"SOCIAL CONDITIONSOF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AMONG THE COAL WORKERS OF EASTERN INDIA, 1860-90."

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The dissertation entitled " Social Conditions of Political Mobilization among the Coal Workers of Eastern India, 1860-1960 " submitted by Shri Anjan Kumar Ghosh for the Degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any University. We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of M.Phil Degree.

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations

1. BCC - Bengal Coal Company.
2. CSSSC - Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, Calcutta.
3. EPW - Economic and Political Weekly.
4. EW - Economic Weekly.
5. IESHR - Indian Economic and Social History Review.
6. IHC - Indian History Congress.
7. IHR - Indian Historical Review.
8. OUP - Oxford University Press.
9. PPH - People's Publishing House.
10. RCL - Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India.
11. ICOA - Indian Colliery Owners Association
12. IMA - Indian Mining Association
13. IMF - Indian Mining Federation
14. AITUC - All Indian Trade Union Congress
15. INTUC - Indian National Trade Union Congress
16. HMS - Hind Mazdoor Sabha
17. UTUC - United Trade Union Congress

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

I.1: Scope and Intent.

The industrial worker has been a rather late entrant into the Indian sociological scene. Inspite of exhortation to the contrary by historians like Morris D. Morris for the carrying out of research on the 'dynamics of industrial labour force creation' in different industries,[1] remarkably little attention has been paid to the formation of an industrial working class in India by sociologists. Their concern with micro-structures and its institutional complex as embodied in village studies[2] or studies of isolated factories as industrial communities[3] have constrained their perspective from the processual aspect of 'class-formation'. Secondly the overarching importance of 'caste' in sociological studies on India as an ideological system[4] has offset attention from other forms of social structures based on more objective conditions of access to means of production. Thus sociological problems are defined in terms of caste as enveloping both the rural and urban sphere[5] or as a functional entity observable at the village level[6]. While this importance of caste as the sole determinant of social stratification in India has been called into question by Beteille especially with regard to agrarian social structure[7] yet the break with functionalism was not absolute. Beteille retained a 'plural' sociology.[8] As a result the focus on micro-structural stasis remained, relinquishing the possibility of raising questions with regard to the power-structure and its permeating linkages in society.

The primary focus of this essay is upon 'class-formation' with specific reference to the coal workers of Eastern India. It is necessary

at this point to relate and integrate our primary concern with certain broad trends in sociological literature, since class formation is a total social process, intimately linked with economic development. The specificity of class formation in a developing economy derives from the interaction of different modes of production within a social formation. An underdeveloped economy by implication suggests the non-hegemonic position of capitalist mode of production which is concurrently coexistent with different precapitalist modes. This casts its imprint upon class formation too by integrating the capitalist class relations with a primordial system of stratification, exemplified by the caste-system in India. Thus the intermesh of class and caste stratification dilutes the polarity of capitalist class relation.[9]

Another feature of underdevelopment relates to the crystallization of class solidarity and rural-urban dichotomy. As Stavenhagen has suggested, 'underdeveloped countries are above all unequally developed societies and that their under-development is in great measure a result of their unequal development.'[10] This unequal development is manifest in rural-urban disparateness which stems from the respective forms of economic activities embedded in them.[11] Dichotomous representation of society has been a consistent trait of sociological analysis. From Maine's 'status-contract' to Tonnies' 'community-society' or Weber's 'sacred-secular', sociologists have overtly concerned themselves with the cultural continuities or discontinuities manifest in these dichotomous concepts. With regard to rural-urban continuties and disjunctures' Redfield's 'folk-urban' continuum has been immensely influential.[12] We mark our departure from this tradition by emphasizing not the cultural and ideational aspect as

Redfield did but the structural and economic in the sense of how the structuring of the respective societies determines the forms and methods of procuring subsistence. As a result in the Indian context the overweening importance of caste is subsumed as a component of the class system.

Rural-urban relationship in India has been viewed in terms of empirically quantitative and qualitative data[13] but has not been understood in terms of structural interdependence in the context of underdevelopment. Bagchi's historical essay is a step in such a direction.[14] In our case the relationship is specifically related to the fact of labour supply from the rural to the urban sector, and its consequential impact on the social organization of the industrial working force. Later we shall spell out the mediation of the labour recruiter and the social conditions of work in the coal industry.

