three categories: [a] Zamindari system [b] Contractor System and [c] Sarkari System

[a] Zamindari system: This was the oldest prevalent system of recruitment in the mining industry. In this system, the coal company acquired the zamindari rights over the coal mining areas and thus acquired surface and mineral rights over the land of a fixed dimension. By acquiring the zamindari right,

References:
12 C.P.Simmons, pp. 458-459.
companies used to compel the labourers living in their zamindaris to work under them in their collieries. All of the major coal concerns maintained their own zamindari departments (which usually kept their accounts quite separate from the purely mining part of the enterprise), whose primary function was the supervision of provision of a regular supply of mining personnel. The 1914 *the Investors’ India Year Book* explained why the Bengal Coal Company’s lease of 83,000 acres included over 30,000 of non-coal bearing land. The Bengal miner was primarily an agriculturist and the large area of non-coal bearing land was acquired by the Company in order to secure their labourers and consequently reduce the problem of obtaining labour and it was a marked feature of the Bengal collieries. In 1926 the zamindari manager—always a European—had occasion to reprimand one of his circle officers for failing to ensure that certain pits (Dishergarh colliery Nos. 9 and 10 mines) had their necessary contingent labourers because: “You must bear in mind that the Zamindari exists primarily for the upkeep of the collieries, and so you must give every possible assistance to the colliery manager regarding labour supplies.” When the zamindari was surrendered to the Government of West Bengal in 1953 over half a million separate tenancy agreements (covering 400 square miles) had to be wound up.

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14 C. P. Simmons, p. 464.  
15 Ibid. p.465.  
16 Ibid.
The Bengal Coal Company had the lease of 27 villages only in Bankura district to obtain labour from them.\textsuperscript{17} Interestingly, the companies also bought the land around the collieries and distributed the land among miners for settling in the proximity of the collieries and for cultivation either free of charge or on nominal rents on the condition that if they failed to carry out work for fixed number of days in the mines they would be evicted from the land. The example of the East India Railway Collieries, where the workers were provided with cultivable land and used charges 9 annas a bigha and 230 days of work was compulsory and thus helped them to settle around the colliery.\textsuperscript{18} This method was resorted to especially in the case of recruitment of the Santhals who were settled-miners in the Raniganj coal-field.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to this, according to the Indian Colliery Employee's Association, Jharia, some of the colliery owners also had acquired zamindari rights to compel the labourers living in their zamindari to work under them in their private collieries.\textsuperscript{20} A few proprietors in Jharia such as the East Indian Coal Company and the Raneegunje Coal Association procured villages beyond the natural perimeter of the coalfield to circumvent the lack of space for settling labour but this was an exception rather than rule in Jharia.\textsuperscript{21} Though this system was introduced at Raniganj and even

\textsuperscript{17} Foley and Fremantle Report, Appendix, August 26, their visit to Bengal Coal Company, Egara colliery.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., Appendix, September 3rd, their visit to East Indian Railway Collieries.

\textsuperscript{19} B.R.Seth, p.24.

\textsuperscript{20} Royal Commission on Labour in India (henceforth R.C.L.), Vol. IV, part1, p.182.

\textsuperscript{21} C.P.Simons, p. 467.
practiced at Jharia to a lesser extent due to paucity of cultivable land but it was the Giridih coalfield, (Hazaribagh district) which could secure larger settled labour force. Here between 60 and 70 per cent of the labourers were Nokarani tenants.\textsuperscript{22} Most of the settled labourers held the company's lands, and got transformed into permanent residents. The \textit{Trehane Rees report, 1919}, advocated that miners should be provided with suitable plot of land for cultivation near their houses.\textsuperscript{23} This system was also known as 'Nokrani system'. The Royal Commission of Labour in India had pointed out that by their time the system was not widely used due to scarcity of free holds to help in settlement of coal miners around the colliery.

Another variant role of the \textit{zamindar} in the coalmine was that of a labour contractor. They proved important category of labour recruiters. The Royal Commission of Labour in India refers to this system. In 1917, Ram Chandracharia Goswami, a petty \textit{Zamindar} in Raniganj undertook to supply 200 miners from the five \textit{mouzas} under his control and in return, he received a \textit{salami} of Rs. 500 plus a commission of three rupees two annas for every hundred tubs of coal that his men produced.\textsuperscript{24} The practice though vague by 1930 was still in vogue e.g. in 1936 when A. Laik, a local \textit{zamindar} of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Trehane Rees, \textit{Report}, 1919, para 55.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol. IV Pt 2, p 470.
\end{itemize}
Dishergarh, agreed to supply 100 *Santhal malkatas* for Rs 1000 and a commission.\(^{25}\)

Thus the labourers could not be completely transformed into full fledged category of proletariat. They could not become or reproduce constant wage workers as wage worker.\(^{26}\)

[b] **Contractor System:** The coal industry was run by various types of contractors such as raising contractor, labour contractor, contractor for cutting coal from particular place from the underground mine, contract for loading coal from the face into the wagon. By one of the estimates given by Indian Mining Association to the Royal Commission, more than 70% of the coal raised in Jharia mine of the Association was done by the contractor system.\(^{27}\)

Raising contractor was one of the predominant forms of labour contractors in the coal mines. Explaining their function, P.B.Dandekar, one of the raising contractors in Jealgora Colliery, observed: ‘I recruit labour and I am responsible for cutting, raising and dispatching of coal. I receive payment from the company at so much per for raised and I pay the labour myself.’\(^{28}\) Thus the raising contractor performed complex work. They maintained whole


\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 171.
paraphernalia for its smooth functioning. They had labour recruiter, the munshi for the wage payment, their managers and sometimes even their supervising staff. At Dhemo Main colliery, Sohan Singh, Contractor's manager estimated the cost of recruiting to be around 4 to 6 annas per ton. And he explained the recruitment of Bilaspuri labour. The chaprasis who were assigned the job of collecting them, kept them for three or four days and bring all recruits by train, the fare and expenditure were borne by the Contractor's manager.29

The raising contractors exercised considerable power. This becomes evident from the statement of Dandekar in which he was reported to have stated that he was partner of a firm of contractors which had contracts in the Goplichack West Colliery and East Colliery.30

These raising contractors made up for the bulk of contract in coal mining industry and it also had other sub-contractors under them like the labour contractor, the gang leader and the loading contractor.

The labour contractor was a common link between raising contractors and Sarkari system. The recruiters visited villages generally his native place and the labour bought by him formed his gang. He had to pay bakshish, khoraki and travelling expenses and for this purpose the labour contractor frequently received advances either from the contractor or from the company. He obtained remuneration for his services in the form of salary and

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
commission for the work done by his recruiters like in Loyabad Colliery, Bhowra Colliery.\textsuperscript{31}

But the cost of recruitment provided by the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa for two large collieries situated in Jharia and Mohuda varied from 7.82 \textit{paisas} per ton in 1927 to 10 \textit{paisas} at the second half of 1928. But it may be qualified that the recruiting cost varied from place to place and mine to mine.\textsuperscript{32}

In the list of petty contractors there was also Miners' \textit{Sardar}. He was generally the headman of the village, or man of influence in his own village, or was appointed by his gang.\textsuperscript{33} The gang usually consisted of 10 to 50 men. The \textit{Sardar} was the one who took instructions from his immediate superior about the place of work and other working instructions for the day. He took the oil from the stores and was also the paymaster of the gang from which he deducted his commission or paid at the rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 anna per tab of coal raised by his gang and the gang gets paid separately by the company.\textsuperscript{34} In certain cases even the immediate supervisors were on the payroll of raising contractors.

The Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission 1940 refers to the Royal Commission on Labour, 1931, while referring to inherent difficulties in such a system; the later had observed: "Both in law and in fact the manager is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol IV part I, p.9.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol. IV, part II, p. 226.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol IV, part I, p.221.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{R.C.L.}, 1931, Vol. IV, part I, p.227.
\end{itemize}
responsible for the safety of the workmen: he determines where coal shall be worked and his decisions have the closest effect on the security of the miner. But even the safety men are not the manager's subordinates, being selected and paid by the contractor. The law holds the manager responsible for compliance with its provisions in respect of hours of work, holidays, the employment of women, etc. As a rule he has also responsibility for housing and other matters (e.g., water-supply) affecting the welfare of the worker outside the mine. Yet he has ordinarily no responsibility for the selection of the workers, the distribution of their work, the payment of their wages or even the numbers employed.”

The contract systems of working the mines had some inherent clauses which supported exploitation. The contract was generally concerned with supplying certain fixed quantity of coal whereas the workers were paid per tub. Consequently there was a general tendency to force the workers to overload their tub, any underweight tub was summarily cancelled so that the contractor can earn more profit. One such example of exploitation could be cited from Tata iron and Steel Company, TISCO, colliery where the Sardar in conjunction with the other officials in the pay of contractor ranging from munshi down to the shot firers at the face were involved. A tangled web of obligations, favouritism, and bakhshish payment were reported in 1936 after a special investigation into corruption had been ordered by Sir Ardeshir Dalal.

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the special Director of the steel company. Unless the munshi was bribed, they would not provide sufficient mine cars to the gangs, would miscount tubs and credit them to others and commonly reject tub loads on the pretext that they were either over or below the correct weight.36

The contractors faced with competition to win the contract went to the extent of accepting meager rates for working the coal which in turn affected wages and welfare services to be provided to the workers. As a result, the management was forced to introduce a clause in their contract to safeguard wages of workers.37

The contractors used to advance money as a tool for controlling labourforce. It is reported that workers used to spend their earnings before the money was earned and became anxious to get more money in advance which further strengthened their bondage.38 In view of the above corrupt practices prevalent in the contractor system the Bihar Labour Commission just as the Royal Commission recommended abolition of the system.39 During 1940s there was a tremendous decline in the number of such contractors. In 1944 only 60 raising contractors were reportedly employed by 49 collieries in Jharia40 and

36 C.P.Simmons, p 478.
similar was the case of Raniganj due to direct recruitment through Gorkhpur Labour Organisation.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{Sarkari System}: This was a mode of recruitment in which the management employed their own staff of recruiters. In some cases the company maintained salaried \textit{Jamadars} and \textit{Chaprasis} who supervised a number of villages and it bore the whole expense of transporting labourers to the working sites and in return they earned the \textit{Sardari} remuneration. The workers were also given the \textit{khoraki} during their travel and some companies also gave \textit{khoraki} worth 4 anna for the first day.\textsuperscript{42} The whole labour force of the company was under the control of the manager and the company was the paymaster of its labour. Some of the companies made direct contact with the headmen of the villages.\textsuperscript{43} They were paid a monthly salary and a small commission on the output obtained by his men so that he could induce the villagers to work at a particular colliery and thus regular attendance was ensured.\textsuperscript{44} This system was generally followed at mines owned by Indias and small European mines.

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\textsuperscript{41} Gorakhpur labour Organisation (G.L.O) will be discussed in the next section.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Foley and Fremantle report}, appendix, August 26.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol. IV, part I, p.221.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
In Seebpur and Katras collieries in Jharia the colliery manager stated that it costed around Rs.30 to bring the upcountry labour family to the mine whose women did not work in the mine.45

The companies that worked the mine under the Sarkari system wanted Act XIII of 1859 to be extended to the coalmines to obtain an agreement of one year with workers so that their labour imported from the upcountry were not poached upon by other collieries and their cost of importing labour was not wasted.46

The companies following Sarkari system were in full control of the management. This resulted in following an unscrupulous method of extraction of coal. So far the preference of the workers was concerned, they preferred the departmental or the Sarkari method. According to Bihar Labour Commission report the workers under the Sarkari system were better paid and better carved.47

The Indian Mining Association, in 1931, estimated that in Jharia coalfield the total coal raised by contract system was around 70 percent and under Sarkari system it was around 30 percent.48 But in Raniganj field the proportion of coal raised under contract system as against Sarkari system had

45 Foley and Fremantle report, appendix, Oct. 27, Jharia Collieries.
46 Ibid., August 30, Jharia Club.
47 BLEC, vol. 1, para 390.
registered a decline by 40 and 60 percent respectively.\textsuperscript{49} The purchase of Zamindari right by the companies could be one reason behind the decline. But in Jharia the cultivable land was not available in abundance which could be granted to the miner as an adherent to gain permanent labour force.

One of the frequently asked questions during the Royal Commission of Labour in India session was concerned with the necessity to recommend the last method of requirement. P.S. Keelan, Field Representative of the Indian Mining Association, of the Raniganj coalfield estate hoped that he would work without a contractor as it gave more command over the colliery. And it also saved them from the blackmailing tactics of the contractors who generally walked out from the mine in case of quarrel with the management. This used to create sudden artificial scarcity of labour for sometime. The cost factor was not very large to tilt the balance in favour of a particular mode of working of the mines.\textsuperscript{50}

K.K. Baksi, manager of Kirkend Colliery, had argued in favour of the contract system (raising contractor) as it gave him more time to supervise the work. The contractor looked after the miners and the raising while he was free to look after the safety and other things. He stated that the difference between

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol. IV, part II, p. 216.
the two modes of coal production was just 2 annas per ton and hence was in favour of the contract system.\textsuperscript{51}

In those mines where the supervisory staffs were also the contracting, staff which happened in some mines, a strange problem was witnessed. The Mine Manager, who had the full responsibility of safety and working of the mine, had no control on workers and their immediate supervisors made every effort to evade every norm to gain easy coals. The payment were directly related to the raising capacity.

Recruitment under the contractor system was strongly criticised by the Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission and it ordered for it earliest discontinuation and where its service was indispensable, its registration was recommended. They were asked to record payments including travelling allowances and advance which could be checked by competent authority to ensure a check on their attempt to exploit the labour further.\textsuperscript{52}

To overcome the perennial shortage of labour and to maintain continuous supply many suggestions were made. Siba Kali Bose of Indian Colliery Employees Association had suggested establishment of a Central Public Employment Agency, with headquarters at Jharia and branches in

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p.134.

\textsuperscript{52} Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission, 1940, vol 1, para 76.
different coalfield centres for the purpose of recruitment of labour, and thus
minimise the cost and centralise the recruitment network.\textsuperscript{53}

A. L. Ojha, M.L.C. and Rai Bahadur D. D. Thacker, representatives of
the Indian Mining Federation went to extent of suggesting that Santhal
Parganas and the whole of the Chota Nagpur should be reserved as an
exclusive area of recruitment for the coal industry.\textsuperscript{54}

During the period of Second World War when the demand for
coalsoared, there was a decline in production due mainly to paramount
shortage of labour. In view of the problem, the government planned to
systematize recruitment of unskilled labour. Therefore the \textit{Gorakhpuri} Labour
Organisation (GLO) in 1942 was established. Labour Department of the
Central Government administered the GLO through the Government of Uttar
Pradesh. All expenditure on the organisation was borne by the Government of
India and recovered from the employers The Government of U.P. maintained a
Liaison Officer with the Organisation who assessed the employers' demand for
labour.\textsuperscript{55}

In a brief report in 1943 on the mining conditions in the districts of
Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura sent by the Commissioner of the Burdwan
division to the Secretary to the Bengal government, Department of Commerce,

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{R.C.L.} Vol. IV, part II, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{55} A.B. Ghosh, p.132.
Labour and Industries, had pointed out that labour scarcity in coal mines was caused by switch over of workers to military and construction works of airfields, railway extensions, etc\textsuperscript{56}. For the greater part of 1943, the labour supply position remained difficult mainly owing to the labourers' preference for profitable military jobs.\textsuperscript{57} The labour supply deteriorated drastically and by the closing months of the year (1943) it became so critical that the Government of India had to permit women workers to be re-employed underground in the coalfields of Bihar and Bengal and Central Provinces provided that in underground working was not less than six feet in height.\textsuperscript{58} Besides, the government had to take several steps to meet the emergency situation. It tried to eliminate competition forced by coal mining industry against other industries and undertakings including that of construction. The labour department of the central government in June 1944 issued specific orders forbidding the recruitment of labour from the districts of Bankura, Birbhum and Burdwan in Bengal and Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Gava, Monghyr, Santhal Parganas and Manbhum in Bihar which were "considered main sources of colliery labour. And this condition was inserted in all government contracts.\textsuperscript{59}

The Directorate of Skilled Labour Supply was set up by the Government in 1944 to supply unskilled labour for work in the coalfield when there was a


\textsuperscript{57} B.P. Guha, p.39.

\textsuperscript{58} A.B. Ghosh, \textit{Coal Industry in India}, 1977, New Delhi, 1977, p.132

\textsuperscript{59} Bishwa Mohan, p.232.
grave shortage of labour and increased production was essential for war purpose. Gorakhpur labour was introduced into the Bengal coalfields at the beginning of 1944 and was entirely unskilled, necessitating careful supervision during training period which consumed considerable time.\(^{60}\)

By September 1944, 12,000 labourers were supplied to the coalfields of Bihar, Bengal and the Central Provinces and by the first week of October 1945, their number rose to 30,000 *Gorakhpuris* in coalfields of Bengal and Bihar and they loaded 1,012 wagons, produced 22,462 tons of coal from quarries and 5,725 tons from underground workings.\(^{61}\) Soon their number began to decline gradually and fell to 15,000 by July 1946. Roughly at the end of January 1946 the railway collieries, the collieries owned by public companies and those owned by individuals employed 7%, 83% and 10% of the total number of the *Gorakhpuri* labour engaged in different coalfields of India. Once the period of crisis was over and shortage of labour had eased, the Ministry of Labour had declared its intention to close down the Directorate of Skilled Labour Supply on the 28th February 1947.\(^{62}\) So the Indian Mining Association, the Indian Mining Federation and the Indian Colliery Owners Association jointly set up the Coalfield Recruitment Organisation with the primary object of taking over the Gorakhpur labour force in the coalfields.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.,

\(^{61}\) *A.R.C.I.M.* 1945, p.30.

\(^{62}\) Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p. 234.
When the Directorate was abolished, some 6,400 Gorakhpur labour was transferred to the new organization.

**Women Labour in the Coal Mines:**

The *Bauris* who were the first to offer themselves for work in the coal-fields, in the first quarter of the last century, came with their women who specialised in the colliery surface work. The *Dhangars* and the *Koras* who followed also brought their family members mothers, wives, daughters and sisters to work in the coal-fields to supplement the family income. Similarly, the labourers belonging to other castes, who were tempted to leave their homes to work in the coal-fields, were accompanied by their women whom they regarded as valuable assets. Thus every increase in the number of male workers led to the multiplication of women workers. This gave birth to a system which has been characterized as the "family gang system" of the Jharia coal miners which took care of the strategies of the family and household reproduction in the period 1890-1940. In the early stages of the industry the *Bauri* women were employed to turn the wooden gin raising coal from pits by means of iron chain to the surface. This method was used in 1869 for Martin Fryar of the Geological Survey reports: "Each gin has four horizontal arms, and to each arm about eight women were appointed so that each gin is driven by

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thirty two women. They are paid two and a quarter annas per day and they can raise about forty tons of coal from a depth of a hundred feet in the course of a day.\textsuperscript{64} Other type of surface work done by women included removing coal and refuse from the pithead and stacking coal. With the mechanisation of the mine, the gins were replaced by electric haulage or by steam winding engines. So the nature of work also changed, and they were shifted to screening of coal and loading it into railway wagons, pushing tubs of coal to the railway siding and picking shale out of the coal loaded. Some were employed to remove boiler ash or to push unloaded coal on the surface. The manufacturing of soft coke by primitive method had also created new avenues such as forming heaps of coal or sprinkle water on them.\textsuperscript{65}

In open mines and quarries, a number of women were also employed, carrying the coal or stone up the inclines on the sides of the open workings. Some of this carrying involved a strain and a twisting of the body to adjust to the weight which could be injurious to the women. The Commission were told in interviews that the average weights carried were 50 to 60 lbs.\textsuperscript{66} Even 13 years old girls carried these weights as no difference was made between the younger and the older women.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} C.P.Simons, pp. 461-462.
\textsuperscript{65} B.R.Seth, p.131.
\textsuperscript{66} Margaret Read, \textit{The Indian Peasant Uprooted; A Study of the Humane Machine}, London, 1931, 165.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
Women also constituted an important part of the underground mine worker force. The Santhali women were the first group who not only worked on surface, but also followed their men folk underground to load coals cut by them. Similarly a good majority of women belonging to the low castes recruited from Bihar, Bengal and Central province also followed the tradition.  

The women were employed as loaders, some were used for bailing out water from the mines, for removing coals from the galleries and to push tubs on bucket from the coalface to the bottom of the shaft.

**Table 2.1: Caste Composition of Female Work force**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Caste</th>
<th>Women per 100 Men of their own caste</th>
<th>High Caste</th>
<th>Women per 100 Men of their own Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doms</td>
<td>110.0</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santhals</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>Rajputs</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhuiyas</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>Goalas</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmis</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>Koiris</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuniyas</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauris</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: B.R.Seth, p. 129)

As it can be distinctly seen from the table women from low caste were more prominent underground worker accompanying their husband, father, brother or other male relatives. Interestingly high caste women folk was also present in underground work in a substantial manner. Among the women of

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68 B.R.Seth, pp. 128-129.
69 Ibid., p.130.
high caste working in the mine were either widow with no financial support or were socially undesirable or their husband or parent were not earning enough to maintain the family or were invalid.\textsuperscript{70} Even in 1924, according to the special investigation of the Chief Inspector of Mines, out of seven thousand women who came under his personal enquiry in the Jharia and Ranigunj coalfields, about 49\% were working with their husbands, 30\% with their relatives and about 20\% unattached.\textsuperscript{71}

In the Annual Report of Inspector of Mine of 1896 the number of coalmines in the Burdwan district was 83, Hazaribagh had 8, Manbhum 100 and Santhal Pargana had 4 so Bengal in total had 195 mines in 1895 (returns were received of 87 only). The total number of labourers working in Bankura, Chotanagpur, Hazaribagh and Manbhum mines were 324,395 workers. 97,776 worked below ground and out of this figure 52,804 were females and total on the surface were 226,619 out of this female constituted 141,637.\textsuperscript{72}

There was always a clause for intervention of local government for the prohibition of women in the underground working in mines. When the Indian Mining Bill, 1901, was been drafted the section 10 stated that subject to the control of the local government or of such authority as the local government might appoint on its behalf any Inspector of mines may by order in writing and

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p.129.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.153.
\textsuperscript{72} James Grundy, \textit{Report on Inspection of Mine in India for the year ending the 30th June 1896}, Calcutta, p.63.
for reason stated theirin prohibit the employment of women and children or both in any mine or part there of or any particular kind of labour above ground or below ground when such employment was, in his opinion dangerous for, or unsuited to women or children as the case might be. But this was always opposed by the owners. The Indian Mining Association and Bengal Chamber of Commerce strongly opposed the interference of the Government with condition of labour which according to them would 'only promote discontent between employer and employed and augment difficulties of getting sufficient labour. ..... at present at any rate there is not necessity for interfering with employment of women below ground, .....any interference with this would have most serious effect on the mining industry'.

Similarly after the passing of Indian Mining Act of 1923, which though did not prohibit the women workers working underground, but it left a question of complete withdrawal should begin within the specified period would be taken by the local government. The members of Indian Mining Federation called upon B.N. Mitra, K.C.I.E, Member for Industries and Labour on 24 July, 1925. They argued in front of him that "the labour of women is intrinsically different from that of a man.... Her labour is complementary and not additional to the labour of the man. In such circumstances......how the women labour can

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73 *Industries and Labour*, (G & M), File No., 18, 1925.
be withdrawn from mines except without an entire breakdown of the industry."\(^{74}\)

But all their pleas fell on deaf ear of the government which notified that from July 1, 1929 employment of women below ground was to be eliminated by stages over a period of next ten years. But by a notification dated 11 June, 1936 the date of 1 July, 1939 was advanced to 1 July, 1937 which was then fixed for 1 October, 1937.\(^{75}\) The depression of 1930s proved an stimulus for the replacement of women workers from underground working.

The women workers were much sought after because they were paid low wages. Their traditional works in mine were abhorred by men so it would be very tough to induce them in such a large number so as to replace the women workers from underground mines.\(^{76}\) The other option was mechanization of the mine which would require huge investment of capital which they did not invest. But the decrease of wages to the starvation level during the period of Great Depression provided a perfect platform for the prohibition of women in underground working (see section on wages, Chapter 3) and forced the male worker to slowly overcome this inhibition. The mining regulations of 1929 had reduced their earnings all the more by providing for the elimination of women from underground works. The employers have gone a step further. They began gradually replacing women by men even on the

\(^{74}\) Ibid.

\(^{75}\) B.R.Seth, p.144.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., p.142.
surface where they were permitted by law to work, and employ too many labourers for the contract work which is more or less fixed and thus reduced the labour earnings without lowering the rates of wages, a device which helped them to escape public attacks or the menace of labour strikes. It resulted in keeping many families semi-starved, in lowering the standard of living of others, and in demoralising the rest.\(^{77}\)

**Table-2.2: Decade wise Ratio of Male and Female Workforce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Increase in number of Male loaders compared to previous years</th>
<th>Decrease in number of female loaders compared to previous years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>3013</td>
<td>6528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>3593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1455</td>
<td>1655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1675</td>
<td>2040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-33</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>15719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-33</td>
<td>5569</td>
<td>9191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-33</td>
<td>4375</td>
<td>5598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: B.R.Seth, p142.)

The table shows the noticeable decline of female employment in mines from 15719 in 1928-33 to 9191 in 1929-33 bracket and it further declined to 5598 in 1930-33 time bracket.

This was the period when the women suffered the maximum. They had to suffer horrible individual and social indignities as well at the hands of the sardars, contractors and companies' officials. Their modesty and chastity were the presents which these contractors sometimes offered to the managers or

77 Ibid., pp. 138-144.
agents to maintain their contract. Contractors supplied them as prostitutes to the companies' officials to get better facilities of work and improvement of their output. A sardar enjoyed a predominant position. He could get any number of men under his sardari, He could dismiss anybody. He exploited his strong position to employ every day a new woman to become the victim of his lust. Miner's wives generally became an easy prey to them. They are tempted to such immoral practices partly because they were able to earn something and partly because they would be keeping their husbands in the good books of the sardars. In short, bribery in the shape of money which was widely prevalent in the days of high profits and scarcity of labour had been replaced 'by the surrender of the virtue of sophisticated country girls in those days of low profits and excessive labour supply'.

The first comprehensive data on areas of the supply of labour and the other possible labour catchment area for the coal mine workers can be best studied with help of Labour Commission Report of 1896 Foley and Fremantels Report on Labour in Bengal and United Provinces of 1906 as they dealt extensively with shortage of labour and labour supplying districts to coal mines to address the problem of shortage of labour with reference to caste that was operating in the coal mine during the period of their surveys. The Royal

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78 Ibid., p.137.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 B.R. Seth, p. 137.
Commission on Labour in India, 1931 and others also provide some interesting information about the same.

The Labour Commission Report, 1896 had catalogued the caste of workers and their places of origin as follows.⁸³

**Table-2.3: Caste wise Distribution of labourforce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Koris</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Rai Bareli, Fattehpur, Allahabad, Jaunpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chattiris and Thakur</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Rai Bareli, Bunda, Jaunpur. (These do not cut coal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pasis</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Rai Bareli, Mirzapur, Fattehpur, Allahabad, Jaunpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bhuyas</strong></td>
<td>Gaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lodhs</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Rai Bareli, Fattehpur, Allahabad, Lucknow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ahirs</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Fattehpur, Rai Bareli, Allahabad, Mirzapur, Benares, Jaunpur, Jabalpur, Rewah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gadaryas</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Fattehpur, Rai Bareli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chamars</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Fattehpur, Rai Bareli, Allahabad, Banda, Fyzabad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kacchis</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Fattehpur, Rai Bareli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kurmis</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Pertabghar, Rai Bareli, Allahabad, Chanda, Fattehpur, Fyzabad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kunbis</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Fattehpur, Pertabghar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kumhars</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Rai Bareli, Azamghur, Benares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kahars</strong></td>
<td>Rai Bareli, Mirzapur, Raipur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arraks</strong></td>
<td>Fattehpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kelwars</strong></td>
<td>Jaunpur, Mirzapur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kahtis</strong></td>
<td>Fattehpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Halwais</strong></td>
<td>Rai Bareli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muhammadans (not particularised)</strong></td>
<td>Unao, Rai Bareli, Allahabad, Jaunpur, Rewah, , Fattehpur, Mirzapur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Banias</strong></td>
<td>Allahabad, Umballa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lohars</td>
<td>Pannah, Rewah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>Rai Bareli, Cawnpur, Benares, Mirzapur, Rewah, Allahabad, Partabghar, Jaunpur, Fyzabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobis</td>
<td>Rai Bareli, Allahabad, Pannah, Rewah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalahas</td>
<td>Unao, Mirzapur, Monghyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telis</td>
<td>Unao, Mirzapur, Monghyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nais</td>
<td>Ballia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajputs</td>
<td>Ballia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhars</td>
<td>Jaunpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khetris</td>
<td>Jabalpur, Fatehpur, Allahabad, Sultanpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayasths</td>
<td>Rewah, Unao, Allahabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhuyas</td>
<td>Allahabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kols</td>
<td>Mundla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koeris</td>
<td>Agra, Arrah, Ghazipur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonds</td>
<td>Rewah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mochis</td>
<td>Unao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallahs</td>
<td>Fatehpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambolis</td>
<td>Fyzabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunias</td>
<td>Benares (a batch of 150 at present mainly on surface)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dosadhs</td>
<td>Monghyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheiks</td>
<td>Ghazipur (only work on surface)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathans</td>
<td>Fyzabad (do tramming work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barais</td>
<td>Ballia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohars</td>
<td>Ballia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musohars</td>
<td>Gaya.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: Labour Commission Report, 1896, pp.11-12)

The largest number of worker originated from the following castes:

Pasis, Lodhs, Kurmis, Ahirs, Koeris Chamars and Muhammadans. And they came mostly from Unao, Rai Bareli, Partapghar, Fatehpur, Allahabad and Banaras districts. \(^84\)

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\(^84\) Ibid., An interesting study has been made by Shireen Moosvi, ‘De-Industrialization, Population Change and Migration in Nineteenth Century India’, *The Indian Historical...*
Beside these new recruitment areas outside the states from upcountry, some districts and certain castes within the state were also mentioned in Foley's report as a possible recruitment area for the coalmines by looking at the population density per square mile, the crops, and nature of the crops and also the caste composition of various districts:

‘Monghyr: In the west and south of the districts, in thana of Sikhpura and Sekundra and Chakai recruitment can be encouraged as the land was poor, there were large number of landless laborers and people are generally very poor the caste which can go to the coal mines seems to be Musahars, Dushad and Nuniyas beside others’. 85

‘Santhal Pargana : In this districts Jamatara, Dumka and Pakur sub division labour could be obtained for the coal mines as these were pre-dominantly Santhal region. Beside Santhsals, Mahilis and Bhuiya and Dusadhs also suitable for coalmines . It was necessary to pay small advance before the Santhal would leave their place’. 86

‘Hazaribagh: The population is spare but the land is too poor to support the population so emigration is not to be discouraged. Semi-aboriginal and

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85 Foley’s Report, 1907, para.90
86 Ibid., para.95
aboriginal forms of half of the population. Some of them go to the Jherria coal fields especially from the East of the districts. But this numbers is too small and much more labour can be expected from this area. The Bhuiyas with the population of 99,000 would be the other suitable caste'.

'Ranchi: In spite of the scarcity of the population the pressure on the land is great and need to be supplements there earning by working outside. Labour seems an eminently suitable for collieries if only the people can be induced to the coal cutting the chief aborigines of the districts are the Oraons but only few of them are found in Jherria mines. Munda can be the other caste which can be induced to the coalmines the Catholic and the Lutherans priest of the districts were ready to influence their pupils to go to the the collieries. The country between Ranchi and Lohardaga would be ideal for the coalmine workers which could be next extended to Gumla sub division from where Bhuiy as and other low Hindu caste can be induced to cut coal.'

'Bankura: In this district except the eastern part the rest of the district the land is poorer. The most numerous castes found are Bauris in the thana of Gangajalhati, Bankura, and Katra. These can be recruited for the coalmines at present only Bauris from Gangajalhati migrate to Raniganj coalmines.'

'Gaya: the proportion of the landless labour is high Grierson in his "Notes on the District of Gaya" in 1893 argues that 45% of the people suffer from
poverty and important source of income of the family was the earning of the members in Calcutta and elsewhere. Fryar found the Bhuiyas from Gaya in Jharia coalfield and also the Nuniyas from Gaya in Palamau. But the percentage of labour is very low in coalmine but expects that once the line from Katras to Gaya get completed the coalmine would be most natural to afford employment to the surplus population.90

The Census of 1914 recorded that the Santhals and Bauris still accounted for over 50 per cent of the labour force, the remainder consisting mainly of Bhuiyas, Muchis, Koras, Kamars, Meahs, Rajwars, Dosadhs, Kols, Bagdis, Telis, and Ghatwals.91 The local labourers such as Bauri and Santhal, were first to join mining work and continued to constitute the largest group. Though the share of flow of labour from United Provinces and other distance states increased but still the local people constituted the greatest bulk. This becomes explicit if checking the birthplace of labour in the whole of Jharia coalfields from the Census Report of 1921.92

The Enquiry Commission of 1931 gives the following as birthplace of labour. In Gopalichak and Central Kirkend collieries labour originated mainly from Santhal Pargana, Hazaribagh and Patna district. But during monsoon seasons they had to recruit labour from Central and United Provinces as the size of the labour from above mentioned districts witnessed drastic reduction.93

90 Ibid.,para. 89
91 Nirban Basu, p.64.
92 Royal Commission on Labour in India. Vol IV Part 1,p5. (Hereafter RCL)
93 Ibid. , p 5
Table- 2.4: Birth place of Labour of various Coalfields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collieries</th>
<th>Total employed</th>
<th>Manbhum and Bankura</th>
<th>Hazaribagh</th>
<th>Santhal Parganas</th>
<th>Gaya</th>
<th>Monghyr</th>
<th>Other Bihar and Orissa districts</th>
<th>Bengal districts</th>
<th>Central Provinces districts</th>
<th>United Provinces</th>
<th>Other Provinces</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>1734</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhowra</td>
<td>1436</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pur Jharia</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkend</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3580</td>
<td>1427</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage to total</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39.86</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>24.24</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bhuggutdih Colliery reported that 25 percent of its labour was local and remaining 75 percent was drawn from the Santhal Parganas, Hazaribagh and Monghyr districts.\(^{94}\)

Loyabad Colliery employed labour either from local areas or from Santhal Parganas, Gaya or Hazaribagh districts with a few workers coming from United Province district.\(^{95}\)

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\(^{94}\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^{95}\) Ibid, p. 5.
East India Coal Company Ltd. recruited its labour from Arrah, Gaya, Hazaribagh, Monghyr, Manbhum, Santhal Pargana, Bilaspur, and Raipur in Central Province and from Bareilly in United Provinces.  

Describing about the source of labour a Committee states that about 80% of the labour was obtained from within the districts of the province of which the more important are Hazaribagh, Manbhum, Gaya and Monghyr. The rest are mainly drawn from districts of Raipur, Bilaspur, and Durg in Central Provinces, the districts of Allahabad, Partapgarh, Mirzapur, Rai Barielly, Jaunpur, Lucknow, Unao, Kanpur, and Gorakhpur in the United Province, Ganjam in Orissa, Rewa in Central India Lahore and Amritsar in Punjab, Burdawan and Bankura in Bengal.

In spite of the growing heterogeneous composition, a distinct pattern of occupational specialisation remained among the working population of the mine. The Bhuiyas, Ahirs, Rajwars preferred tramming and loading whilst the Beldars and Nuniyahs had a predilection for earth cutting. The Kamars and Meahs were known as good engine operatives. Most of the Sardari/supervisory functions were performed by men who had been recruited from the ranks of the workers themselves and therefore did not form a separate

96 Ibid, p. 5.
98 Ibid.
100 Ibid, p. 35.
caste or regional entity. The clerical staff, i.e. overseers, managers etc, were generally recruited from the educated middle class, mostly Bengalis.

The common language the workers employed in coal mining industry to conversed with each other was probably Urdu.\(^1\) James Grundy in his Annual Report observed that every worker could understand some Urdu and they received their order from their supervisors in the same language and this was further testified by Frank Agabeg who said Hindustani was the lingua franca of coal mine worker.\(^2\)

After the study of the labour catchment areas and the various castes working in the coalmine (the reports were generally caste based) let us see the fluctuation in the supply of labour with the corresponding cycle of trade. The period from mid 1890s till the 1920 it was a period of rapid expansion of the coal mining industry of the country.