Sociological studies of the industrial worker have tended to concentrate more on their behavioural aspect[15] than on the process of 'proletarianization' which defines the parameters of interaction of the industrial labour force. This accounts for their ahistorical and functional account. As Lambert notes, their behaviour is probably functionally adapted to the form of technology they handle.[16] It enables convenient schematization into the 'tradition-modernity' dichotomy and by placing industrial workers on the modernity end it is then easy to impute charges of 'non-committment' to the industrial ethos, upon them.[17] What gets left out is the historical process through which an industrial labour force is born, and which alone can explain the residues of pre-industrial traits.

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Yet why is history important? This is hardly the place for vindicating

history, but it is necessary to indicate the specificity of historical experience in an underdeveloped economy in order to trace the roots of underdevelopment. Prof. Bipan Chandra in an illuminating essay[18] has demonstrated with historical evidence the colonial roots of Indian underdevelopment. He suggests that 'colonialism' ought to be 'seen as a distinct historical stage or period', for "It is a well structured, 'whole', a distinct social formation (system) or sub-formation (sub-system) in which the basic control of the economy and society is in the hands of a foreign capitalist class which functions in the colony (or semi-colony) through a dependent and subservient economic, social, political, and intellectual structure whose forms can vary with the changing conditions of the historical development of capitalism as a world-wide system."[19] Underdevelopment is thus the alter ego of development, in other words both form the totality of international capitalism[20]. Colonialism thus serves as a structural impediment to the emulation of the 'modernization process' (capitalism) of the metropolis for the peripheral-capitalist countries. Unlike the unilinear position of the 'tradition-modernity' schema, choices of transition to modernity simply does not exist for the satellite countries. And this provides the specificity of underdevelopment where differing modes of production interact within a social formation. As a result the capitalism which comes into being in these countries are not autonomous entites with hegemonic control, but are firstly integrated with international capitalism on a dependent basis and secondly harbour strong residues of pre-capitalist relations of production sometimes leading to the dominance of pre-capitalist forms of surplus expropriation under a capitalist social formation.

From such a perspective does the problem of 'class formation' or

'proletarianization' attains its significance. For unlike in the industrially developed societies class formation like the entire mode of production remains retarded and does not manifest itself in a pristine manner. The interaction of different modes of production constitutes the basis of this process. Bernstein asserts that, "Underdevelopment must be located historically in the penetration of pre-capitalist societies by the expansion of capitalism from its countries of origin"[24]. The formation of an industrial proletariat constitutes its result. But as the capitalist integration of underdeveloped economies at the supranational level is subordinated to the interest of developed economies and consequently weakens the basis of indigenous capitalist development; similarly the growth of an industrial proletariat is equally distorted by the persistence of primordial solidarity the result of pre-capitalist relations of production.

It is from such a perspective that we embark upon our study of 'class formation' and political mobilization among the coal workers of Eastern India. Similar studies have been carried out with reference to other 'third world' countries like Peru, Ghana and Rhodesia.[22] Yet for India such studies are conspicuous by their absence, although recently some interest is evident in this direction[23]. In India sociologists have predominantly sought to consider social change either in terms of 'Westernization' or 'Modernization'[24]. These concepts by their diffuse and inclusive nature disperses the locus of change from their particular levels. Thus by 'Westernization' Srinivas indicates "the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, the term subsuming changes occurring at different levels.....technology, institutions, ideology and values."[25] With regard to 'Modernization', Singh

considers it "as a form of cultural response, involves attributes which are basically universalistic and evolutionary..... Modernization approximates to such a cultural order. It symbolizes a rational attitude towards issues, and their evaluation from a universalistic and not particularistic view point; when it involves an emotional response to problems, orientation is empathic and not constructive; modernization is rooted in the scientific world-view; it has deeper and positive association with levels of diffusion of scientific knowledge, technological skill and technological resources in a particular society".[26]

Common to both the concepts is the focus on cultural changes rather than structural or economic ones. As Singh notes about 'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization' as concepts are primarily focused to analyse cultural changes, and have no scope for systematic explanation of changes in the social structure'.[27] Conceptualization of 'change' in terms of 'Westernization' or 'Modernization' diffuses the specificity of social transformation and consequently allows a vaguely generalized notion of change to gain currency. Secondly subsumed within the concept of 'modernization' is the Parsonian pattern-variables[28] or 'cultural universals' which gives central importance to the diffusion of particular 'values'. As a result the assimilation of such values is considered the primary characteristic of 'modernization'. In this way the focus of social change is shifted from the relationship between classes to attributes imbibed individually. The psycho-cultural realm which thus becomes an important stimulus to change has therefore received the attention of social-theorists like McLelland[29] and Hagen[30], both of whom have asserted the importance of entrepreneurship as an important propellant of modernization. To them child rearing patterns

play a significant role in shaping the personality of a potential entrepreneur. Hagen tries to show through cross cultural examples how the debilitating experience of domination (in the form of colonialism in some societies like Burma) upon certain groups leads to 'status withdrawal' and activates them later, in an attempt to rehabilitate their status, to entrepreneurial functions.

The problem with such theories of entrepreneurship and change is again their attempt at universal generalisation from specific cases. While 'status withdrawal' in particular instances may ultimately lead to entrepreneurship, yet to what extent it can be considered as a general formulation is not yet clear. Over and above this what is ignored in such a thesis is the structural constraints of a concrete economic structure. In other words an individual's psychological attributes are seen as sufficient to fulfil entrepreneurial functions, setting aside the problem of the economic context in which he has to perform and the limitation or advantage in the form of access to resources by privileged group of classes, who are then better placed to convert these resources in terms of their entrepreneurial activities. Such social conditions, however, do not fall within the purview of psychological theorists like McLelland and Hagen.

I.2: Sociological Perspectives on the Industrial Worker in India:

Industrialisation in India was promoted by the British only to that extent which concurred with their colonial interest. Consequently railways were introduced in order to facilitate the transport of commodities from the hinterland to the port towns (Calcutta, Bombay) for export[31]. Entry into the international commodity circuit led to the commercialisation of

agriculture which in turn gave rise to differentiation of the peasantry.[33] As has been shown by historians the colonial impact upon rural society fostered the growth of a class of agricultural labourers[34]. Initially it was from the ranks of the dispossessed peasantry that industrial workers came, usually as seasonal workers to supplement their agricultural earnings. Population pressure, heavy taxation, increasing intermediary rent-receivers and the instiable greed of the money-lender all consorted to 'push' the landless labourer or share-cropper or small tenant farmer to industrial occupations. Later other classes of agriculturists including peasant proprietors and landed gentry sought employment in industries to strengthen their rural standing. In fact a drastic change came over the work force as the advantages of a fixed cash income and opportunities of social mobility came to be realised by the middle and higher castes. Niehoff's data on the changing composition of the workforce in Kanpur sheds some light on this aspect. Initially, it was the untouchables and low caste marginal groups like the Chamars, Koris and Muslims who took up industrial employment, as in the traditional occupational hierarchy industrial work had yet to establish its credibility and consequently was ranked low. The early migrants being largely Chamars, 'Kanpur was described in early days as being primarily a city of Chamars'.[35] They were followed mainly by artisan castes like weavers, forced out of their traditional occupation as 'de-industrialization' gathered pace[36]. By 1951 the low caste migration had petered out and in the dwindling migratory phase after independence it was the high caste Brahmins and Thakurs and the displaced but skilled and enterprising Sikhs from Pakistan who formed the bulk of immigrants. As Niehoff suggests, for the former group it was Zamindari Abolition and for the Sikhs it was Partition which

'pushed' them out of their villages. Evidently it was macro-societal factors like 'colonialism' or the decision to Partition the country, or Government legislation on landholding which contributed significantly as reasons for migration.

But 'pull' factors were also important. Once industrial work gained prestige by virtue of its economic viability or enabled the neutralisation of earlier low caste identity in the urban milieu thus affording social mobility, more and more people were attracted to it. Significantly though late-comers, the high caste men flocked to the factories outnumbering their low caste counterparts[37].

At the same time it is interesting to note that it is the more recent high caste immigrants who still retain strong ties with their village home either because they have some small landholding or because members of the family are left back home while they come to work in the cities. As Niehoff observed the early low caste industrial workers on the other hand have become permanent urban residents as their families had migrated with them and maintain tennous links with their village of origin. In this context it is probably relevant to note that Gertrude Woodruff reported a similar situation from Bangalore[39]. She found that the low caste Tamilian agricultural labourer purportedly migrated with his family from South Arcot into Bangalore to take up work as construction workers. In Bombay the Ratnagirians were slowly displaced over time by the 'Bhaiya' from U.P. and Maratha from the Deccan who retained some interest in land[39]. Thus it seems as though that instead of the archetypal proletarian, displaced from land and totally

dependent on urban wage labour, is slowly being replaced by workers who have not totally relinquished their ties with the village and consequently does not conform to the pristine notion of the proletariat.