During this period there was an enormous expansion of the coal production, with opening up of new coal mines, big leap in the capital invested by the managing agent, and corresponding increase in the labour force employed in the coal mining industry. According to the Annual Inspector of Mines of 1896 Report, there were 44 mines in Manbhum, Hazaribagh and Chotanagpur district producing about 850,734 tons of coal and were employing

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102 Ibid., Agabeg, p. 31.
27,310 workers, out of which 10,649 were women workers.\textsuperscript{103} The number of coal mines in Manbhum, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Sonthal Pargana, Rajmahal, Palamau, Daltonganj was 239 and the number of workers employed were in these mines were 64,313, out of which 23,112 were females. The total output of coal was 10,526,468 tons as compared to 9,112,348 tons in 1906 an increase of 15.51\% and 9,993,348 tons or 94.93\% of the total coal raised in British India exceeding the output of the preceding year by 1,375,528 tons. The principal increase came from Jharia coalfields where the output had gone up by over a million a year.\textsuperscript{104} The coal trade was in very flourishing state. Every section of the community and the indignant shareholder complained through newspapers that their dividends were not more than 50\%.\textsuperscript{105} The number of coal mines in Manbhum, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Sonthal Pargana, Rajmahal, Palamau, Daltonganj were 298\textsuperscript{106} in 1909 employing 76,914 workers producing 8,002,951 ton of coal.\textsuperscript{107} The rise would have been more but for the outbreak of cholera in the coalfield which led to cessation of work for two months and according to the estimate of the Chief Inspector the loss in output was of around one million tons which when calculated with the prevailing prices amounted to around fifty lakhs of rupees.\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[103] Report, 1896, p.63.
\item[104] A.R.C.I.M. 1908, p.
\item[105] Ibid.,1909,p.9.
\item[106] Ibid., p.43
\item[107] Ibid., p.43
\item[108] Ibid. p.8
\end{footnotes}
The coalmines in Bihar experienced shortage of labour during latter part of the year due to good harvest in 1916 and abnormal monsoon in 1917 which bought heavy rain and which lasted beyond the usual period. But even then we see an increase in the total number of coalmines in Bihar to 444 and this was producing 11,931,141 tons of coal by employing 105,910 workers out of which 40,600 were female. The reason behind this growth was firstly owing to opening of the Jharia coalfields and its connection by the two railways (East Indian Railway and the Bengal Nagpur Railway) and the opening of coal market. The total coal traffic carried by East Indian Railway was 6,142,264 tons for the year of 1905 earning 202,44,250 rupees. The second impetus was provided by the world war. This was the period when all the better coals were requisitioned by government for military purposes at fixed prices and the coal had the benefit of priority as regard to transport. The result was that the demand for non requisitioned coal exceeded the available supply and the prices for such coals ranged far above the prices of requisitioned coal and this was abnormally high if their inferior quality is taken into consideration. So there was a tremendous increase in coal production, whom the raising of the Jharia coalfield alone was 11 million tons by 1918. Between 1914 and 1919 the rise in aggregate output of coal was 37% and the percentage of Bihar being 41%.

110 G. Huddleston, History of the east Indian Railway, Calcutta, 1906, p.166.
111 A.B.Ghosh, Coal Industry in India, p. 62
The next phase from 1920 to 1936 was a period of decline to slight recovery during 1926-1929.\textsuperscript{113} The output fell by nearly three million tons in 1920 compared to previous year’s production. With the coming of the depression many uneconomical mines that opened up during the boom period had to close. By the end of 1921 the period of industrial boom came to an end.\textsuperscript{114} The coal mine by 1924 had entered the period of prolonged depression which continued till 1937, as is evident from the table below: \textsuperscript{115}

**Table-2.5: Production figure of coal in 1927-28**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalfield</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>% increase or decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>10,665,479</td>
<td>10,583,487</td>
<td>+.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>2,026,791</td>
<td>1,790,594</td>
<td>+13.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>804,118</td>
<td>855,253</td>
<td>-5.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: *ACIMR*, 1929, p. 28)

**Table-2.6: Production figure of coal in 1929-30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalfield</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>% increase or decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>10,753,858</td>
<td>10,785,745</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>2,160,249</td>
<td>2,118,703</td>
<td>+1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>613,533</td>
<td>771,165</td>
<td>-20.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: *ARC.I.M*, 1931, p.36)

\textsuperscript{113} This was the period of slaughter mining when superior grades coal are extracted, so that it find easy market and quench the thirst of managing agencies for their profit. A sheer waste of natural resource.


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 1929, p.
The annual output of coal from Jharia mines in 1920 stood at 9,294,040 it showed a marginal increase in 1923 when 10,346,015 tons coals were produced, and by 1935 it had dropped to 9,245,298 tons. The workforce in coal mines was 190,342 in 1920 it rose marginally to 200,913 in 1923. By 1930 this declined to 184,370 and this stood at 194,704.\footnote{116} This phase was worst for the working class in the coal mine. The closing of smaller mines due to uneconomical working and lack of demand led to loss of employment to large number of workers in the mines. But the worst was the enforcement of the Mining Regulations of 1929 for gradual exclusion of women from underground work. This together with the commencement of agricultural depression and the intensification of coal depression and the consequent fall of both raisings and dispatches brought about a further reduction of 44% in the case of underground workers. This heavy decline in the employment of women resulted in a big drop in their daily earnings as the figures given in Chapter III of the present thesis would show. Agricultural depression did not permit workers to return to their native places, but forced them to compete among themselves for the diminished employment yet available. Thus, their earnings were practically reduced to a starvation level. (this would be discussed in Chapter III) The loading of coal which was considered women's work now gave some respite to the male workers and this was more than compensated by the retrenched male workers.

\footnote{116}{C.P. Simons, p.483.}
The Second World War saw increased construction activities undertaken by military and the high wages provided by them led to shift of workers toward those sites. From 1942 the coal production was being affected due to shortage. The above reason was compounded by shortage of foodstuffs in the mining region. This was the period of high demand for coal for war industries and so the production was not able to keep pace with the growing demand as reflected in the output. It was only due to the reemployment of women labour and Gorakhpuri labour\(^{117}\) and various inducements like, ration distribution, increase in wage rates, that the supply of labour was increased to raise the production to feed the war industry as shown in production of coal and labour force in the coal mines below.

**Table- 2.7: Coal Production in some selected coalfields**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Coalfields</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>% increase or decrease as compared to previous year</th>
<th>Total production in Bihar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>12,133,186</td>
<td>+3.24</td>
<td>16,589,9996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>1,899,385</td>
<td>-5.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>445,031</td>
<td>+25.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karanpura</td>
<td>486,065</td>
<td>-12.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>11,662,569</td>
<td>+8.77</td>
<td>15,912,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>2,166,541</td>
<td>+40.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>644,936</td>
<td>+14.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karanpura</td>
<td>736,908</td>
<td>+54.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>11,788,631</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>17,317,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>2,602,998</td>
<td>-6.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>501,735</td>
<td>+7.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karanpura</td>
<td>976,695</td>
<td>+2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A.R.C.I.M of respected years)

\(^{117}\) Discussed in this chapter earlier.
### Table-2.8: Labour Employed in Some Selected Coalfields.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coalfields</th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th>Openworking</th>
<th>Surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>Giridih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56,734</td>
<td>2,839</td>
<td>4,521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,338</td>
<td>7,524</td>
<td>2,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,198</td>
<td>2,794</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30,069</td>
<td>27,697</td>
<td>1,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9540</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Year) Underground Total Female Total Female Total Female

- Jharia 56,734 3,338 11,98 30,069 9540
- Bokaro 2,839 7,524 27,94 27,697 485
- Giridih 4,521 23 10 1,443 498
- Karanpura 1,043 1332 385 --
- Aggregate 71,814 12,602 45,247 38,459 11,601

With the termination of War the labour supply became less scarce and the "screening" order for recruitment of mining labour in certain area was lifted. The ban on employment of women in underground working was reintroduced but the introduction of Gorakhpuri labour and mechanical methods of working at some of the larger quarries greatly enhanced coal production (as there was acute shortage of mining machinery, plant and stores during the War period.")
So during the period of the study we can see that the industry failed to evolve a labour force completely dependent on mining for their livelihood. Labour in the cropping season and the reaping season still had a fluctuating effect on supply of labour to the mining industry.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{118} The usual exodus of labour from the coalfield in the months of June and July was absent due to late arrival of monsoon and so the productions during these months were abnormally high, \textit{A.R.C.I.M.}, 1948, p.4.
CHAPTER - 3

LABOUR AND CAPITALIST ENTERPRISE

The Indian coal miners were mainly drawn from the agricultural classes. The *Bauris, Santhal* etc were all agricultural workers.¹ Earlier mines were not worked during the rainy season causing any shortage of labour.² With the working of the coal mines throughout the year the labour problem started aggravating. They could not be converted to full time coal miners solely dependent on the industry for their livelihood. They were variously designated freelance workers (Agabeg)³ semi proletariat (Ranajit Das Gupta)⁴. Describing the “free lancer”, Agabeg goes on to say ‘He works when he likes, takes a holiday when he thinks he requires it, yet with all this he is hard working when he is so inclined his enjoyment and pleasures are simple and his wants few’.⁵ Foley and Frementle Committee which was formed to look into the question of labour supply amongst others, in Bengal and Bihar coalfields. In his Report Foley had observed that in the Raniganj coalfields: ‘...there is always scarcity of labour in the cultivating seasons, especially when the paddy is transplanted

¹ We have discussed the theme in chapter 2.
⁵ Ibid.
in July or August, and again for a shorter time in December, when the paddy is cut; also a good paddy crop means scarcity of labour in coal mines and vice versa’.\(^6\) Similar shortage was experienced at the Jharia fields too. Foley reported: “As at Raniganj, the worst time of the year is the season when the paddy is transplanted in July and August and next when the paddy is reaped in December.”\(^7\) R.I. Treharne Rees, a reputed British expert, who in 1919 was entrusted by the Government of India to look after various aspects of coal mining in India and make suitable recommendations. Regarding labour he says that “At present the majority of the ork people are primarily agriculturists, who treat mining as a secondary occupation and periodically disappear from the collieries to their villages to cultivate their ground; consequently supply of labour is fluctuating.”\(^8\) Since the Royal Commission of Labour in India had made their recommendations in 1931 there has been no marked change in the characteristics of industrial labour. A vast proportion of unskilled labour was drawn from agriculture and that too mostly from neighboring villages.\(^9\)

The state of agriculture failures and bumper production considerably affected labour supply. It was found that in case of crop failure, some people maintained themselves with the crop they received as cultivators or as owners of the land, for a large part of the year. The supply of labour was invariably

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6 *Foley and Fermantles Report*, 1907, para 74.
7 Ibid., para 57.
dependent on production of food crops. This is amply borne out by profuse evidence we could call out from records.

The returns of the Jharia Mines Board of Health showed that in the third-quarter of 1918 the labour population of the Jharia collieries was about 65,000. With the failure of rains in September of that year the number began to rise; in the last quarter of the year—the harvesting months in which labour supply usually declined in a year of normal rains—the labouring population numbered 80,000 and in the first quarter of 1919, when the scarcity was acutely felt, it reached 1,00,000. But with an improvement in the agricultural situation in 1920 frequent complaints were again heard of shortage of labour.10

The relation between cropping season and labour supply is also demonstrated by the following figures.

Table 3.1: Average number of labourers employed daily in the Raniganj and Jharia coalfields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>88340</td>
<td>103581</td>
<td>96895</td>
<td>51582</td>
<td>61658</td>
<td>64968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>104038</td>
<td>119673</td>
<td>104364</td>
<td>61251</td>
<td>70967</td>
<td>70615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>105914</td>
<td>110853</td>
<td>98117</td>
<td>60302</td>
<td>67372</td>
<td>67467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>101384</td>
<td>103604</td>
<td>92575</td>
<td>57623</td>
<td>64181</td>
<td>68364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>100482</td>
<td>89982</td>
<td>85953</td>
<td>59894</td>
<td>63738</td>
<td>67469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>96068</td>
<td>86389</td>
<td>86587</td>
<td>57200</td>
<td>68794</td>
<td>61107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>81483</td>
<td>79479</td>
<td>78256</td>
<td>60814</td>
<td>54120</td>
<td>5263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>79060</td>
<td>75664</td>
<td>73225</td>
<td>51849</td>
<td>49821</td>
<td>66561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>98177</td>
<td>88244</td>
<td>88472</td>
<td>60805</td>
<td>65368</td>
<td>64014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>86299</td>
<td>84098</td>
<td>82885</td>
<td>67712</td>
<td>59567</td>
<td>69613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>70211</td>
<td>76177</td>
<td>81812</td>
<td>55041</td>
<td>59669</td>
<td>47466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>79763</td>
<td>86266</td>
<td>85329</td>
<td>69644</td>
<td>62608</td>
<td>62520</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: B.R. Seth, Labour in Indian Coal Industry, Bombay, 1940, p.34)

10 R.C.L., Vol. IV, part I, p.4
There is decline in the cropping season and maximum supply was noted during February and March. And this is further ascertained by labour supply in Loyabad colliery. So they were not permanent workers dependent on mining alone. So what were the causes that drove them to mines?

**Table-3.2: Figures for Loyabad colliery, 1928**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Tons of Coal cut</th>
<th>Miners including loaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>42,508</td>
<td>33,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>49,001</td>
<td>41,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>46,907</td>
<td>37,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>39,729</td>
<td>33,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>46,934</td>
<td>40,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>35,817</td>
<td>29,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>23,458</td>
<td>19,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>39,100</td>
<td>39,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>40,123</td>
<td>40,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>36,425</td>
<td>35,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>28,694</td>
<td>24,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>28,268</td>
<td>25,169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(sources: *R.C.L, Vol. IV, part I, p.15*)

The causes of migration of labourers to the coal mining industry were very extensively surveyed in Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission Report of 1940. Out of 1038 workers family surveyed by the Commission 448 family were landless labour who came in search of employment, 54 families had migrated to earn higher wages in the coal mines and it was noticed that pressure on land was responsible for migration of 163 families, 27 family left their native place to escape prosecution for debts and to earn to pay the landlord moneylenders their dues, and significantly 20 families attributed their migration to the decline of village industries. One interesting observation inferred by the Commission on account of large proportion of workers from
depressed classes in collieries was that they had come to work in coalmine to escape social indignities and social harassment.¹¹

According to Margaret Read increase of population, failure of the land to support entire family, higher cost of living, the burden of debt were the major factors for eviction of the aboriginal peoples of the country surrounding the coal mines to opt for work in the mine.¹²

**Hours of Work**

The coalmining industry was the least regulated industry before the passing of the first Indian Mining Act in 1901. Even then many aspect of condition of works in the mine were left unregulated. One such aspect was restriction of hours of works in the coalmine. The miner and loaders went inside the mine anytime and came out when they had raised sufficient tubs of coal for their needs. Commenting on hours of work of the miners and loaders, James Grundy, Inspector of mines, reported that, “the women and girls go into the mine with their male relations, at about 6 A.M in the morning in the hot weather, and at about 4 A.M. during the cold weather. The men continue working but the married females return home at about 7 A.M. to cook the food for their male relatives and themselves; and they take the food into the mine at about 9 A.M., and resume work again at about 10 A.M., after the meal is over.

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¹² Margaret Read, 127
and until the male leaves the mine." In 1906 during a survey in Seepbur and Katras (Jharia collieries) it was found that the miners generally worked from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. and then from 8 P.M. to 4 A.M., then he would go away for a day and night; this counted as 2 days work and 2 tubs were insisted upon, otherwise the miner was not paid. This was how a 24 hours shift was worked i.e. 24 hour on and 24 hours off. Though they stayed underground in a mine for very long hours but they cut coal in just sufficient quantity to fulfill their immediate needs. Most of the times they remained idle underground a mine smoking, sleeping, or waiting for the tub. The effective working hour was very less. But during the same survey it was found that in East Indian Railway Collieries, Giridih the work was done in shift of 8 hours. While in Bengal Coal Company, Rajhara in Palamau the mines were worked in two shifts a day, one from 8:30 or 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. and the other shift started at around 6 P.M. So there was no fixed hours of working in colleries by that time. This was again highlighted in Trehane Rees Report, who and recommended introduction of shift system in the coalmine.

14 Foley, appendix, 27 October
15 Foley and Fremantle Report, 1907, para.54.
16 Ibid., para 54.
17 Ibid., appendix, Giridih, 3rd September.
18 Ibid.,
19 *Report by Treharne Rees on Coal Mining in India*, 1919, p. 40.
The restriction on the hour of work for underground labour was imposed in India for the first time in 1923 by Indian Mines Act, 1923. The ratification by the Government of India in 1921 of the 60 hour week convention made it necessary to conform to the principle. The passing of the India Mines Act, 1923, limited the weekly hours to 60 hours for surface workers above ground and 54 hours for underground and working days were restricted to 6 days in a week. There was however no limitation of daily hours of work and in some cases the same worker remained underground for 16 or 17 hour at a stretch. The difficulty of checking hour of work without a daily limit, led to the enactment of an amending act in 1928. By this amendment it was made unlawful to employ any person in any mine for more than 12 hours in any period of 24 consecutive hours. It also provided that work should not be carried on in any mine for a period exceeding 12 hours in any consecutive period of 24 hours except by a system of shift. It was laid down that register of workers and their hour of work should be maintained in all mines.

But this was violated in many mines as found out by the Royal Commission of Labour, 1931. As Sabodhi, a Santhal in Loyabad colliery confessed that she used to go to work at 6 in the morning and return at 10 in the night. Even the Dhemo Main Colliery daily entry registers showed that in

21 Ibid., p.81.
22 Ibid., pp.81-82.
many cases the worker worked for 73, 67, 68 hours a week.\textsuperscript{24} Even reputed Jamadoba Colliery of Tata Iron and Steel Company Ltd. workers narrated that some time due to unavailability they had to stay down for 24 hours.\textsuperscript{25}

Therefore regulation of hours of work was not very effective in the mines. In the series of regulation the last regulation was signed by the Governor General on 21\textsuperscript{st} April 1935 and it came into force from 1\textsuperscript{st} October, 1935.\textsuperscript{26} According to this Act, hours of work inside mine was reduced to 9 hours from 12 hours but the weekly hours of work remained 54 hours.\textsuperscript{27} While for the surface worker, the weekly hours of work was reduced to 54 from 60 and their daily limit was reduced to 10 hours from 12 hours.\textsuperscript{28}

The wage structure of the coalmine workers was very complex and intricate. There was no principle or system for fixing the wage rate of the workers. Even in the adjacent collieries the rate paid for the same type of work varied noticeably. The reason behind the differential rate was attributed to complex geological factors, like the coal seam, its thickness, inclination, frequency of fault, the different working conditions, like depth of the pit, state of roof and floor of the working face, ventilation, distance between the shaft and the coalface, height and width of galleries and softness & hardness of the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.281.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p.105.
\textsuperscript{26} I.L.O, p.83
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
coal. Beside these natural factors other factors also played crucial role e.g. the extent of use of machinery and use of explosives (supplied by collieries or bought by workers), economic position of the collieries etc, different rate for cutting coal from the roof, sides and floor of the galleries.

Glen George in his written evidence submitted to the Indian Coal Committee, 1925 stated clearly that “The best recruiter is the colliery with the best underground condition, i.e., an easy face, tram lines, and practicability of earning money quickly.”

Keeping all these complexities aside it was between the worker and the employer or sardar that the wages were fixed arbitrarily. There were two methods of payment: first was piece rate and second was time-rate. Piece rate was more prevalent among the miners as they were accused of being an idle, careless and unsteady.

Labourers in the coal-fields were generally classified under two heads, namely, skilled and unskilled. They were further divided into two classes, namely, those who worked in quarries or open workings, and those who worked in inclines or pits. The second category of workers were further subdivided into two sub-categories, namely, underground workers such as coal-cutters and loaders, coal-cutting machinemen and their coolies, trammers,

29 B.R.Seth, pp. 61-62.
30 Ibid., p.62.
31 B.R.Seth, p.62.
bookmen, banksmen and onsetters, pump and haulage engine *khalasis*, line *mistries* and their *coolies*, bailing *coolies*, timber *mistries* and their *coolies*, drillers, shot filers etc. 33

Both the skilled and unskilled workers were either paid piece wages or time wages. In the Indian coal-fields piece-rate workers were in an overwhelming majority. They were about 80% of the total workers employed. 34 This predominance of piece-rate workers has been ascribed to the fact that the usual system of employment on the time-rate basis was not practicable in the case of underground workers since the working places were usually scattered over a large area and an efficient supervision of the work was difficult. In addition to this there was a special reason in the case of India and that was to be found in one of the characteristics of the labour available. The Indian labourer was admittedly unsteady, careless and idle. 35 It was estimated that out of 8 to 10 hours that he spent underground he hardly worked for five to six hours. It was felt that such cases it was not desirable to pay him time wages which was likely to encourage idleness and careless work.