Data on the changing composition of the industrial labour-force and their specific ties with the village is scarce[40]. The rural origin of industrial workers has been commented upon by various observers[41] but few have tried to locate the subsequent persistence or lack of ~~it of~~ rural ties in terms of the structure of industries within a specific totality (i.e. mode of production). More commonly sociologists have been concerned with ascertaining the level of 'commitment' of workers[42] or with their role as modernizing agents by virtue of their contact with technology[43]. The fragmentation of certain behavioural characteristics from the total structure and process of industrialization has given rise to a lopsided representation of reality in sociological literature. Another locus of interest has been the transformation of caste and its values in an industrial setting[44]. The segmentation of social structure into micro-units of observation which has resulted from the latter concern, has impeded the realisation of a larger power structure as the integrating phenomenon. Thus sociological literature has reflected only local reality but little concern with total structures. Since 'cultural inadequacy' and 'labour commitment' have been two very influential concepts, we will deal with them at some length to show their inadequacy with regard to the explanation of change and industrialization.

Slotkin's formulation of 'cultural inadequacy' as a cause of

industrialization, leads to his locating the cultural 'configuration' of industrialism in a trait-complex. It consists of : 1) corporate ownership and operation of complex technological equipment, 2) extensive division of labour, 3) formal industrial organization, 4) interdependence between industrial organization and wider society, 5) mechanization or use of inanimate sources of energy[45]. Such an industrial-trait-complex orginally emanated in the European societies and was subsequently implanted into other non-industrial societies, through a process of 'acculturation'. Such an exposition smacks of a superordinate-subordinate relationship characteristic of a colonial situation, where the coloniser introduces industrialization in the subjugated country thereby incorporating the latter into an international system of economic exchange. The initiation is primarily in the interest of industrial capital in the 'home country', for the 'periphery' with its underdeveloped forces of production is forced into a dependent position vis-a-vis the 'metropolis' in the world market. Simultaneously the 'colonial encounter'[46] produces derogatory stereotypes of the colonised. Again the 'drain' of surplus coupled with the deliberate non-development of the capital goods industry retards the growth of a home market and perpetuates the process of underdevelopment[47]. In this context 'acculturation' is nothing but the cultural counterpart of economic imperialism[48]. From the above notion of acculturation, sans its economic implication, Slotkin goes on to propound how as a result of 'cultural inadequacy' the rural population perceiving new opportunities in industries moves into industrial employment. It is effected by the disorganization of traditional culture, cultural deficiency and cultural defectiveness owing

to the interpenetration of industrialism.

From his micro-cultural perspective, Slotkin is unable to see the implications of industrialization as a process or as an international phenomena. Thus for him it appears aberrant and disruptive leading him to pose a choice between rapid industrialization and the welfare of people[49]. Secondly the reduction of industrialism to psycho-cultural variables (i.e. 'trait-complex') enables him to ignore the socio-economic preconditions. Finally industrialization is found to be a result of the introduction of innovations. Yet what is left unanswered is why these innovations developed in some places and had to be introduced in others? Again was the introduction voluntary or imposed? Answers to these questions can hardly be found in a study of the cultural subsystem as an autonomous entity.

Starting from the premise that 'economic development' or modernization is the desired goal, Moore and Feldman propounded that 'commitment was a crucial variable with regard to labour utilization in the process of industrialization'. They wrote, "this volume explores the social correlates of economic change, using labour commitment as a convenient focus for the whole complex process of social transformation"[50]. It was the 'motivation of workers' as a significant 'precondition to industrial development'[51] which concerned them in varied cultural context. Deriving from McClelland that forms of socialization led to 'need-achievement' which was the functional pre-requisite of commitment, Moore and Feldman asserted the 'fundamental importance of norms in the conduct of a viable social system'[52]. The concept of 'labour commitment was also utilised by Kerr and his associates[53],

for expounding their logic, of world wide industrialism and the concept of 'industrial man' constrained in his choices into a converging pattern of industrialization as a general social system. As a definition Moore and Feldman stated, "commitment involves both performance and acceptance of the bahaviours appropriate to an industrial way of life. The concept as thus concerned with overt actions and with norms. The fully committed worker, in other words, has internalised the norms of the new productive organization and social system. By implication therefore, there are degrees of commitment and partial substitutions....."[54]. Such an all encompassing, diffuse, culturological difinition gave rise to difficulties of operationalising. In effect conformity with the 'industrial ethic' or values constitutes the core of the concept. Exclusion of the material preconditions for the emanation of these values was succinctly pointed out by Singer[55], "if these values have not propelled the newly developing countries into an advanced stage of industrialization, perhaps this only shows the limitations, of values as concrete requirements of industrialization, rather than that the people of these countries need a different value system and 'character'. "Along with pointing out the institutional impediments to industrialization in consonance with the distinctive national cultures: given a favourable institutional setting indigenous capital and entrepreneurship was capable of generating economic development.

In the same volume Morris[56] demolished the myth of labour scarcity in India owing to the constraints of traditional value orientation in the form of caste, joint family, rural background and the 'otherworldliness' of Hinduism which was more conducive towards ascriptive than achieved criteria

of status. Overriding the Weberian arguments, Morris went on to demonstrate that both in Bombay for the cotton textile mills and in Jamshedpur for Tata Iron and Steel Company, the supply of labour had not been problematic.

The implications of a diffusionist, unilinear model of economic growth is latent in Moore and Feldmen's original formulation.* The ahistorical nature of their functionalist interpretation stems from the consideration of an individual as the unit of study. Consequently his behavioural attributes can be isolated and predetermined. Thus instead of social relations values become the important structural factor. Implanted as characteristising a collectivity (the workers) in terms of 'commitment', ~~it~~ values becomes an arbitrary indicator ~~to~~ of the maturity of evolution of the labour force. More important is the enumeration of the institutional context and overheads as prerequisite of 'commitment'. Secondly the conflict of interest arising out of the ownership and ~~=~~ possession of the means of production between the employer and employee is ignored and a harmonic system is posited in terms of value consensus. Both the worker and the industrialist are held to be component parts of an industrial ethos. In other words the structural conflict emanating out of their objective social position is glossed over in terms of 'integrationist behaviouralism'. For Moore and Feldman, power and control over property has little to contribute to the articulation of individual behaviour. Conflict a major motivator of social change is thus reduced to 'value-dissensus' between traditional and modern ones.

On the substantive level sociologists concerned with industrial workers

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* Yet even in Europe there was no single model of transition to capitalism as the Junker-Capitalist variant and the second serfdom of Eastern Europe testifies. (Marx and Engels: Selected Correspondence, Moscow, p.409).

in India have been predominantly concerned with operationalising these concepts. Moreover the apparent lack of any organised conflict of interest in terms of an effective labour movement vis-a-vis the organised political impact of the industrialists on the state structure[57] has given credence to the 'integrationist' model of industrial relations in India. The trade unions institutionalised since pre-independence times could hardly be effective catalysts of labour interests, as certain initial constraints were imposed upon them[58]. Firstly as an outcome of the national movement, their political affiliation was with the national political parties. As a result both in leadership and ideology the interest of the workers were subordinated to that of the middle and commercial classes, designated by Kerr and his associates as 'nationalist elites'. The trade unions or the labour arena served as the political support base of some of the bourgeois nationalist leaders. Consequently the wage-welfare issues could hardly be left to the unions to settle autonomously with their respective employers through collective bargaining[59] so from the time the Congress came to power in the provinces (1937) state intervention, pre-empting some of the functions of unions, began taking place. The state became the self-imposed patron of labour interest and sought to kill two birds with one stone. By enabling some benefits to percolate to the workers through legislation from time to time, political leaders sought to maintain their bases. At the same time it enabled the state to exercise a restraining and disciplinary influence on the labour force in concurrence with the ostensible aims of planned industrial development. The dependence on the state which 'compulsory adjudication' wrought on the unions eroded their function of mobilization to being mere legal functionaries on the part of the workers. Consequently the trade unions

were institutionalised as part of the state structure ostensibly representing labour interest but unable to challenge the status-quo, since as a bargaining instrument it had implicitly accepted the rule of law in its interest. It was thus forced to play its part as labour disciplinarian[60]. Also the policy of granting representative status to a particular union closely linked to the ruling party has led to the erosion of support for other unions and has effectively sapped their mobilizational capacity. For a union will be patronised by the workers as long as it is capable of protecting their interest and eliciting wage enhancement and other welfare measures for them. Consequently an unrecognized union can hardly serve as an effective instrument of bargaining. Secondly it is denied the influence on the state structure which enables the state to implement welfare measures by fiat. Thirdly it would inevitably lack resources available to the union fostered by the state. It is under these inherent disadvantages that the opposition trade unions like AITUC, CITU, HMS, and UTUC function. However, it seems evident that these unions are strong where either their parent party enjoys strong electoral support and have been or are still in power at the provincial level.