Coal-cutters were generally paid per tub of coal or per cubic foot of the coal face cut. While the tub rate was popular in Bihar and Bengal, native workers favoured the cubic rate. Loaders and trammers were also generally

33 B.R.Seth, p.64.
34 These classifications are based on *Annual Report of Chief Inspector of mines wage section.*
paid per tub of the coal loaded or carried from the face to the bottom of the
shaft or from the pitmouth to the railway siding. Line mistries were also fre­
quently paid per set of three timbers erected to support roofs and sides of
underground passages, although in some cases they got weekly wages. Line mistries were also frequently paid per set of three timbers erected to support roofs and sides of underground passages, although in some cases they got weekly wages.36 Stone­cutters were mostly paid per cubic foot of the stone cut.37 As regards time rates, they were generally paid to the skilled workers and their coolies such as masons, drillers, shot firers, coal carters, onsetter, banksmen, and hook­men, though in some collieries they were found working on piece rates.38

Prior to the Annual Report of Chief Inspector of Mine, we don’t have any comprehensive data on wages. So the wage data are very scattered, episodic and incidental during the courtier phase. William Jones describing his earliest venture in coal mining in 1816 estimated that the cost of sinking a shaft worked out to be Rs 2-8 per foot. Even in 1830s Homfray also stated the same rate. Coming on the wage of workers during that period it was mentioned that the miner received from Rs. 3 to Rs 4 per month according to their merit.39

Commenting on the wage rates Blanford stated, the miner's pay was high. They were paid by the quantity of coal raised, and the usual price paid, in

36 B.R.Seth, p.65.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., pp. 62-64.
1859-60, was 5 pice (one anna and three pies) per bucket of 6 maunds of round coal; this had since been increased in some mines, if not in all. A good workman could get out 3 buckets a day, the average was about 2 ½, giving more than 3 annas a day. They are not paid for the rubble or dust coal produced. The boys and girls, who carried the coal from the hewers to the pits, and who were employed in picking coal, &c., above ground, received from 3 to 5 pice (9 pie to 1 anna 3 pie,) the “gin”-women 5 to 6 pie (1 anna 3 pie to 1 anna 6 pies,) according to their age and strength. But they did not obtain this every day, for they mentioned large number of holidays that they could work, on an average, twenty-three days in each month. Allowing for this, a family comprising a man, his wife and three children, would earn about 9 Rupees a month, three times higher than the pay of an ordinary peasant or cooly in the neighbouring districts. All looked well fed, even the children, but otherwise they were little, if at all, improved by receiving better pay than was usually the case with their countrymen. Till 1882 there was no improvement, in the bucket rate. It was only 6 pice per bucket and the earnings were falling due to lower output per day. In 1900 there was considerable improvement in the bucket rate. It was 2 Annas 3 pies per bucket. In 1909 and 1912 the rate was

40 Blanford, p.171.
41 B.P.Guha, p.48.
42 Blanford, p.172.
43 Ibid., p.171.
44 B.R.Seth, p.93.
45 Ibid.
found to be ranging near about 3 As. per bucket in the Ranigunj coal-field. In
the Jharia coal-field miners were getting 4 to 4 ½ As. per tub in 1900. It rose to
5 Annas in 1910 and 6 As. in 1914. Semi-skilled labourers got Annas 8 to
Annas 10 in 1910. Wagon loading coolies on the surface got As. 10 in 1900
and Annas 15 in 1910. Women earned Annas 3 in 1900 and Annas 4 to 5 in
1910. On the whole, rates of wages were on the rise in both the coal-fields.
This increase was due partly to the shortage of labour supply with the rapid
expanding Jharia mine, and partly due to the increasing cost of living and
partly to the increase in the pit-mouth value of coal.

The first appreciable increase in wages came in 1921, as a result of a
sustained movement by workers and the newly formed All India Trade Union
Congress. However its role was neglected by the owners. According to the
Memorandum of Indian Mining Association, submitted to the Royal
Commission on Labour in India the following wage increases were made:

1. Miners got an increase of 25% or 1 ½ anna per tub of 13 cwt.
2. Cutting and loading of stock coal rate was increased from As 3 to As 4
   or by 33%.

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 B.P. Guha, p. 41.
3. Female got an increase of one anna i.e they were to be paid 7 to 8 annas as instead of 6 to 7.

4. An increase of 30% on all wages upto and including 6 ½ annas per day; 25% for all getting 6 ½ upto and including 8 annas. per day or above Rs. 12 and upto including Rs. 12 per month ; 20% on all wages above 8 annas, and including 12 as. per day, or above Rs. 15 and including Rs. 22-8-0 per month; and 15% on all wages above Rs. 22-8-0 and upto and including Rs. 30 per month ; all wages above Re. 1 upto and including Rs. 2 per day above Rs. 30 and up to and including Rs. 60 per month ; 5% on all wages above Rs. 60 per month.\(^{53}\)

The Indian Mining Federation, submitted before the Royal Commission, 1931, that Indian colliery owners had granted an increase of 100%, much higher than that of the European Association.\(^{54}\) The increase was granted at a higher rate otherwise they would not have been able to attract sufficient labour for their collieries. This was to give the worker the profit of boom period after 1919.

But the boom period was short lived and continued till 1924, so the wage fell again till a slight rise in wages was noticed in 1937 after women were prohibited to work underground the mine.\(^{55}\)

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53 B.P. Guha, pp. 49-50.
55 B.R. Seth, p. 97.
But during 1923-26, the earnings of the miners went down considerably, mainly because of the fall in the prices of coal (as shown below). This created an economic pressure on the industry and the burden was immediately transferred to the workers. The mine-owners responded with immediate reduction the wages of workers.56

The Royal Commission on Labour in 1931 observed: ‘The miners are generally thoroughly improvident.’57 According to an estimate made by Dewan Chaman Lall in 1932, the coal worker filled a daily average of 1.33 tubs a day or in the case of any underground work, 1.43 tubs a day.58 As the average rate of payment was about seven annas or less per tubs, the average miner got less than ten annas for a full working day.59 The Chief Inspector of Mines, in his written statement to the Royal Commission on Labour had estimated that the average wage of a coal miner was thirteen annas per day, but Chaman Lall contested this figure. According to him, the Chief Inspector of Mines was wrong in not taking into consideration the fact that the tub payment was on the basis of two persons drawing wages for the same trip i.e. “the miner and his wife or the loader and the woman working with him.”60

58 Dewan Chaman Lall, Cootie, The Story of Labour and Capital in India, Lahore, 1932, p. 49.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Table-3.3: Value (per ton) at pitmouth of coal extracted from mines in Jharia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Price (Rs. / A. /P.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>6/12/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>3/15/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>3/10/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>2/11/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>2/8/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Report of the Coal Mining Committee, 1937, p.234.)

Now, let us assess the developments which took place during the look period of 1924 to 1938 to get a better picture. Table-3.3 deals with wages of the period, 1924 to 1938. This period could be divided into three phases. The first phase from 1924 to early 1927 was a period of decline in wage, decline in productions, decline in the pit mouth value of the coal (as shown in Table-3.3). And as usual the workers bore the maximum brunt of the decline and consequently their decline was proportional to decline in price of the pit mouth value.

The second phase 1927 to 1929 was a period of stability as can be seen from the Table-3.3. There were also slight increases in the production of coal in some mines. This phase shows that there was the increase in superior grade coal, which was mined so as to find an easy market. The owners decided to bring out only what could be sold, leaving the rest underground in such a state that it was not only irrecoverable at any subsequent date, so the best grade of

---

coal was bought to the market so that it could find ready buyers. This period was known as of 'slaughter mining'.\textsuperscript{62} The directors of the larger firm stationed at Calcutta were more interested in raising the production, on the question of rise in the wages the forced to trade depression.\textsuperscript{63} However despite the depression of trade, the salaries of superior staff were raised, the profits of intermediate agents were just the same as before, and the companies were still making more than their due share of profits.\textsuperscript{64} The rates for contractors were reduced, but in no case has it been followed by an all-round reduction in wages.\textsuperscript{65} This reduction in rates had invariably cut the wages of labour.\textsuperscript{66}

The third phase coincided with the period of Great Depression and this phase continued till 1936. This period had a leveling effect on all the factors of production. Though for the workers it was calamitous. The falling wages which took a breather for a while (the wage in Jharia was 0-13-6 from 1928-30) once again started its downward journey and reached its nadir in 1936 (in Jharia it dropped to 0-7-6, while Giridih it dropped to 0-6-0).\textsuperscript{67} The fall in wages could be explained by fall in demand for coal. The fall in demand resulted in collieries trying to restrict their output by reducing the working

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.,p.1517
\item\textsuperscript{63} Report of the Coal Mining Committee, 1937, p.23.
\item\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{65} Siba Kali Bose, R.C.L., Vol. IV, part I, p.192.
\item\textsuperscript{66} Report of the Coal Mining Committee, 1937, p.27.
\item\textsuperscript{67} B.R. Seth, p. 102.
\end{itemize}
days.\textsuperscript{68} So there was an oversupply in the workforce in the mining area and workers clamoured for jobs.\textsuperscript{69} This coupled with removal of female labour from coal mines led to huge fall in wages of the miners’ family income. It was also a period of agricultural depression which further complicated the problem of surplus workforce who could not move back to farming. This gave the capitalist an open field to exploit the helpless workers.\textsuperscript{70}

The role of managing agency and their mode of functioning is described vividly in Coal Committee Report of 1936, where citing a speech of a Chairman of a group of companies without naming him has been given and this is worth quoting in full with his observations in between: ‘Coming now to the figures, outputs from our nine companies increased in the ten years 1925-35 by about 80 per cent. The companies concerned are among the most important and progressive, and are all representative in the economic sense of the term. Average raising costs per ton decreased during the same period by 46 per cent, and it is remarkable how all the factors (except depreciation and interest charges) making production costs have fallen in much the same proportion. Remuneration of superior staffs has come down on an average by 41 per cent, but this includes 10% retrenchment cut . . . Wages of labour have fallen by 45 per cent . . . If accidents involving large loss of life continue, the diminution in the available supply of labour may be such as to embarrass the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Report of Coal mining Committee, 1936, p. 23
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{70} B.R. Seth, pp. 97-98, B.P. Guha, pp. 16-17
\end{itemize}
coal industry. The efficiency of the labour has not apparently deteriorated . . . Risks have been taken in India which would not have been possible with less ignorant labour. As was to be expected perhaps, depreciation and interest charges have fallen most of all . . . The dividends paid by these particular companies have improved in almost every instance and indicate that, whatever may have happened to the property or the machinery or the labour force, the advisability of keeping the share-holders content has not been lost sight of. This may also be due to the fact that in some cases the remuneration of the managing agents depends on the dividends and bonuses paid to the shareholders. . . . out of 66 coal companies mentioned in Calcutta Stock and Share List, 32 declared no dividend 9 (nine) not reported, one company paid 65 per cent, two 22 ½ %, one 18 ¾ percent, one 17 6/7 percent, two 15% and remainder paid between 2 ½ and 12% dividend. In short, to use a sporting metaphor, the coal trade in India has been rather like a race in which profit has al-ways come in first with safety a poor second, sound methods an also ran and national welfare a dead horse, entered perhaps, but never likely to start.'^71

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Table-3.4: Increase in Production of Superior Grade Coal and its Declining Prices at Jharia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1935</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual output in tons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9,229,040</td>
<td>10,346,015</td>
<td>10,753,858</td>
<td>9,245,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of total British India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.41</td>
<td>55.14</td>
<td>47.41</td>
<td>43.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of selected and grade 1 extracted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of grade II and lower extracted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average pitmouth value per ton in rupee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-10-0</td>
<td>6-13-0</td>
<td>3-10-0</td>
<td>2-8-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average price paid per ton of coal delivered into wagon in rupees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-8-6</td>
<td>9-3-6</td>
<td>3-11-0</td>
<td>2-11-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No of mines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>335</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Report of Coal Mining Committee, 1937, p. 22)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mining field</th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th>Open workers</th>
<th>Surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>Loader</td>
<td>Skilled labour</td>
<td>Unskilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>1-3-0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0-15-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>1-4-0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-4-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-14-3</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-11-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-13-3</td>
<td>0-11-9</td>
<td>0-14-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-13-6</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-14-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-8-6</td>
<td>0-7-3</td>
<td>0-10-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-9-6</td>
<td>0-8-3</td>
<td>0-10-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-7-6</td>
<td>0-6-3</td>
<td>0-9-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-9-0</td>
<td>0-7-3</td>
<td>0-12-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-9-6</td>
<td>0-8-3</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-9-9</td>
<td>0-11-6</td>
<td>0-12-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: B. R. Seth, p.104-105)
During the Great Depression (1929-33), and the cost of living had risen and the miners' earnings continued to fall. This continued till 1935-36. Thus, the miners' wages in 1936 were lower than they were in 1920-21, while both the cost of living and the profits of the industry rose continuously. The Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines made it clear that the average income of a miner per week was only Rs. 2.72

Again, the daily income specified above was also subject to many deductions which can hardly be ignored in estimating the real cash earnings of the workers. Coal-cutters and loaders were punished for loading shale in tubs and for under-loading tub (They worked for a while in silence, then Jiwan straightened himself and wiped his forehead and he was reported to have said, 'This coal has much shale in it, Parbhu. We shall not get the full money for this tub. The munshi will deduct money from the contractor, and he will take it from us. You remember last week you had a tub deducted from the seven which you filled ?' 'Yes, I do remember. But it is always so. We work and there is money deducted; or we would work and there are no tubs').73 It is not unusual to see coal-cutters losing one full or half tub because it used to contain three or four stones. 'They are also fined for robbing pillars, which, in not a few case is inspired by the contractor's men who are anxious to get the maximum raising for their masters. Fines are also imposed if workers are found in the prohibited areas or sleeping underground or for misconduct.'

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72 A.R.C.I.M., 1937, p.4
73 Margaret Read, p. 127
workers are also fined for coming late. The usual form that the fine takes is cash and it ranges from annas 5 to annas 8 per fault and even higher than that sometimes; Frequently coal-cutters and loaders are fined by being refused work for a day or two or by deduction of one or two tubs out of the total number of tubs of coal loaded or cut in a week.\textsuperscript{74}

Further, the labourers of collieries owned by the Cutchies are compelled to contribute something out of their income to a supposed fund for Gowshala or cow-homes and Kalipuja. Usually a deduction of 3 pies per rupee was made on this account. In most cases this money used to go into the owners' pocket instead of to the Gowshala funds.\textsuperscript{75} Some collieries like the Giridih Coal Company had organised welfare funds. A male worker contributed 6 pies and a woman 3 pies per rupee of their weekly income.\textsuperscript{76} Though it was a useful contribution it could not be ignored in estimating the net cash earnings of the worker.\textsuperscript{77}

The last but not the least important deduction was the expense that the workers incurred in greasing the palms of their immediate superiors. From sardars up to the managers, all were recipients of such bribes. Labourers had not only to suffer the burden of what they themselves paid to secure their jobs

\textsuperscript{74} There are innumerable instances of reduction of wages in Royal Commission of Labour, Vol. IV, part-II, in session with labour
\textsuperscript{75} B.L.E.C., Vol. I, 1940, para 329.
\textsuperscript{76} B.R.Seth, p.78.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
or to get their women employed but they were also forced to share the bribery expenses of the *sardars* and contractors through whom they were paid.\textsuperscript{78}

*Sardars* paid to the overmen and other members of the supervising staff to ensure working places, to enjoy better commission on every tub of coal loaded and cut by their workmen. Contractors paid to the company officials to maintain their contract and to get financial help from the company.\textsuperscript{79} But on an average 10% of the weekly or monthly earnings of the workers was deduced without running any risk of over-estimation.\textsuperscript{80}

The value of all economic benefits given to the workers were calculated by the Indian Mining Federation, a representative body of colliery owners, in their memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour was as follows\textsuperscript{81}:

\textbf{Table-3.6: Value of all economic benefits given to the workers}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Rs. & a. & p. \\
\hline
Fuel & 1 & 8 & 0 \\
Travelling & 1 & 0 & 0 \\
\textit{Bakshis} & 1 & 8 & 0 \\
Housing & 2 & 0 & 0 \\
Kerosene & 0 & 8 & 0 \\
Total & 6 & 8 & 0 (per month) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 79

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{R.C.L.}, Vol. IV, part I, p.216
But B.R. Seth contests these and according to him this cannot be more than Rs. 4 an. 13 and 0 p. per month.\textsuperscript{82}

But during the Second World War, when the demand for coal was increasing the production started falling particularly after 1943. The sudden drop in production caused alarm in the ranks of coal producers. Two conferences were held of the Mine Owners’ Association under the chairmanship of the Labour Member of the Executive Council of the Government of India in October and December 1943:\textsuperscript{83}

1. Laying down on the scale of ration to be supplied compulsorily by all collieries to workers employed by them.

2. Adoption of comprehensive scheme for welfare of workers.

3. Increase of wages.

As regard to ration following provision was introduced from summer of 1944.

a. Food grain ration of 6 seers a week for each man and women both on surface and underground; 3 ½ seers for each women dependent (non workers) and 1 ¾ for each children dependent (between 2 and 12 years)

b. Rice to be at least 5/6 of the total ration and the remaining wheat, atta or millet.

\textsuperscript{82} B.R. Seth, p. 83
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. A.B. Ghosh, pp. 189-90.
c. Full ration can be claimed for minimum four days’ work a week and pro-rata ration for less than four days a week.

As the production of the mines were not raised to the expected levels, a revised scheme was introduced in colliery area in Bengal and Bihar, from May 1, 1945 known as the “Young Plan” following which a mine of workers was entitled to draw ration in two parts as follows:

a. Basic standard ration supplied at controlled rates: 4 seers per week for each worker, 4 seers for each adult dependent, 2 seer for each child between 2 to 12

b. ½ a seer rice to be supplied free to each worker for each attendance.

But when this scheme did not help production and criticism of the proprietors’ association and on the face of serious shortage of food supply the free supply was reduced from half a seer to quarter seer.\(^{84}\)

As regard to dearness allowances of 50% of the basic wage prevailing in the year 1939 was given to all those, whose monthly income was up to 30 Rs per month.\(^{85}\) The following was the scale of dearness allowance adopted by the Indian Mining Association from 1st July 1945.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{85}\) Nirban Basu, p. 100.
Table-3.7: Scale of dearness allowance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic wage</th>
<th>Dearness allowances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to Rs. 30 per month</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 31 to 50</td>
<td>40% with a minimum of Rs. 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 100</td>
<td>35% with min. of Rs. 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Latter in the year under Government’s new guidance, a new wage scale was adopted for miners/loaders based on a 36 c. ft per tub. This was a basic wage of 8 annas per tub plus 4 annas per day as retention wage.\(^{86}\) This meant that the miner would get Rs. 1 and Rs. 2 as per tub a day.