The state in this manner has deprived the trade unions of their capacity to grow as institutions of a 'class' in direct opposition to the ruling one. In accordance with their functions the leadership of the trade unions was vested in the hands of lawyers and petty bourgeois leaders who while sympathetic to the cause of labour were unable to articulate an alternative ideology or world view to the dominant one. Trade unions thus became perpetrators of a false consciousness among workers. Finally as

INTUC, the predominant trade union all over India, followed the Gandhian model of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad from whose ranks successive Labour Ministers like G.L. Nanda and Khandubhai Desai were recruited, so a conciliatory rather than a militant approach to labour relation was evolved. The net outcome of this has been the assimilation of the trade unions as part of the state bureaucracy, quite contrary to Marx's conception of them as 'Schools of communism'.[61]

In this context of a weak trade union and labour movement, the concepts of 'social selectivity' and 'labour commitment' both functional to the aim of "integrated" industrial development have gained credence. The industrial worker has therefore been studied with regard to characteristics necessary for industrial work and the modernizing impact of technology upon society[62], other studies have concentrated on the reorganization of the work group for greater productivity,[63] or adjustment to an urban milieu and consequent changes in social structure[64]. Others have sought to enumerate the factors affecting the workers relationship within the social system of a factory[65], while some have measured and correlated particular aspects of worker behaviour to their industrial occupation[66].

Evidently much emphasis has been laid on isolating factors facilitating or retarding workers adjustment with their work milieu and also on depicting them as 'change agents' introducing the 'industrial tradition'[67] into a traditional society. What has consistently escaped scholarly attention is the process of formation of an industrial labour force; Constraints of class formation and class consciousness in a situation of economic underdevelopment; Articulation of interests and demands on the political plane; Also the way power and social control is exercised by non-workers upon workers and how it affects

differentiation within the class itself". In sum the way in which ~~how does~~ the structure of society leads to a specific mode of incorporation of a class and thereby affects its world view and life chances".

The literature dealing with such questions are fragmentary and meagre[68]. Taking our cue from such diverse strands of thought we will attempt to knit together a case-study of the colliery workers with regard to their process of class-formation and its impact on their political articulation. In our next section we will discuss some of the concepts to be used in the study.

I.3: Concepts.

Two concepts form the mainstay of our exposition of class formation among the colliery workers: 'political mobilization' and 'class consciousness'. Since concepts are not static but require redefinition or modification with every set of new data, so after a brief survey of the past use of these concepts we shall set them out according to our needs.

Unlike the use of the concept of 'mobilization' by Deutsch[69] and Etzioni[70] we use it in a more locale specific sense. For Deutsch, "social mobilization is a name given to an overall process of change, which happens to substantial parts of the population in countries which are moving from traditional to modern ways of life".[71] In effect then Deutsch makes 'mobilization' synomymous with 'modernization'. His effort is seemingly directed at developing a model which would be the political counterpart of Rostow's 'take-off'. Accordingly he suggests that the processes of social mobilization 'tend to go together in certain historical situations and stages of economic development, that they are identifiable and recurrent in their essentials, from one country to

another..... but once it occurs on a substantial scale it begins to influence the further process of modernization in turn'[72]. This self-perpetuating process of political development is propelled by political mobilization which by eroding segmentary clusters enables integration at a national level. For Deutsch therefore, this transformation of the 'communitas' into 'societas' specifically in the context of nation-building is crucial. Since our concern is more with the linkages of 'local-level politics'[73] Deutsch's exposition becomes too obtuse for our purpose.

Etzioni's macrosociological concept of mobilization provides us with a number of useful starting points. His characteristics include control of resources by a specific unit, over a relatively short span of time leading to the transformation of the social unit itself which 'increases its ability to act collectively'[74]. He also recognizes the ideological implications ('theoretical conceptions') which motivate mobilization. Again Etzioni recognizes its potential for change saying 'mobilization often precedes attempts to produce a change either in the relations between two units or among the sub-units that make up a given unit'[75]. The self consciousness of a collectivity posited by him provides us with a specific criteria of mobilization, though we are more interested in a long term perspective telescoping both the preparation for and the mobilization into one process.

In a comprehensive theoretical enumeration Nettl[76] uses the Parsonian pattern variables: goal attainment (politics), adaptation (economy), integration (normative) and pattern maintenance (family and kinship) as functional sub-system of the process of mobilization. As an induced process of social and political change he too locates 'political mobilization' as a historically specific form

succeeding religious and military mobilization. He differentiates between two types of mobilization: 'cleavage' and 'issue specific', the former based on interest and the latter on the legitimation of authority[77]. Nettl subsequently defines political mobilization as 'differential commitment and support for collectivities based on cleavages'[78]. But he envisages different forms of it for developing and developed countries based primarily on their elite formation, who act as initiators of mobilization. The difficulty with Nettl's formulation lies in his granting autonomy to the functioning of the political subsystem. This violates the complex contextual interweave between the political, cultural, and economic, isolating the political subsystem into a self-contained whole.

In the Indian context 'political mobilization' as a concept has been used for the analysis of social movements. Shah[79] has used it in his analysis of the Bardoli Satyagraha and Oommen[80] for peasant movements in Kerala. Shah's definition 'of a people's commitment either to participate in a movement or to extend support to it' comes close to our notion. The only difficulty arises from the generality of the term 'people' which thus does not differentiate between the forms of mobilization and its specific content with reference to a particular class. If at any point of time there is a coalescence of interest between different classes it is necessary to find the reason for it.

The relational aspect of political mobilization of a 'class' is subsumed under 'class consciousness'. In other words mobilization can be effectively related to the ideological development of a class. The level of consciousness has been demarcated into 'class in itself' to 'class for itself'. It is only in the latter phase when a class is able to specify its historical task, that it is

able to exercise its 'hegemony'. Lukacs describes this as a 'class conditioned unconsciousness of ones own socio-historical and economic condition'[81]. On the substantive plane Gareth Stedman Jones' distinction between 'trade-union' and 'revolutionary' class consciousness is useful. The former implying a rejection of bourgeois political control in the sense of militant occupational solidarity, and the latter a phase of overcoming sectional loyalties through intellectual conviction[82].

The next chapter consequently deals with the growth and development of capital in the coal industry.

Chapter II: Evolution and Economy of the Coal Industry in Eastern India.

The principal factor in the retardation of the economy, as embodied in the constraints over indigenous private investments in industry, in Eastern India, was British rule. Colonial control both political and economic enabled foreign (primarily British) enterprises to flourish at the expense of the Indians.[1] State policy during colonial rule discriminated against the Indian industrialists who consequently functioned under severe handicaps. The coal industry was no exception to the rule. To this we will come later, for the present our attention will be focussed on the growth and development of the coal industry through the nineteenth and twentieth century.

II.1: The growth of the coal industry in Eastern India:

Although prospecting for commercial exploitation of coal was started as early as 1773-74 by Messrs. Sumner, Heatly and Redferne around Ethora on the Dishergarh seam, little headway was made by them or their successor William Jones who tried to open a mine near Egara about 1814.[2] The latter's failure enabled Messrs Alexander and Company, an agency house of Calcutta to take over the mine in 1820 and attempt a sustained commercial venture of mining coal. Other agency houses like Jessop and Company also developed interests in coal and opened new mines.[3] It is not entirely surprising that the agency houses epitomising British mercantile interests, would find coal mining a profitable venture to invest in, as steam navigation with its demand for coal formed one of their complementary interests. As we shall

see later a continutty of this complementarity would persist under the managing agencies too. Between 1830-35 an economic depression resulting in a run on the leading Banks of the time like the Bank of Hindustan and the Calcutta Bank connected respectively with the agency house of Alexander and Company, and Palmer and Company., led to the liquidation of all the agency houses.[4] The mining interests of Alexander and Company was bought by Babu Dwarkanath Tagore who thus came to form Carr, Tagore and Company to work it. The situation of the sale is characteristic of the economic flux prevailing at the time: "It is said that no much was the value of such property depreciated at the time of the sale, that the whole estate including several valuable patni and other tenures, together with all the buildings, and works, steam engines etc., on the mine, nearly 250,000 mds of coal (above 9,000 tons) at market, and a large quantity more at the mine together with all advances made to boatmen, was sold for 70,000 rupees less than the value of the coal at market alone".[5] In its process of expansion by the acquisition of a number of mines by Carr, Tagore and Company it ultimately amalgamated with Messrs. Gilmore, Homfray and Company in 1843, into the Bengal Coal Company., the largest coal concern of its time.[6]