\(^{86}\) *A.R.C.I.M.*, p.30.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mining field</th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th>Open workers</th>
<th>surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>Loader</td>
<td>Skilled labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-9-6</td>
<td>0-8-6</td>
<td>0-7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-9-3</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-8-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-11-0</td>
<td>0-10-0</td>
<td>0-8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-13-0</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>1-2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>1-2-3</td>
<td>1-1-0</td>
<td>1-3-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-14-6</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
<td>1-4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>2-5-0</td>
<td>2-1-0</td>
<td>2-2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>2-1-9</td>
<td>2-11-0</td>
<td>2-3-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A.R.C.I.M. of respective years)
Table 3.9: Increase in wages in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coalfields</th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>Loader</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>Loaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-9-6</td>
<td>0-8-6</td>
<td>0-11-6</td>
<td>0-7-9</td>
<td>0-6-6</td>
<td>0-9-3</td>
<td>0-6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>0-9-3</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-13-9</td>
<td>0-8-3</td>
<td>0-6-0</td>
<td>0-6-6</td>
<td>0-6-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-11-0</td>
<td>0-10-0</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
<td>0-8-9</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>0-6-8</td>
<td>0-10-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-13-0</td>
<td>0-10-9</td>
<td>1-2-3</td>
<td>0-10-6</td>
<td>0-6-0</td>
<td>0-6-0</td>
<td>0-6-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>increase or</td>
<td>decrease in</td>
<td>wages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>10.44%</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
<td>8.36%</td>
<td>11.85%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>37.13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>27.97%</td>
<td>29.245%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-13.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>1-2-3</td>
<td>1-1-0</td>
<td>1-3-3</td>
<td>0-14-3</td>
<td>0-15-3</td>
<td>1-2-0</td>
<td>1-1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>0-14-6</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
<td>1-4-6</td>
<td>0-12-9</td>
<td>0-14-9</td>
<td>1-6-0</td>
<td>0-12-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>increase or</td>
<td>decrease in</td>
<td>wages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
<td>42.15%</td>
<td>71.56%</td>
<td>80.72%</td>
<td>151.14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>13.286%</td>
<td>58.49%</td>
<td>266.66%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A.R.C.I.M. of respective years)
During the Second World War with the declining output, there was government intervention in labour recruitment\(^\text{87}\) and other intervention as seen above to keep the labour contended. And the wage tables for that period showed a tremendous increase in wage rate and the production bonus with system of rationing may look very rosy to the naïve eyes when this increase is tallied with the real wages of the workers till 1946 was well below it. It was only in 1947 that we see any semblance of equilibrium. But this was not due to any generosity but was hard fought battle by the workers as would be shown in the Chapter 5.

**Table-3.10: value of money**

(Base: 1939= 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Money- wage</th>
<th>Real wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: B.M.Prasad, pp.230-231)

\(^{87}\) Formation of GLO, discussed in chapter 2
CHAPTER - 4
QUALITY OF LIFE IN COAL MINES

The coal mining in India during the colonial period was highly labour intensive industry. Throughout the period of our study the industry was plagued by irregular supply of labour. There had been attempts to get a settled workforce completely dependent on mining for their livelihood. But due to nature of industry (violent cycle of boom and depression), the pathetic working condition and the equally pathetic residential arrangement and the low wages, the industry could never a settled working population totally divorced from agriculture.

Among the earliest mining proprietors, there are some indirect evidences that William Jones tried to have a settled labour force around the vicinity of the mine. For this he took 99 bigha of land on lease from the zamindar to build six large huts.¹ Then we have seen that the zamindary system was most prominent system of recruitment of labour in the early history of coal mining in Raniganj. The earliest comprehensive report on the labour force in coal mining gives evidences of settled mining population in certain mines.² A committee appointed in 1917 by the Bihar and Orissa Government to enquire into the housing of labourers in the Bihar coal fields estimated that only 15 per cent of the colliery labourers in the Jharia fields, mostly Santals, were settled in the

¹ H.D.G. Homfray, p. 151.
² L.E.C., 1896.
sense that they had been provided with land for cultivation and had built their own houses on the collieries. Of the remainder, 75 per cent were found to come for several weeks or months and live in the *dhowras*, while rest lived in their own villages within a few miles of the mines and trekked to their work daily or when it suited them. The residential facility provided by the coal companies were highly inadequate, too crowded, and devoid of any amenities. The space of area of the houses was very small.

In the Jharia field, a detailed survey of 1923 found that the following are the space available to miners in their allotted house.

**Table-4.1: Space available to miners in their allotted house**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space Available</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between 900 and 700 cft.</td>
<td>7214</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 700 and 600 cft.</td>
<td>5466</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 600 and 500 cft.</td>
<td>5424</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 500 and 400 cft.</td>
<td>2843</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 400 cft.</td>
<td>1450</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22397</td>
<td><strong>47%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: D. Buchanan, p.390.)

This was a clear violation of the instructions of The Jharia Mines Board of Health, as it had laid down minimum floor surface of 33 square feet and stipulated an air space of 333 cft was to be allowed for each adult and half space for each children under 12 and the minimum dimension of the room should be such that a family of 2 adults, 2 children under 12 can be

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accommodated in it. The Board standard of 10x10 sq. ft. which was highly inadequate was also disregarded in case of temporary hut built by miners themselves with a floor space of even 70 sq. ft.\textsuperscript{4} R.K. Mukerjee specifies that cubic space for an adult should be at least 500 ft. and the cubic space for a family should not be than 2500 ft.\textsuperscript{5}

The same survey of 1923 showed that 7 per cent of the quarters were in ‘ruinous condition’ and unfit for habitation.\textsuperscript{6} Worse conditions were found in 1938. In 1938 about 34% of the houses in Bihar coalfields where family budget were collected were found to have leaking houses. Whereas, in the Joint Bokaro and Bhadruchuk coalfields had more than 80% of the houses had leaking roofs.\textsuperscript{7}

The miner and his family would like to have a room separate from that of another family for privacy instead of sharing the same room with others. ‘These dhowrahs had no windows, so that when the doors were shut, as it would be during the cold of the night or the heat of the day, the room would have no fresh air. If one compared the dhowrahs with the bathrooms of the Burrahsahibs, one would certainly choose to live in the bathrooms than in these pigsties’.\textsuperscript{8} The housing, as provided, was insufficient and unsuitable. The

\textsuperscript{4} R.K. Mukerjee, p. 305.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p305
\textsuperscript{6} Buchanan, p. 390.
\textsuperscript{7} B.R.Seth,
\textsuperscript{8} Mr. Siba Kali Bose, Indian Colliery Employees’ Association, Jharia.
rooms were, as a rule, overcrowded. The claim of the mine owners that they do not find any difficulty in making the labour utilize what accommodation is provided was not untrue.⁹

Table-4.2: Extent of overcrowding in Bihar coal-fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>No. of houses</th>
<th>No. of adults per room</th>
<th>No. of children per room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhaga</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Bokaro</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamadoba</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Kujma</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bharuchak</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During B.L.E.C. survey it was found that there were 29000 dowrahs for about lakh of workers.

The dowrahs provided by the employers in Jharia were generally of several different types such as of country tile roof, Raniganj tile roof, arched roof, plastered flat roof and tin roof dowrahs which accounted for 45%, 11%, 39%, 2.2% and 1.5% respectively. Except arched roof and flat roof houses which are generally pucca masonry work, all these are built up of mud and brick. In Giridih collieries, the workers were given only the building materials, such as bricks, bamboos, mud and tiles and they have to build their own

⁹ Ibid.
houses. As regards the account nearly 85% of the families were living in one room, 10% in 2 rooms, 3% in 3 rooms and 2% in four room houses.  

Every ordinary worker was given a one room house whether he was alone or had family. The same room was used to serve as store and bed room. 93% of the houses had verandah of 5’ x 10’ or 5’ x 12’ which were frequently used as kitchen. Where there is no verandah the workers cook their food in the open, or in front of the door or in the room itself.

At the end of the war the workers’ dwellings were still in a miserable condition. There were no latrines, no bath-rooms, no drains to carry filthy water and no proper arrangement to remove the refuse in the majority of the collieries. There were no proper arrangements for drinking water either. The workers fetched water from wells and river. Taps, wherever available, were not adequate in number and in some cases one tap served as many as 500 persons. The average number of dhowras in 1944 in Jharia was 33,736 for 101457 labourers in that coalfield.

An enquiry made sometime in the mid-1940s into 1,030 miners’ families in Bihar revealed that 440 families or 42 per cent never left the coal fields for visit to the village and 57 families were found to be visiting their family only once in three years or at longer intervals. Thus 48 per cent of the

10  B.L.E.C, para 209.
11  Ibid., para 210
12  B.M. Prasad, p. 239
labour force covered by the enquiry might be considered to have permanently settled in the coalfields of Bihar.

The larger part of the life of the mine workers outside work was passed in overcrowded, ill ventilated and bleak ‘standardised’ housing provided by the employers of the dhowrahs, the makeshift huts constructed by the workers themselves, considered by the 1946 LIC as “mere apologies for homes”. The dhowrahs having a standing floor space of 10 sq.ft. usually quartered 4 to 7 persons and often even 12 to 15 persons. The Commission reported: “The existing atmosphere and outlook in the mining settlements is so drab and dreary that few human beings would have any inducement to continue for long spells of time in these.”

Sanitation was far from satisfactory and left much room for improvement. Surroundings were dirty and unclean with no arrangement for sewage removal drains and if at all they existed, were not cleaned; water-supply was meagre. There were no arrangements for bathing or washing; latrines were practically non-existent; as a result thereof, periodic epidemics were frequent. These dhowrahs were visited regularly by cholera, smallpox and plague. And each year it claimed a large toll from these inhabitants. In 1905, Jharia was severely affected by plague. The insanitary condition of the residential area was proverbial. The houses constructed for the workers were like cells built in continuation and all of them were overcrowded. So once

13 RCIM, 1907, p.22.
14 Geology and Mineral, A, No3-4, March, 1910
plague makes an appearance in this filthy habitation it spreads very fast.\textsuperscript{15} Cholera being water-borne disease was endemic in these areas. As the workers were not provided with any system of supply of proper drinking water tanks and wells were the only sources of water supply. When the stagnant water in tank is used for washing cattle, human beings and clothes as well, the level of contamination may not be very difficult to understand. Some individual company in Jamadoba had tried to supply filtered water to its worker but this was an individual effort. In 1908, Jharia experienced severe cholera epidemic which led to great shortage of labour in midst of a coal boom.\textsuperscript{16} Small-pox breaks in a major epidemic form once a year during winter and runs its epidemic form till checked by the advance of the hot weather. This was the condition of the area where the workers lived and this hardly was tempting for any new arrival, as in the adjoining areas it had earned a very bad reputation. Under this condition the Bengal sanitary bill was passed in 1910.\textsuperscript{17} So we can judge that the coal never tried to provide the workers with a decent with any basic amenities.

\textbf{Underground mining conditions}

The Indian coal mines enjoyed decidedly favourable natural conditions. In the early days they were exceedingly shallow, the seams were exceptionally

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid. p. 4
\item \textsuperscript{16} Heslop, Presidential address, \textit{T.M.G.I.}, 1910, p.22.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Geology and Mineral}, A, No3-4, March, 1910, p.7.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
thick and workable, and during most of the year there was relatively little trouble from excess water. Yet labour in the mines was not regulated until 1901 and conditions were often very bad for the workers. About 1900, Lord Curzon found the conditions in the mines far from satisfactory and out of his investigations resulted the first Indian Mines Act. Lord Curzon says:

I . . . asked Mr. Reader, the Officiating Inspector, for a special report. . . What he told me was that, in his many inspections he had repeatedly found an utter disregard for human life, resulting partly from ignorance, and partly from carelessness, and that many mines were conducted upon such inhuman lines—these were his own words—that some immediate remedial action ought to be taken... In many of the mines the head gear and winding apparatus were unsafe. Elsewhere there was no attempt at proper ventilation. Frequently the managers were absent, and the work was proceeding under no sort of control... In one case, in a Bengal coal-mine, Mr. Reader found two hundred and fifty people (men, women, children, and infants) at work, where he reported the ventilation as nil, the air as foul in the extreme with smoke and gases, and the conditions as unfit for human existence... In two other gaseous mines, where the managers were absent, and incompetent substitutes had been left in charge, he found huge fires kindled in the working galleries, and naked lights suspended from the roof where the cutting was going on. . . .
Again, he says that infants are allowed to be carried and kept to sleep in foul places incompatible with health or safety.\textsuperscript{18}

By this time any effort by the government to regulate the working or the living conditions was opposed on the pretext of interference. This \textit{laissez-faire} policy of the government exposed the workers to worst form of exploitation by the management in the working conditions and worst housing around the mining areas. The coalfield earned bad reputation for diseases in the surrounding country.\textsuperscript{19} Coalmining has always been believed to be a dangerous, dirty, risky and hazardous job. This could easily be shown by the working condition of the mines.

The working condition in mine was highly deplorable. The Kerosene lamps used in many mines gave insufficient light, the stink emanating from Kerosene oil ‘\textit{kupis}’ the offensive smell of explosives the coaldust in the air knee deep water in many pits, to hack coal with a heavy pick, and to carry baskets of coal weighing 60 lbs. and over in such an atmosphere leave on him incapable of increasing his output and earning a higher wage with the present rate.\textsuperscript{20} Even the pits underground were not provided with latrines and urinals and there were no facilities for even drinking water; the miners had to quench their thirst by using the water dripping from the seam. All compounded made

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} C.f L.Fraser, \textit{India Under Curzon and After}, London, 1911, pp. 328-29.  \\
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Geology and Mineral}, A, No. 3-4, March, 1910, p.3.  \\
\textsuperscript{20} S.A. Dange, \textit{Death Pit in our land}, London, 1945, p.12
\end{flushright}
the underground unbearable for the workers. In 1900, when Lord Curzon visited the mines in Jharia, he was latter to remark upon the "utter disregard for human life" the unspeakable condition of work and the total lack of regulation. "Up to that time" wrote his biographer, "Indian Mines had never been properly inspected, and accidents were not properly reported. The Government...had woven a wonderful web in which to enmesh mining prospectors; they had done nothing for the protection of people who worked in mines already existing." Of sanitation, they politely but firmly decline to spend any money in their practical application. The Committee formed to look into the sanitary condition of coalfields in Bengal stated: 'The firms of managing agents in Calcutta are also not altogether blameless in this policy of laissez-faire, in as much as they purposely "turn the blind eye" towards all advice and warning and while professing in the principle of sanitation, politely but firmly decline to spend any money in their practical application.'

The lack of latrines and urinals forced thousands of miners to ease themselves in any secluded place in the pits. Margret Read stated that besides fouling the air, this lack of sanitation causes the soil to be impregnated with hookworm which infects the bare footed miners easily through their feet. This exposure to infection continues all the time they are in the mine, while the

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22 L.Fraser, pp.328-29.
23 Geology and Mineral, File no. 16, March, 1910
eating of food underground is an additional source of infection.\textsuperscript{24} Investigations into hookworm were made during the years 1918-1922. The underground water of 79 pits and inclines in 29 collieries was examined for living larvae and 75\% of the cases were found to be infected. The number of persons examined was 5,689 and the percentage of infection was 68.85 in collieries.\textsuperscript{25} According to information supplied to the Royal Commission 90\% of the adult workers in the Jharia mining area were infected. For the improvement of sanitation underground in coalmines the Royal Commission for Labour suggested that bucket latrines should be provided at convenient spots and a small staff of sweeper employed to keep the latrines clean and to remove the content of the bucket to the surface daily for final disposal.\textsuperscript{26} But this proposal was never implemented on the pretext that the native workers are used to ease themselves in open and hence this would not have the desired result.

The other basic requirement of deep mining was the insufficiency of light. As very few mines used electricity for lighting the gallery the only source was naked light. Miners used kupis with kerosene oil or castor oils while working on coalface which gave very insufficient light and also added foul odour. About a quarter of all mines suffered from forms of miner's Nystagmus.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} A.B.Ghosh, \textit{Coal and Industry in India}, Delhi, 1978, p. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Industrial Labour in India}, Geneva, 1938, p. 190.
\item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India}, 1931, p. 15.
\end{itemize}
a nervous disease by deficient lighting. The damp atmosphere, continuous exposure to coaldust, highly exertive nature of work all had a telling effect on the health of the workers, with large number of workers suffering from respiratory diseases which are the curse of miners. Miners also faced a high risk of contracting lung diseases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuberculosis:</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1928</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A survey in the 1950 concluded that 6.6 percent were suffering from tuberculosis and 18.8 percent of the underground workers were suffering from pneumonocosis. So we can at least assume that the conditions would not have been better.

One of the basic features of the Indian mining industris loose technical composition of mining capital. Equipments in many mines remain old fashioned as the owners refused to invest in improving technique. Observers pointed out that cheap labour reduced the effectiveness of machines. This factor coupled with incommensurability of loading and transport facilities with potential output (most underground loading was done by hand, even where there were cutting machines in operation and seasonal shortages of wagon persisted) reduced the economic viability of machines. Not only that the

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28 Ibid. p. 64.
mechanisation for increasing the output was slow and halting but even the basic requirement for safety of workers in deep mining was very insufficient.

Walter Ness, Chief Mining Engineer, recommended that as mines were getting deeper, the government should concern itself with the problem of adequate ventilation. Medlicott (Director of G.S.I) wrote a supporting letter on this point: ‘In many of the mines I have visited, there are conditions of suffocation. In the smaller mines where modern machinery is not at all used both above and below ground, ventilation becomes unsatisfactory even at a small distance from the shaft. In about 420 collieries in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa producing about 95 percent of coal, there only 47 mechanical ventilators. The number of mechanical ventilator used in coal mines in 1930 was just 83 which rose to 158 in 1945. Similarly was the case of safety lamps, a basic necessity for deep and gassy mines. In 1930 the number of safety lamps used in coalmining industry was 22,654 for 126.6 thousands of workers working underground; this number rose to 46,268 against the number of underground labourers employed being 152 thousands. These two mechanical devices not only showed very slow mechanisation but also very low degree of

30 Ibid.
33 A. B. Ghosh, p.154
34 Ibid, p.156.
concern for workers' safety. As the mines were being worked to greater depth the ventilation was sure to deteriorate further and the chances of gases erupting enhanced very greatly.

Mechanization

The earliest coal mines in India worked by out crop of a seam of coal as in quarries. It was the first stage of almost every mine in the field. The second evolved method was extraction of coal from pits but this method was not resorted to, until the workings became so deep, that it was inconvenient any longer to extract the coal from quarries, or until the water could no longer be kept under by the primitive methods adopted. In most of the smaller collieries, whether worked by pits or by quarries, the water is raised by the “terah” system commonly employed in Bengal for irrigation and for wells. The principle of the common “terah”, a long horizontal pole or bamboo, working on the top of two vertical poles, and having a bucket, or an earthen pot, attached to its longer end by a vertical bamboo, while its shorter end bear a stone or a mass of mud as a counterpoise, is hauled down by ropes. Another plan, less used, is to haul up a skin bucket over a pulley. Mat scoops, worked by two men, are occasionally used, especially in steep underground galleries, if the lift does not exceed 2 or 3 feet, such small lifts being repeated at frequent intervals, and the water being, in most cases, ultimately raised to the surface by the “terah”.  

35 Blanford, pp. 161-162.
The tools used by the workmen are crowbars, hammers of large size, and wedges. But in Chinakuri picks were used. The pick consisted of a slightly curved bit of iron tipped with steel and was single headed and badly balanced. The handle was round and roughly made of green tough wood. The wedges were shapeless piece of any kind of old iron forged up. The hammers were likewise. The crowbar was one inch round iron -4"-6" long. The coal, instead of being "holed under", or cut away at the bottom, and wedged down from above, is cut out above, and then broken away from below, mainly by crowbars and wedges. This plan was probably introduced by Betts and ordinarily pursued in all mines. 37

The prevailing method of raising coal was by buckets operated by a gin on the surface and manipulated by from 24 to 48 women. This method was slow, and only a very limited output could be obtained from one pit during working hours. The coal was brought to the pit bottom in baskets by the men or their women, and kept in stacks; each gang appropriating a place to stack coal till their turn came to raise it. This system entailed double work.38

The first mechanical plant used in Indian coalmines would appear to have been steam of which records exist showing their existence in 1832.39 In the greater number of collieries, women are employed to drive a "gin", which is

36 Agabeg, p. 23.
37 Ibid, p. 165.
38 E.C. Agabeg, presidential address, 1914, p. 21.
39 Barraclough, p. 143.
merely a modification for hand labour, of the common “horse gin” or “horse whim” of British collieries and metallic mines. The rope passes round a circular wooden drum of the usual form, to the vertical axis of which, at the lower portion, are attached four arms, each of which is driven or pulled by from six to nine women and girls, of whom, from twenty-six to thirty-six, more frequently the latter number, are employed upon one gin. In 1852 it was recorded that a steam engine of 10 HP was capable of raising 600 blocks in two shafts as compared to 300 blocks raised by 32 women and was hoped that by installing a more powerful engine the women would no longer be required for that work.  

He was reported that one colliery had a small Beam engine that did the combined work of pumping and winding. A pulley from the main shaft of the engine was coupled up by belting to another wheel on the drum shaft. It took three men to run this master-piece. One at the boiler stop valve, one at the engine, and the third man attended the drum and brakes. Ship's windlasses were a common form of engine for winding.

All borings for proving the field were done by hand, and a boring anything over 250 feet was considered a fine performance. Sinking operations were just as primitive. The explosive used was country powder which gave off volumes of smoke and did very little work for the quantity used. With this poor  


41 Frank Agabeg, p.21.
class of explosive sinking operations were slow and dyke driving was tedious. The coal being very shallow, one or two extra pits did not entail much expenditure. It was also cheaper to sink for ventilation than erect elaborate ventilating plant.42

No lamps were used; the miners' lights consisted of narrow strips of cloth, twisted rope fashioned and saturated in castor oil. It was about 1878 that the tin lamp, now still in use, came into vogue. The oil burnt in them was thin mineral oil from Burma that smoked badly. Kerosine came into use much later.

In 1877 or 1878 for the first time, double-headed steel picks, steel wedges and hammers of the kind still in were used. We adopted the direct-acting pump down below and did away with the expensive system of hand bailing. We were also the first to pay the men by weight and erected weighing-machines in all our new pits.

In 1879 powder was first used by us for blasting down the coal, and the whole output of one mine was obtained solely by this method. Artificial ventilation had to be resorted to, and Frank Agabeg states that he had the pleasure of building the first ventilating furnace, which was in daily use till the pit which was 86 feet deep closed down.43

By 1874 another method of hewing coal than the prevailing Pillar and Broad system of the time, was introduced and that was the Longwall system

42 Ibid.
and some collieries followed this system. The long wall system worked well, and the daily output from the pit in which it was carried on increased.

In 1906 one of the first colliery power station with a capacity of 400 KVA at 2200 volts, 3 phases A.C. was installed by Bengal Coal Co. at Sodepur. With the advent of electricity in the mines the 1st real step towards mechanization became possible and bar coal cutting machines were introduced between 1906 and 1908. From 1910, the introduction of electric pump with increased efficiency, unlimited range of operation and greater reliability brought about a gradual change in mining methods and allowed the formation of much larger pillars with much smaller percentage of extraction in first working. In 1912 the first aerial ropeway was adopted for the transport of coal to the railway sidings at Saltore Colliery in the Jharia field. The ropeway was 7200 feet long.

The end of the First World War saw a vigorous drive towards a change-over from steam to electricity in the British coalfields; and more and more of steam engines, boilers, even steel chimneys, could be bought at scrap values in England because anything was considered well enough for India. S. Mcmurtie wrote in 1912: “These older methods are not to be despised; they are used by many who do not like them and would never think of using them with white

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45 E.S.Tarton, Transport and Screening of Coal at Saltore Colliery., TMGI, vol viii, 1913, pp. 50-51.
labour, but who in this country are often hampered not only by the ignorance of the natives but by the fact quick profits are a necessity”.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1918 Trehane Rees recommended that the large quantity of unmarketable slack coal which was being allowed to accumulate in and about mines and which was posing a threat of fires due to spontaneous combustion and explosions should be utilised for the generation of cheap electric power at the pitheads.\textsuperscript{47} But this proposal was not accepted.

This was followed by other small power stations at individual collieries in the Jharia fields and by 1921, large central power stations were being commissioned in Raniganj and Jharia coal fields to offer bulk energy to collieries.\textsuperscript{48} The Mahindra committee gives the latter development just before the independence as shown in the table.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Event
\hline
1921 & Commission of large central power stations
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Development of power generation in India}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, p. 1517.
Table-4.3: Electric Capacity in the Various Coalfields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1600</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C: GIRIDIH</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>4650</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>4650</td>
<td>3260</td>
<td>4000</td>
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<td><strong>D: JHARIA COALFIELD</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>4000</td>
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<td>8800</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>16000</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.S.Co. Loyabhad</td>
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<td>4000</td>
<td>11000</td>
<td>2100</td>
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<td>6250</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mohuda Pit</td>
<td>15500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other collieries p.s. owned by industrial collieries</td>
<td>12000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>3200</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Mahindra Committee Report, p.291.)

The fact that although the first mechanical loader was tried out in Indian mines in the thirties it could never secure a foothold should be proof enough of this contention. The introduction of the mechanical coal-cutter enabled the elimination of the skilled pick miner whose place could be taken by the unskilled loader. The pace of introduction of the coal-cutter was also hastened by the phased withdrawal from coal mines, under a statutory enactment in the thirties, of women labourers who were doing the unskilled work of loading the
coal that their men-folk, the skilled pick miners, had cut. In fact, the introduction of the mechanical coal-cutter to replace the pick miner in ‘development’ and the introduction of the electric drill to replace the so-called CP miner in ‘depillaring’ following the withdrawal of women from mines and the consequent unwillingness of their men-folk to work in the mines just when the Second World War had opened up new avenues of employment for whole families on the surface near their homes. The peasantry from North Bihar and western Uttar Pradesh were lured into working as indentured labour for loading coal in the mines. Now, the most dangerous places in Indian coal mines are the development headings and the depillaring areas, and it is in these places that manual loading had to keep pace with mechanical coal-getting. The consequent crowding of large numbers of green labour in the most dangerous areas in mines was to be reflected in the very high accident rates. In brief, this so-called mechanisation, far from “reducing occupational hazards of labour underground and the number of men face these hazards” as the Commission tries to make out, was to become the most potent means for mass-death. 49

Accidents

The Indian coal mines enjoyed decidedly favourable natural conditions. In the early days they were exceedingly shallow, the seams were exceptionally thick and workable, and during most of the year there was relatively little trouble from excess water. The seam in India are rarely less than 10 ft in thickness and the working galleries are comparatively spacious and so miners

49 Ibid.
are generally able to stand upright.\textsuperscript{50} The human element in accidents was of greater importance in the mining than in any other manufacturing industry, partly because adverse physical condition and partly because of the supervision of work cannot be so close as in factory.\textsuperscript{51} The condition of mine changes quickly. An inspection of working the area might be found safe, but within hours due to air circulation there might an accumulation of dangerous gases also, as mine air carries up and deposits dangerous coal dust continuously. A mine area may cease to be satisfactory from the dust point of view within a short period\textsuperscript{52} and any one of the factors or both coupled together can lead to explosion and disaster for the workers and the mines also. The above factors make coal mining a highly hazardous industry. Accident rates in coal mines all over the world are 3 to 8 times more than in factories.\textsuperscript{53} It was the dangerous nature of the industry that Mines Department was established as a separate department under Chief Inspector of Mines with sub-inspectors to enforce safety and regulation of proper working under Mines Act of 1923.\textsuperscript{54} In spite of dangerous nature of the underground mining work there are other factors which lead to large number of accidents in mine.

\textsuperscript{50} Colin Simons, 'Working Conditions, Accident and Protective Legislation in Indian Coalmining Industry in Pre Independence Period', \textit{Bengal Past and Present},

\textsuperscript{51} A.B.Ghosh, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} A.B.Ghosh, p. 192

\textsuperscript{54} B.R.Seth, p. 282
1. No training of the workers.
2. Piece rate payment of the workers.

In coalfields of India a cultivator is allowed to work on his first day at the coalface. There were only very few mines in Bihar which imparted any sort of training to the new workers. The failure of the colliery owner and manager to provide even the most rudimentary kind of training must have increased the danger of accidents.\(^5^5\) The safety at working place depends largely to a great extent on the skills and experience of the miners themselves. It is impossible to forsee the endless danger that may arise through ignorance and foolhardiness. The illiteracy and ignorance of the miners made it impossible for them to perceive the danger to which they were exposed by sleeping in the shadow between the railway trucks, or in the vicinity of tram lines, or sheltering in the drums of the winding engine, or entering fenced off areas, mishandling explosives, riding on running tubs, greasing and oiling machinery in motion, returning to working places before all the charges are exploded, crossing the bottom of the shafts instead of the bye-passes where provided, drying gunpowder over the open fire, and lighting the match in prohibited gassy areas.\(^5^6\)

The nature of payment and nature of control in mines also leads to conditions leading to large number of accidents. As miners were paid

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 287.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
according to their output, sometimes they were tempted to rob the pillars to gain some easy picking without themselves realizing the extent of dangers they are exposing for few annas.\(^{57}\) Complementary to this was the nature of working in the coalmines. Before 1940s, a large percentage of coal were cut by the raising contractors, and these raising contractors had whole paraphernalia for working the mine. And where the safety supervisors were also the employees of the raising contractor, the manager whose real function was looking after the safety aspect were left redundant. So safety was the biggest casualty in the case. As the interest of the contractor with the mine was of short time and their agreements were to load certain wagons of coal, they forced the miners and loader to overload their tub and also encourage pillar robbing for quick coal.\(^{58}\) Secondly, the decision making bodies in Calcutta were more interested in raising than on scientific or sound working of the collieries.\(^{59}\) Royal Commission for Labour in India expressed concern about the increasing rate of accident in mines; it hoped that “while the steady improvement, in discipline and regularity of work is without doubt tending to greater safety.”\(^{60}\) They thought that presence of excessive numbers at certain periods also increased the accident rate and hoped that a better level of individual output, with shorter hours, better disciplined working and better health among the

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57 Refer to chapter 2.
60 I.L.O., p 203.
workers would lessen the incidence of accident. Increasing depths of mine to extract coal to meet the growing demand for coal and the accompanying trend towards expanding mechanisation made the problem of mines safety very complex with the passage of time.

The accidents in the coalmine can broadly be studied under the following headings:

1. Shaft accident
2. Haulage Accident
3. Fall of roof or sides.
4. Explosion of fire Damp
5. Miscellaneous accidents by water and suffocation by gasses and electric fault.

Accidents in shafts were rare and these include falling from the cage while ascending or descending the pit of the mine, breaking of the rope, etc. The accidents in the haulage section occupied larger proportion of accidents. This takes place while walking on the haulage road for shortcuts, joy ride on descending tubs, sitting or resting near the haulage roads, lack of any buffer if the tubs get detached while ascending the incline, lack of proper inspection of

61 Ibid.
the haulage wires, tub links and tub drawback. Accidents due to fall of roofs and sides formed the biggest percentage of mining accidents (60% approximately). The accidents under the head could have been minimized by proper training, alertness of the worker and proper timbering of the roof at appropriate time. Accidents from fire damps can be prevented by proper inspection of the working site for any dangerous gases before start of any shift, use of safety lamps, and use of safety guidelines, etc. The accident under the section can be prevented by having an updated plan of the mines, following the proper scientific methods of working and proper training of the workers.

In the earlier period as the mines were not worked to a great depth the accident due to falls (fall of coal from roof, sides, fall of coal from working face), accidents on shafts (rope and chin breaking, while ascending or descending the mine, falling into the shaft from the surface) clubbed together formed a large percentage of accidents. In 1896 these together constituted 25 cases while accidents due to irruption of water were 7. Similarly in 1908 the accidents due to fall in mines were 58 accidents in shaft were 22, and accidents due to irruption of water or falling into water were 2. These can be explained

63 Ibid.
64 Colin Simons, p. 186.
66 Annual Report of Inspector of mines, 1896, p. 88
due to the unsystematic working of the mine, mine not having proper plan map, and having unskilled labour force.

While in the latter phase, we see the accidents due to firedamp with the deepening of the mine taking a heavy toll of life and property in mine and also cases of land subsiding making their impact felt in the accident chart due to deep working of the mines and due to lack of sand stowing before second working. Some of the biggest accidents in the history of colonial India, like Poidih colliery in 1936, in which 209 people were killed fall under this head.\(^\text{68}\)

As the data for the causes of different types of accidents are not available, independently we have to depend on Royal Commission of Labour.

Here we can see that the largest numbers of accidents were classified under misadventure. And other large percentages were under fault of the deceased. Over half the numbers of fatalities in all years were ascribed to misadventure, yet as the Commissioner for Workmen’s Compensation pointed out to the Royal Commission in 1929, this designation was never defined by law. The Commissioner felt that as the term stood, and ‘if it is pushed to its logical conclusion’, the meaning of misadventure should be that ‘it is a state of things or grouping of circumstances for which the employer was directly or

\(^{68}\) Report of the Coal Mining Committee, 1937, p27
ultimately responsible'. If this definition had been accepted by the courts then it should have been included in the fourth of our categories and many widows and dependents would not have forfeited compensation. The second and third categories are also somewhat misleading because it would not have been very difficult for employers to prove that in at least some cases miners were responsible for 'serious and willful' misconduct (in order for them to avoid paying compensation). As the Commissioner put it, Managements are not unknown, who are themselves responsible, for breaches of the rules and regulations or who acquiesce in breaches of rules and regulations by labour and who do not mind denying liability in case an accident does occur. It is easy in such circumstances for the management to prove that the workman disobeyed some rule or some order verbally given to him.

The attempt of the management to divert the cause of accidents to individual person was because if the mine owners or managers were found guilty of breaking any of the mining regulations, they were liable under Indian Mining Act 1901 to face criminal charges. Although there was a steady increase in the number of prosecutions over the period, the penalties were hardly severe enough to deter the hardened offenders.

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
There is a close correlation between the number of accidents and the level of economic activity. The number of fatalities doubled, for example during 1907-08, the year of the spectacular boom. Similarly, during the period of prosperity at the end of the First World War, there was a sharp increase in the fatality rate. The depression of 1931-34 was responsible for the lower accident count, but from 1935 till the outbreak of the Second World War, the unhappy implications of 'slaughter mining' were all too apparent. According to Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines, number of accidents in 1934 was 131 which accounted for 157 casualties (in Jharia, 61 deaths). This increased to 158 accidents with even greater figures of 264 deaths out of which 106 deaths occurred in Jharia and 67 in Giridih.\(^\text{72}\) Similarly, during the period of second war we see the increase in number of fatal accidents. Number of fatal accidents in 1941 was 260 as compared to 287 in 1942 and the number of persons killed was 333 in 1942 which was 39 than the preceding year.\(^\text{73}\) The casualty for 1943 was 328\(^\text{74}\) which shows decline in number but it must be remembered that 1943 was period of labour shortage.

At the time of the appointment of the Burrows Committee (1936), over fifty fires were raging in the underground workings of the Jharia coalfield largely as a result of the premature depillaring that had been taken place there.

\(^{72}\) Ibid. pp. 32-33.  
\(^{73}\) A.R.C.I.M, 1943, pp. 9-10.  
\(^{74}\) A.R.C.I.M, 1943, p.10.
M.S.A. Hydari, Labour Secretary, while moving Coal Mines Safety (stowing) Bill, on 14 April 1939. In 1936 there were 47 fires in 20 different collieries which increased to 74 fires in 56 mines. A fire broke out at Khas Jharia in 1931 after a collapse of an old working. This fire spread to the adjoining mines of Khas Jharia, Sonalibad, and New Khas Jharia and presently burning vigorously near the Dhanbad-Jharia East India Railway, and Surat and branch line.75

The loose wording of the Act provided the employers with many loops through which they could avoid liability. Perhaps the most notable example of this occurred in the Mudidih case of April 1928. As a result a heavy subsidence at the Mudidih colliery, several dhowrahs (colliery dwellings) collapsed on the surface, and six people were killed outrightly; further forty were injured. The widow of one of the miners applied for compensation. The owners decided to contest the claim on grounds that the accident did not strictly occur ‘in the course of the deceased’s employment’ since the miner was off duty at the time (he was actually asleep). The case was eventually decided against the widow on two counts; firstly, ‘it appears clear that the time spent asleep is not included in such periods’, i.e., in the course of employment, and secondly, because ‘colliery labourers are not in any way compelled to make use of dhowrahs which may be supplied by the colliery—they are free to use them or

75 Labour Movement in India, 1937-1939, p. 977.
not as they like'.\textsuperscript{76} An Act which tolerated this sort of evasion was not much short of being a mockery, especially in an industry as dangerous as coal mining.\textsuperscript{77}
CHAPTER 5

FORMS OF PROTEST AND RESISTANCE AGAINST CAPITALIST ENTERPRISE

The coal mines in Bihar were located in formerly remote jungle areas inhabited by tribal and semi-tribal population and low caste Hindus engaged in primitive form of agriculture who were partly dependent on the gathering of forest product.\(^1\) It was this tribal, semi-tribal population along with low castes Hindu from where the earliest labour forces were drawn. They were assumed to be independent, joy loving, fun filled agriculturist and gatherers.\(^2\) Frank Agabeg, in one of his addresses narrated one of experience to underscore the nature of these people: ‘I remember many years ago on one occasion when I was underground talking to a gang of Sonthals who had fallen off considerably for some time in their daily output. On arrival at their working face, I found one man asleep, one playing the flute, while the other two were undercutting and loading respectively. The following conversation took place. On my asking why their output had fallen off, the gentleman with the flute addressed me as follows: Sahib, when you go out for shikar, do you always get game? ’ I replied in the negative. "Well," said my friend, "it is the same in coal cutting:

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1 V.Ball gave a list of 80 forest products used by the natives as food to survive from famines and deficient farming (as their land was not very productive). Cf., V. Ball, ‘On the Jungle Products Used as Articles of Food by the Inhabitants of the Districts of Manbhum and Hazaribagh’, *Journal of Asiatic Society*, 1867, No. ii, pp.73-82.

the beastly coal will not always come down " and commenced playing his flute again. In the present chapter we will deal with the degree of appropriation of these people into the new system of capitalist production or system of wage economy or their reaction to the web of exploitation enmeshed in the capitalist mode of production.

The reaction of the miners to the system of production can be divided in two phases. The first phase can be the phase of silent resistance till 1920 and second phase would be the phase of collective resistance or direct confrontation with the capitalist class and its auxiliary system.

The first overt confrontation of the coal mine labour was in 1920, incidentally the year of foundation of All India Trade Union Congress. The actual coalmining operation is said to have started in 1815, the gap of 105 years is little surprising and neither was it the period of complete harmony between the labour and other factors of production. The first phase of silent resistance was noted for the absence of any effort among the workers to resist collectively and the workers protested in their individual capacity or in small group reacted to a particular system of oppression.

The first form of reaction was marked by desertion or flight: this was the most common form of resistance. There are numerous episodes of desertion

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4 Barraclough, p.141.
from dangerous working condition, uninhabitable living condition and unresponsive superiors.

The workers used to desert to rural areas or preferred frequent shuttling between countryside and the mine areas and acceptance of mine work for a very short duration. The explanation usually offered by the employers and also the government was that the mine workers [were] primarily agriculturists and they treated mining as a secondary occupation.5

One characteristic feature of mining in its early stages was the absence of any limitation on hours of work and the miner used to stay in mines for considerable time and cut coal in just sufficient quantity to fulfill their immediate needs. Frank. J. Agabeg referring to this prevailing practice, observed that miners who could only cut and load one ten-cwt. tub per man ---- while the same gang of miners were able to cut and load one-ton tub per man without staying a minute longer.6 They would work hard when they had to earn quick money.7

The Members of Jharia Mines Board of Health in its oral evidence before the Royal Commission of Labour in India observed:“...from the starting year of the Jherria coal industry, until 1914 or 1915 the industry encountered great difficulties, largely due to scarcity of labour and intermittent epidemics... The

5 Trehane Rees, Report, para 46.
6 Frank Agabeg, p.25.
7 Ibid.
labour would get frightened, and if two or three deaths occurred at a colliery, 200 to 300 workers would leave overnight quietly, without permission.\textsuperscript{8}

**Mechanism of Control:**

The earliest mechanism resorted to by the coal company to secure full control over their labour was the recruitment through the *zamindary* system.\textsuperscript{9} “You must bear in mind that the *Zamindari* exists primarily for the upkeep of the collieries, and so you must give every possible assistance to the colliery manager regarding labour supplies.”\textsuperscript{10} The tenants remained under compulsion to work at specified collieries, even if they did not want to do so. There were also cases where some coal companies - Bengal Coal Company being one of the most prominent of such companies - bound the workers to mine work through written contracts.\textsuperscript{11} Payment of advance and also the debt dependency which were a part of miners’ life involved concealed coercion and the other system was that of tenancy system when the workers were forced to serve in the mine for stipulated number of days or they would be evicted in Giridih the tenure of compulsory service was 230 days.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8} B.R.Seth, p.54.
\textsuperscript{9} B.R.Seth, p.23.
\textsuperscript{10} A manager of Dishergarh zamindary reprimanding one of his circle officer (chapter 2 p.5).
\textsuperscript{11} *Foley and Fremantles Report*, para 55.
\textsuperscript{12} *Foley and Fremantle Report*, 1907, para. 67.
The second mode of control was marked by advance money generally given by the contractors used as a tool to control the labourforce and it also reflecting upon poor status of worker earning. In reality it implied that the worker should spend their earnings before the money was earned and became little better than slaves under such circumstances and obviously they were anxious to get more of the advance money and in the process their bondage was further strengthened. But we have seen that having more labour did not mean more production. The workers resisted the encroachment of their independence. They worked underground a mine throughout this time (24 hours shift) and cut coal in just sufficient quantity to fulfill their immediate needs. Most of the times they sat idle underground a mine smoking, sleeping, or waiting for the tub. Consequently the effective working hour was very less. These coercive measures were combined with 'paternalist attitude and practices such as chiding and use of the rod as well as various forms of patronage to festivals and ceremonies'. Such a combination tended to generate a submissive attitude.

The workers worked when he liked and skulked when he liked, and was always ready for any paltry excuse to stop work, and refused to resume until

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14 Ibid, para.54.
15 Ranajit Das Gupta, p.309.
some imaginary grievance or other was rectified.\textsuperscript{16} One mode of resistance followed by the labour to escape from the inhuman working condition was taking unscheduled holidays for \textit{puja}, not working for more than 4 days and prolonged absence during sowing and harvesting time.\textsuperscript{17} They overcame the contractors pressure to overload their tub by resorting to loading their tubs hollow in the centre, and piled up on top. The \textit{Beldars}, who were generally involved in surface excavation, were paid by measurement, and the ingenuity exercised by them to deceive and get measurements in excess of the work done was very well known. E.C. Agabeg observed 'The skill which they exercised in doing this often deceives an expert overseer. The only way to prevent it is by surveying the ground and taking levels before starting work.'\textsuperscript{18}

In a colliery village (\textit{dhowrah}) where 32 families lived, having 69 children of all ages, it so happened, that two weeks after they had settled, two of the younger ones died from sickness with which they had been ailing before they had arrived at the mines. On the death of the second child, the workers had decided to desert in one night, but the workers were stopped from leaving the mine. This was not uncommon reaction of workers against unhealthy condition of living in a \textit{dhowrah} provided by the management.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Refer to chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{T.M.G.I.}, Vol. VIII, p.36.
\end{flushright}
In 1908 Jharia experienced severe cholera epidemic which led to substantial shortage of labour in the midst of a coal boom. Describing the unsanitary condition of the dhowrah, the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, Bihar and Chotanagpur noted that ‘cholera breaks twice in a year ----and small pox breaks out regularly every cold winter and run its epidemic course until hecked by the advance of the hot weather.’

1909 the Chief Inspector had stated that the immediate effect of a shaft accident in Burra Dhemo mine in the Raniganj area resulting in the death of Kanu Majhi “was to drive away all the labour at the sinking belonging to the caste of the dead [i.e. Santals]”.

Foley and Fremantle were told that they(workers) “flocked” to a new colliery where the machinery was new and where the work was easy because of nearness to the surface.

So from the above instances it is quite evident that the workers were aware of the dangers in the mines and when the mines became too dangerous they resorted to desertion. The officials saw it in terms of superstition, “a superstitious dread”.

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21 Conjoint report on the sanitary condition of the Jherria Coalfield by the Civil Surgeon, Mabhum, and the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, Behar And Chotanagpur Circle, Geology and Mineral, File No.,16, no. 3-4,1910.
22 E.C.Agabeg, p.37.
Glen George in his written evidence submitted to the Indian Coal Committee of 1925 had stated clearly that “The best recruiter is the colliery with the best underground condition, i.e., an easy face, tram lines, and practicability of earning money quickly.” So in the early phase the labour though not organized in modern sense, but did register their dissent to the oppressive working and residential houses provided by the Company in the vicinity of the colliery. Their resistance did bear the fruit in the form of passing of Bengal Sanitary Bill, and proposal for Jharia water supply bill. These measures were inspired by workers flight from coalfields irrespective of the impeding wage loss or the state of the coal cycle.

**Role of ‘Outsiders’:**

At the welcome speech of the inaugural session All Indian Trade Union Congress at Bombay in 1920 Joseph Baptist highlighting the role of outsiders had observed, ‘In absence of primary education and the practice of victimisation this appear(leaders should be from within the workers) counsel of perfection outside the pale of practical politics. We are, I have no doubts, experimenting a combination of officials consisting of the insiders and outsiders! But I have no doubt that for the present union will be farce without outsiders.’ The Royal Commission of Labour in India, 1931, had expressed varied and interesting views on the role of ‘outsider’. The Indian Mining

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24 Geology and Mineral, File No.134,October,1913.
Federation in its answer replied, 'The social fabric of an eastern people like Indian is yet founded on the older order of status. The sense of mutual obligation which knit the different elements of old Indian society still informs the relation between Indian employer and Indian workmen. This sense of mutual obligation has hitherto served the purpose of ameliorative labour legislation in India remarkably well. And it is only natural that where the old spirit exists, ineffective legislation has been resented both by the employers and the employees. It is not the intention of the Committee to suggest that the legislations should not be undertaken. What they desire to emphasise is that this is an aspect of the labour situation in India which does not make the need for legislation as urgent and as necessary, as it might otherwise appear.'

While Indian Mining Association was of the opinion that their workers had no grievances agitators would create perceived grievances. It seems that the Indian Mining Association perceived that grievances would be artificially created by agitators. It argued, 'They (workers) have no grievances except that they would like to have more of this or more of that.' The B.L.E.C., 1940, was much more forthright in their perception for it argued that the, 'vast majority of workers are so ignorant, apathetic and afraid of displeasing their employers, that outside help is indispensable for organizing and conducting union.'

Complete elimination of outsiders from trade union has not been possible

26 R.C.L., 1931, VOL. IV, part I, p. 211.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid. p. 337.
elsewhere and Bihar is no exception, especially in these early stages of trade union development.' The employer's objection to 'outsiders' is largely based on his expectation and experience that the executive formed from among the rank and file of the workers will be docile and accommodating. This if true would nullify the aim of the trade union which has to conduct negotiations with the employers with courage and determination, not only in times of peace but even during strikes and lock-outs. And on the other hand, there is no gain-saying the fact that men have entered into the field of trade unionism in India who are indoctrinating the workers with ideas and beliefs that run counter to such fundamental institutions as property and the state. The workers are far too illiterate to understand the implications of communist ideology and on the whole flock to those who promise fulfilment of the largest economic and social hopes. It is for this reason that the workers should be trained to be as responsible and self-reliant as possible and to look at the particular issue in a factory or the industry as a whole more from the angle of present economic conditions and prospects of the workers than from a distant social and ethical ideal whether of Socialism or Communism or Fascism. It is necessary for the successful running of the unions that the majority of the executive should have knowledge of the technical aspects of the industry. If the reduction of the outsider element from one half to one-third impoverishes the trade unions in this regard, each province should appoint a technical or economic adviser to
the unions who when a dispute arises will help the union to present the workers' case before any tribunal or to bring about a settlement.\textsuperscript{30}

But it was these outsiders who really set the foundation of the trade union movement in the coalfields of Bihar starting with Swami Bishwananda to Bari and Mukutdhari Singh.

\textbf{Struggle of the coal mine workers}

As stated earlier, the first phase of miners resistance was characterized by individual or group action of the workers to protect themselves from the onslaught of the management and its auxiliaries possibly due to lack of any formalized association of the workers. But with the formation of All India Trade Union Congress (A.I.T.U.C), 31 October, 1920 a new chapter was added to the workers movement of the country. In first session of the A.I.T.U.C. Swami Biswananda with one delegate represented the coalminers of Bihar and Bengal and on his insistence A.I.T.U.C. passed a resolution considering the plight of workers in coalmines. The resolution says, “that this congress emphatically protest against the prevalent condition of labour in Indian Coalfield and calls upon the government and coal owners to take immediate steps to remove such horrible conditions.”\textsuperscript{31} The formation of AITUC gave fillip to the labour organisations in the coalfields to form unions of their own and the Indian Colliery Employees Association was formed in the year 1920 itself with headquarters in Dhanbad. Shri I.B. Sen, Bar-at Law who had then

\textsuperscript{30} B.L.E.C., 1940, para, 540.

come to Dhanbad to defend certain clerks involved in a criminal suit for assaulting a colliery manager, became the first President of the Association. Thus the origin of the trade unionism in the coalfield exactly coincided with the birth of an all-India movement. This was for the first time, that the colliery workers were actively and formally associated with the movement.  

Swami Bishwananda and Swami Darsanand were two most prominent persons involved in the labour movement in the coalfields of Bihar and Bengal. Swami Darsanand brought about strikes in 1920 at 6 collieries of Andrew Yule, 4 collieries of Equitable Coal Company, and 1 colliery of Bird, involving altogether 5,300 miners. In a meeting in Jamuria he preached the 'Bolshevik principle' of equity between rich and poor.

In the Jharia coalfield the period between 1920-22 was a period of high tension. The air was saturated with rumours of impending strikes. There were constant exchange of information regarding every development in the coal mines among various wing of state administration.

In one such note by B.A. Collins, Director of Industries Bihar and Orissa, dated 30-11-1920, had warned that ‘the agitators are on the move it is probable that they will demand more and will get it. The most likely resource

32 B.P.Guha,p.95
34 Condition of labour, Strikes in Bihar, F.No. L-882
of trouble are skilled and unskilled men eg. mistris, winding and pumping khalasis, khalasis etc. the latter class are getting low rates having first been raised from Rs. 12 to 14.\textsuperscript{35} He also highlighted attempts by I.B. Sen and others to get the higher grade men to combine to get better rate. And thus he forecast trouble in near future.\textsuperscript{36}

In one note dated 30-11-1921 from B.A. Collins, (Director of Industries Bihar and Orissa), to A.G. Clow (Controller labour, Board of Industries and Munition) there was a mention of a directive by Indian Mining Association to its member to open shops in their collieries to supply food etc. to their labour.\textsuperscript{37}

Coal cutters of two East Indian Railway Pits ceased work on 17\textsuperscript{th} on the purported cause of high price of food and clothing. It was also suggested that the strike was caused by pending cases against rioters. Some of the strikers were reportedly induced to return to work while 240 men were still away from the colliery.\textsuperscript{38}

Strangely it was a time when mere threat of strike was sufficient for the concerned officials to act. In Jealgora colliery the khalasis alleging that they

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Condition of labour, Strikes in Bihar, F.No. L-882.
\textsuperscript{38} Telegram dtd. 23 June 1921, Strikes in Bihar, F.No. L-882
got less payment than given to their counterparts in other collieries.\textsuperscript{39} Swami Bishwananda was alleged to have taken up their case. But the threat to strike worked and their salary were increased.\textsuperscript{40}

On 17\textsuperscript{th} October, 1921 Musammat Bhekhin Chamain, working in a pit of East India Colliery, Karharbari, Giridih, alleged an assault on her modesty by European Over man named Corrington, who asked for her "\textit{dhibri}\textsuperscript{41}" in order to light his lamp which had gone out. On hearing her shout number of coalcutters arrived and they assaulted the over man who managed to escape. Some 2000 persons stopped their work in solidarity.\textsuperscript{42} The work resumed from the next day but on 25\textsuperscript{th} October due to dissatisfaction regarding the enquiry,\textsuperscript{43} there was a strike at the East Indian Railway Company’s collieries at Giridih the whole of labour force struck work on the 18\textsuperscript{th} November due to firing by Assistant Manager, Fairfield, on a woman whom he had discovered stealing coal.\textsuperscript{44} The worker resumed work on assurance by Bajrang Sahay (Non-cooperator) that the official would be suspended pending full inquiry.

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[39] From R.N. Gilchrist, D/O Industries, Labour Bureau to Collins, Director of Industries Bihar and Orissa, 2nd November 1921. Note by D/O Industries, 22 September 1921, F.No. L-882
\item[40] Ibid.
\item[41] Used as symbol of female genital organ
\item[42] Letter No. 12944-S.B, 14 November 1921, from Dept. of Inspector General of Police, Bihar and Orissa to the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bihar and Orissa.
\item[43] Note by Collins
\item[44] Leader, 21-11-1921, Strikes in Bihar, F.No. L-882.
\end{footnotesize}
At the time of the Second Annual Conference of the A.I.T.U.C. at Jharia in November 1921, under the Presidentship of Joseph Baptista, the mine owners became so panicky that they approached the Viceroy with the request not to allow the Conference to be held within 200 miles of Bengal and Bihar coal-fields. While not agreeing to ban the holding of the conference, the Viceroy sent sufficient security force for maintenance of law and order. The mine owners threatened their employees with disciplinary action if they defied their order and joined the Conference. This was a challenge for the organisers of the labour movement. The miners were exhorted to refrain from work for three days of the Conference and simultaneously demanded an increase in the wage rates. Ignoring the threat of disciplinary action, the miners attended the Conference in thousands and work in the coal mines remained virtually suspended. A number of coal-miners, despite the threat had come to the platform of the AITUC session to narrate their condition of wages and work and to plead for support of the session for their struggle. Towards the end of the Conference, the owners declared a substantial wage increase. As a result of which the rate of miner's wages almost doubled. It will be seen that in the very second year of the trade unionism in the coal field, the goal for higher and

45 Interview with Shri S. Das Gupta, Secretary, Indian National Mine Workers Federation, cf., B.P.Guha, p.96.
46 Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p.203.
47 B. P. Guha, p.96.
48 Ibid.
better wages was achieved by demonstrating the strength and unity of the coal mine workers.49

The holding of the 2nd Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress in Jharia in 1921 mainly due to the efforts of Swami Viswananda provided an impetus to the trade union movement in the coal field. The membership of the Indian Colliery Employee Association rose at a rapid rate after it was affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C. The increase in the membership of the Association made it necessary to have whole-time office-bearers. In the year 1924, P.C, Bose was appointed as whole-time secretary of the Association. The chief activities of the Association during the period were as following: a) to redress individual and general grievances, (b) litigation for realizing compensation money and unpaid wages, (c) organising strikes, whenever necessary, and (d) educating workers on hygiene and sanitation.50

On 18th of January the whole staff of Sendra Colliery ceased to work due to dismissal of a mistry for bad work. These men were eventually persuaded to return to work by Swami Biswananda.51 Another strike occurred at Lakurka Colliery over the question of fine.

After a very promising beginning the trade union movement was beset with many difficulties and could not make expected progress on account of

49 Ibid.
50 B.P.Guha,p.96.
51 Correspondence between Collins and Gilchrist, dated 22 February 1922.
differences of opinion among union leaders. The heterogeneous character of the colliery workers who belonged to various castes and religions made it difficult to bring them together on a common platform for united action. To organise any movement among the illiterate workers who were scattered widely in the coalfield areas without transport facilities was another serious handicap. Nevertheless, the movement continued to grow, although very slowly. The AITUC realising the need for further impetus to the trade union movement in the coalfields held its ninth annual conference at Jharia in 1928 under the presidentship of Jawahar Lal Nehru.\(^5^2\)

This was a very critical period for the coal mining industry in Bihar. The industry was going through a prolonged depression and the effect of Great Depression was just about to set in. Many coal companies had reduced their working days to reduce their production and retrenchment had become quite frequent and the coal companies always had the antipathy toward trade union movement in their vicinity. But the workers were not subdued and they did show their resistance. The other defining moment of the period was the non-cooperation movement that was started in 1930. These had their resonance in the workers' movement of the time.

The first notable strike of the period was held at Amblabad colliery in 1930.\(^5^3\) On 5 April, 200 miners of the Amlabad colliery in Manbhum struck over wages and the change of a contractor. The management refused to

\(^{52}\) B.P.Guha, p.96  
\(^{53}\) B.P.Guha, p. 97.
negotiate on the ground that the Mine-Owners Association did not recognise the Indian Colliery Employees Association.\textsuperscript{54} The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-32 gave further encouragement to the colliery workers. The belief that the success of the movement launched against the British (many of whom were colliery owners)\textsuperscript{55} would indirectly improve their lot prompted them to join it. The miners at the GIP Railways' Kargali colliery at Bermo, Hazaribagh, struck on 7 and 9 May to protest against Gandhi's arrest earlier that week. Foreign cloth was burnt at a meeting at the nearby Jaridih Bazaar on the 9\textsuperscript{th} which was attended by over 2000 persons, and nationalist speeches were heard urging miners to strike for better wages.\textsuperscript{56} During the same period the miners of the EIR's collieries staged lightning strikes over a three-week period, demanding an end to the \textit{sardari} system and differential rates, and shutting down six pits employing 3,423 persons.\textsuperscript{57} They complained about extortion and demanded allotments of free coal, railway tickets, loans and paddy lands.\textsuperscript{58} But no union was involved in sympathy strikes and picketing. These episodic struggles did not achieve immediate gains, but they did express the liveliness and discontent of the colliery workers.

\textsuperscript{54} Dilip Simeon, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{55} Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{56} Dilip Simeon, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.,
The wages of workers at Jamadoba colliery were also reduced. On 12 June 1932, Satya Bimal Sen, Secretary of the Tata's Collieries Labour Association (TCLA) was seen waving red flags and urging the miners at Jamadoba not to accept their wages which had been reduced by 10%.\(^{59}\) PC Bose and Siba Kali Bose also intervened but it was after Superintendent Kirk threatened to close the pit, the miners went to work\(^{60}\). Kirk forbade the agitators from visiting the colliery, but miners held a meeting on the 19th decided to strike against the cuts, and for a settlement without victimisation, through the efforts of the TCLA. About 3800 of the staff of 4000 struck on the 20th, though most surface workers, "either Punjabis or up-country men" did not join.\(^{61}\)

On 22 June a magistrate passed ban orders on SB Sen, PC Bose, and Shiva Kali and noted, "It is evident that the workers do not desire to go on strike but the second party are instigating them to do so either by taking a red flag round about the Colliery... or holding meeting which is likely to cause disturbance"\(^{62}\). On 23 June the ICEA and TCLA asked for public contributions. Jamadoba colliery re-opened on 29 June but a fight broke out between Punjabis and strikers, and the pit was closed once again. By July, cash and food were collected from the adjoining collieries. By 14 July miners were accepting the


\(^{60}\) ibid

\(^{61}\) Ibid, p. 192

\(^{62}\) Ibid p.192
reduced rates, and the mine opened on the 19th after a loss of 28 working days.\textsuperscript{63} This strike was a perfect example of how the management of the collieries dealt with strike and when the management action were not sufficient in quenching a strike how the state intervened to bail it out by removing the leaders, and how different sections were pitted against each other to weaken the movement. But inspite of all these workers were not demoralized.

The Railways' captive colliery at Giridih was worked both with \textit{sarkari} and \textit{sardari} systems of supervision, but all wages were paid through the \textit{sardars}. Many miners also held service tenancies.\textsuperscript{64} The depression had resulted in the average work week being reduced from 5 or 6 days to 3 Or 4, but the piece-rates were 14 annas per ton (7 to 8 annas per tub of 10 cwt). In May the rates were reduced to 7 annas per tub. The change affected the \textit{sardars} too, who now had either to reduce their customary one anna per tub commission or squeeze their labour harder.\textsuperscript{65}

The overman Elmes collected his share of graft through certain powerful \textit{sardars}. On 10 May 1934 a large crowd, including gang \textit{sardars} of the Jogtiabad pit-protested at the overman's office against the cut in rates. Elmes' abusive response led to an assault and he suffered serious injuries.\textsuperscript{66}

Miners at the adjacent Serampur colliery also joined on the 14th morning. A

\begin{itemize}
  \item[63] Ibid., p.193
  \item[64] \textit{Foley and Fremantles Report}, 1907, para.
  \item[65] Dilip Simeon, p.195
  \item[66] File 108/34. DC, Hazaribagh, RE Russell's letter dtd 19/5/34. "His behaviour on the 10th... is directly responsible for his being assaulted." C.f. Dilip Simeon, p.195.
\end{itemize}
thousand miners smashed the Serampur manager's office, burnt vehicles and attacked the police, who opened fire. Two miners were killed, and two injured. The DC reported an 'unpremeditated' riot.\textsuperscript{67}

The Giridih affair had shown the power of dismissed contractors and the bondage with labour to set them up against the management when their perks and rates were affected.

The Board had its way, and 1059 miners in Kargali and 4500 in Bokaro were marked for discharge. 660 had been repatriated, and many were forced to accept the reduced rates. Passes were arranged for those opting to leave.\textsuperscript{68} These developments showed that mediate supervision, while being the ground of the detested extortions, could give rise to identities of interest between miners and sardars, and between sardars, mine contractors, when livelihoods were collectively affected.

With the installation of the popular Congress ministry in 1937 in Bihar the attitude of the government officials under the popular ministry changed towards the unions. The Indian Colliery Employees' Associations, the Indian Miners' Association and the Tata Collieries Labour Association were recognised as bonafide associations.\textsuperscript{69} The Bararee Coke Plant Workers' Union and the East Indian Coal Company Workers' Union started functioning with

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p.196.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
new zeal and enthusiasm. The Labour Enquiry Committee appointed under the Chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad by the Congress ministry raised high hopes in the minds of the workers that something effective would be done to ameliorate their condition. It emboldened them to organise their unions and approach the mine owners for improving their wages and other conditions. In 1938 there was strike in the three collieries of Bird & Co led by Professor Abdul Bari. The strike continued for three months but did not succeed in securing any benefits for workers. It was during this period that Chotanagpur Mazdoor Sangh came into existence as a powerful union of the miners in the Jharia coalfields to co-ordinate the activities of the various labour unions and groups. Mukutdhari Singh of the Bihar Congress began to devote his full time to the trade union movement in the coalfields of Bihar. With the rise in activities of unions the factional politics among unionists also quickened. Satya Bimal Sen 'captured' the TCLA (with a membership of 3123) and set up the East Indian Coal Company Mazdoor Sangha, at Jealgora, with Subhas Chandra Bose as its President. In a visit to Dhanbad on 28 May 1938, Subhas tried to reconcile the quarrelling unionists but was not very successful.

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 It may be mentioned that there was no trade union of colliery workers in the Raniganj coalfield.
74 Memorandum on Agitators from CID to Chief Secretary, dtd 27/10/38 B.L.E.C. Vol. 1, paragraph 444.
75 Dilip Simeon, p.257.
Singh, deputed by Rajendra Prasad to work in the coalbelt, arrived in Jharia in June, and began devoting full time to the trade union movement in the coalfields of Bihar, much to the irritation of Bari, who had been invited by Imamul Hai Khan and KK Sarkar to help counter Satya Bimal Sen.

The Jharia Coalfields Worker's Union (JCWU), floated in May 1938, by Pramotha Nath Ghosh (the ex-Andamanite), KK Sarkar, and IH Khan, was an alliance of activists from some 15 collieries in Loyabad, who chose Bari as their President. He visited the area on 3 July and 13 August, met dismissed employees of Bird & Co.'s Badruchak colliery, whose management refused him an interview. On 26 September 1938, 2200 miners struck work. They had complained in July that the new manager "beats us for nothing... and holds us to contempt as a dog." At Badruchak, women with broomsticks and handis (earthen cooling port) snatched safety lamps from workers and obstructed the pump khalasis descent into the pits. At nearby Katras colliery, picketters defied ban orders. The strike was complete, and four Anglo-Indian

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76 Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p.204.
77 Dilip Simeon, p.257.
78 Ibid
79 File 379/39. Strike Report 1, dtd 26/9/38, and Report of the ADC, NN Ray, dtd 28/9/38. In letters to the CME, dtd 20/5 and 30/7/38, the haziri (time-rated) workers and the coalcutters of Badruchak had drawn attention to the great heat in the colliery, asked for a general increment and complained against the new manager, Morrison. 16 workers were discharged most were haziri workers. ADC to Chief Secretary dtd 30/9/38.
80 Dilip Simeon, p.258.
assistants were requisitioned to operate the pumps. On 4 October, a list of demands was given to the ADC. The lists at Badruchak and Mudidih (where a sympathy strike broke out on 17 October) were similar, who focussed on outstanding grievances, such as depressed living conditions and the summary dismissals effected by the corrupt supervisory staff. Re-instatements of victimised workers and union recognition were prominent demands. Others related to service conditions: a 30% general increment, bonus, leave rules, holidays with pay, increments and promotions according to seniority, free primary education for workers' children, old age pension, maternity benefits, medical facilities, water supply and housing, etc. Working conditions were emphasised: payment for overtime, the provision of assistants, weekly payments on Saturdays, an end to the bribery and maltreatment by supervisors (described as 'obduracy'), an adequate supply of tubs and kerosene oil, work for unemployed women workers, and a proper daily wage for the time-rated coolies. Bari’s comrades worked hard among the workers of Bird’s other pits. Money was brought in from Jamshedpur. Hazara and Shamdeo visited nearby villages, and became prime movers in the lightning strikes which began on the 17th in Loyabad and Mudidih. At Mudidih, the strikers (550 in a total of 1050)

81 File 379/39. Strike Report 2, dtd 27/9/38, and ADC's letter to Commissioner, dtd 26/10/38. Pump operation was crucial to prevent flooding. At Badruchak, 4000 gallons of water per hour needed to be pumped out.

82 Dilip Simeon, Appendix 8.2, pp.362-364

submitted a list of demands, but linked resumption to the re-opening of Badruchak. At Loyabad, more than half the workforce of 2400 was on strike. In both places, the strikers obstructed safety men. Miners waving red flags defied ban orders at the pickets at Loyabad on 18 October, and arrests were made to stop them moving towards the power house. As funds for rations ran short the leaders began seeking a way out. Bird transferred the manager, bowing to one of the striker's demands. Mukutdhari advised resumption of work and this suggestion soured his relations with the strike leaders.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, prices of all commodities registered a sharp rise making life very difficult for the colliery workers. The Chotanagpur Mazdoor Sangh raised a demand for the miners. With the support of the workers the Sangh succeeded in securing an agreement from the Indian Mining Association for grant of 10% dearness allowance to them. Since this allowance was not immediately given by other coalmine owners, strikes were organised in various collieries in order to secure it. Most of the strikes were short-lived, there was one, the strike of Kustore and

84 Ibid., p.259
85 File 379/39, Strike Report 7, dtd 19/10/38, and Dhanbad CID to Chief Secretary dtd 18/10/38.
86 File 379/39, Letter of the ADC, NN Ray, dtd 18/10/38, and Strike Report 7, dtd 19/10/38; DO from Bihar SB to Chief Secretary dtd 13/10/38.
87 File 379/39, Strike Report 6, dtd. 16/10/38
88 File 379/39, Letter of the ADC to chief Secretary
89 Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p.258.
90 Ibid.,
Burrakar collieries, in the Raniganj coalfield which continued for three weeks. It involved 6000 workers. At the end the dispute was resolved and a 10% increase in wages was secured (this happened in 1939). But after the settlement there was some victimisation and ill treatment of workers. Consequently another strike took place in the middle of 1940 which continued for 100 days, and again erupted in 1941 and finally the government came to the rescue of the colliery owners and imposed restrictions on strikes. It put behind bars Congress leaders who were active in the trade union movement in the coalfields. By 1942 all the important union leaders in the coalfields were arrested and jailed thereby giving a serious blow to the workers movement in the coalfield.

The activities of the trade union were further restricted in 1942 under the Defence of India Rule (81) which empowered the government (a) to make general or special order to prohibit strikes and lockout in connection with any trade disputes unless reasonable notice was given; (b) to refer any trade disputes to conciliation or adjudication board; (c) to require employers to observe such items and conditions as might be specified and (d) to enforce the decision of adjudicator. Provincial governments were also empowered by the central government to ban strikes and lockouts. Invested with these special powers under the Defence of India Rules the government succeeded in holding

91 Ibid.
92 B.P.Guha, p.97.
93 Ibid., p.98.
94 Bishwa Mohan Prasad, p.258.
strikes in check. There was no strike in the Jharia coalfield in five years preceding 1946; the same was the case with the Raniganj coalfield except that there was sporadic strike of very short duration in one of the mines lasting for a single day. In Giridih and Bokaro also no strike could be organised in a period of five years preceding 1946. In this way the government put a complete ban on union activities in the coalfields.

The next phase of struggle started with the release of the trade union leaders in 1946. The Communist Labour Union had prepared for a general strike to take place in the Giridih coalfields from the 6th September, 1946, but on the intervention of the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police the strike has been postponed till the 24th September, 1946. In the Dhanbad coalfields of the Diamond Tisra Colliery some workers went on strike to protest against the bad quality of rice supplied to them and in the East India Coal Company there was a token strike for one day to protest against the prosecution of the Labour Union Secretary.

During the War period in order to facilitate the work of distribution of ration, the Central Government, at the request of the Colliery owners, decided to allot foodstuffs to the three main groups of the collieries and through them to the individual colliery owners. The system, no doubt, had its advantages, but

95 Ibid.
97 Extracts from Fortnightly Report for Bihar for the first half of September 1946. File No. 18/9/46; Home (Political) Department, Government of India (1946), Report no.28
it had given rise also to black market in the area. In spite of the fact that a huge quota of cloth and foodstuffs were given to the area the main complaint of the labour was the absence of the fair distribution of both.\(^98\)

On the 6th August 1946 the trouble arose due to a defamation case filed by a Timekeeper against the Secretary of the Labour Union. The workers wanted to strike but on intervention by Howieson, the Coal Superintendent, the situation was brought to normalcy. But since the arrival of Mr Satya Sen, who, I am told, was extemned during the War period from this area on charges of defalcation of accounts and other malpractices, lot of outside agitators have set up parties and factions and the colliery atmosphere remains greatly disturbed.\(^99\)

A local strike was threatened on the 24th August 1946 at the Digwadih Colliery by the entire labour on the ground that the quality of rice was bad and they were not prepared to accept the rice which was to be distributed.\(^100\) The plea of the Management was, that whatever foodstuff they were getting from the Rice Controller were distributed. But to avoid any trouble the Management agreed to the proposal to distribute superfine rice which was 7 As [annas] a seer at the rate of 5 As a seer for which medium rice was available.\(^101\) V.M.Shah reporting of a trouble brewing up in Jamadoba Colliery mentioned

\(^{98}\) Ibid.,
\(^{99}\) Ibid.
\(^{100}\) Sumit Sarkar, p.568.
\(^{101}\) Ibid.
that the trouble had arisen from a quarrel between a clerk and a coolie and the local strike took a serious turn, for by 1 p.m. the whole power House was threatened to be closed down. But on his assurance and timely intervention the strike was called off.102

From September 24, Giridih with its 17,000 coal miners decided to go on strike demanding the same service conditions from the Railway Board as were offered to their other employees and thus the Railway Board which managed these mines would not have any supply of coal. They were led by the Colliery Workers' Union under whom 17000 miners were enrolled as members.103

The year witnessed the inauguration by the Labour Ministry of the first State-sponsored scheme of welfare work among the women of the coalfields—a scheme for promoting welfare through women for women. Miss. C. A. Radha Bai, Lady Conciliation Officer of the Ministry of Labour, was entrusted with the work of implementation of the scheme. A training centre was opened at Pathardih in the Jharia coalfield, utilising the accommodation available in a labour camp used during the war for housing Gorakhpur labour and a number of women belonging to middle class Bihari and Bengali families were trained in social service, first-aid, nursing, handcrafts and community life. The higher grades of welfare personnel were given an intensive training at Delhi, and equipped with the necessary knowledge and background for

102 Ibid, p.569.
103 Ibid., p.617
shouldering duties of important nature including promotion of craft education, propaganda and inspection of the operation of statutory measures enacted by the State for the protection and benefit of working women. At the end of the year thirty-four women workers were trained and posted to welfare centres at Jamadoba, Apcar Charanpur, Bastacolla, Kustore, Sendra-Bans jora, Kankanee, Pootkee, Bhagaband, Jitpur, Bhowra and Amlabad. Activities at these centres included nursery schools, craft education for boys and girls, recreational activities (Bhajans, Kirtans, etc., and play-grounds, jhoolas, radios, newspapers, indoor games, etc. Audio-visual education and entertainment through a mobile cinema, organising first-aid services and health talks, popularising hospitals schools, etc., at the collieries.

With the cooperation of employers, labour and labour leaders, the organization attained considerable success in the first year of its operation.

In 1947 the Government of India, finally appointed a Board of Conciliation with representation of the workers (Abdul Bari and P.C.Bose), employers, and the Government to probe into question of wage increment of colliery workers of Bengal and Bihar coalfields. So the end of our period we can see that the workers started reaping fruits of their struggle. The constant

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid
pressure on Government had finally worked and the workers were finally incorporated into policy making body of the government.

Despite some success of workers movement, the enrolment of the workers in respective union was very marginal in comparison to the total labour force in the colliery of the region. The Indian Miners Association, Jharia had 8000 members while The Indian Colliery Labour Union had 11,577 members, The East Indian Coal Company Workers Union had 2,546 members, The Mugma Coalfield Workers' Union had 3000 members.\textsuperscript{108} Thus the percolation was not very deep in context of the enrolment of the workers. Therefore let us search for reason within the contemporary sources.

Coal companies took every preventive measures to prevent trade unions growing in mining areas with migration of miners. Victimization of workers for joining a trade union, assaults and persecution at the hand of gangsters maintained by the companies to terrorise and tame ‘rebel’ workers, was the ordinary method followed by all mine-owners, including the managers of the State Railway Collieries. Trade union meetings were made impossible by the simple fact that miles and miles of land in the collieries was declared private property where no trade union meeting of the workers could be called, and if held where the miners lived in their tenements, those attending were prosecuted for trespassing or ejected from the tenements and beaten up. And if it did cross all these government would rush in to help the owners by

\textsuperscript{108} All the figures are from \textit{A.R.C.I.M.}, 1947, pp.61-62
imprisoning the trade union leaders.\textsuperscript{109} The other possible reason was possibly clash of personality as we had seen above that Bari hated the coming of Mukuthdhari Singh in Jharia.

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