The collapse of the agency houses enabled for a brief period a number of Indian entrepreneurs to play a significant role in joint Indo-British mercantile enterprises. Three most important of them were Dwarkanath Tagore, Rustomji Cowasji and Motilal Seal.[7] Dwarkanath's business ventures collapsed in 1848 and his coal interests for a long time was managed by a board of directors till in 1908 the Bengal Coal Company was

taken over by the leading British managing agency firm of Andrew Yule and Company.[8]

Meanwhile the coal industry stagnated till 1860 primarily because of three reasons. Firstly as it was internal consumption which consisted of its chief demand, the slow rate of increase in domestic consumption affected the industry adversely. This can be attributed to the slow rate of growth in industries, indigo plantations being the only agro-industry, and to the lack of initial recognition of coal as domestic fuel. Secondly the transportation of coal by river to Calcutta, the main consumption and distribution centre, was problematic. It was not only slow and hazardous as the operation could only be performed during the monsoon when the rivers were swollen, but also affected the quality of coal. Pilfering was also not infrequent. Finally the scarcity of labour was a potential constraint on increased production, initially.

The opening of the East Indian Railways in 1855 upto Raniganj and its later extension to Sitarampur remedied some of the disadvantages. It facilitated transportation of coal, as a consumer it served to increase demand and finally to transfer labour from its supply bases to the mines. Expansion of the railway network led to the doubling of coal consumption by them. Meanwhile the jute, cotton and tea industry was also underway and served to increase the industrial demand for coal.

In 1893 the Jharia coalfied was started and by 1903 had surpassed Raniganj in production, yielding 60% of the total Indian output or approximately 4 million tons.[9] Accessibility of the coal deposits located

at a shallow depth promoted production. Yet unlike in Raniganj where both Indian and European enterprises coexisted, Jharia was solely dominated by the latter.[10]

Although coal produced in India was primarily consumed within the country, exports to neighbouring countries ~~was~~ were also made. Thus exports to Burma and other South East Asian countries increased from 42,000 tons in 1891-95 to 1,224,758 tons in 1920. But the rise in internal demand in the Post World War-I period combined with a decline in production compelled the government to discontinue the exporting of coal except to scheduled ports.[11] The embargo placed on coal exports (1920) was lifted only in 1923. Meanwhile coal imports which had declined drastically reaching its lowest ebb in 1909,[12] increased during the war years as production was unable to cope up with the demand. In fact production fell from 21.7 million tons in 1919 to 17 million tons in 1920. The deficiency was sought to be met by the import of South African coal and also by requisitioning of all supplies by the Government.[13] Difficulties of transportation of coal by railways to Western India from the East, led to the import of coal into Bombay from South Africa. Industrialists found it cheaper to import coal than to get it transported from Bengal. Consequently imports although reduced, persisted. [see Appendix

With the opening of the Jharia field coal production increased rapidly. Between 1891 and 1901 the output tripled and from 1909 to 1919 it doubled again. Inspite of the increased production, the supply was not sufficient to meet the demands of increased industrialisation. By 1911 the Tata Iron and Steel Works of Jamshedpur had started functioning near the coal belt. But the largest consumer of coal was the railways which itself consumed

approximately one-third of the total output of coal.[14] However, all the supply channels were strictly monopolised by the British coal companies. This was because the colonial government denied the coal contracts of the Railways to any but European firms. Secondly the horizontal monopolistic links of the leading British managing agencies also helped to exclude the supply by indigenous entrepreneurs.[15] Therefore we next turn our attention to the specificity of colonial economic control as manifested in the institution of the managing agencies.

II.2: Economic Control: the Managing Agencies.

The managing agencies were a unique institution[16] resulting from the specific nature of British colonialism in India. Economic imperialism, embodied in the 'drain' of investible surplus, was the prime motive force behind British colonial expansion. The forms of this extraction changed with the change in the character of the British bourgeoisie progressing from industrial capitalism to finance capitalism. Its reflection on state policy was manifested in the change from "free trade" to the preservation of the interests of the monopoly houses in the mother country.[17] Free trade had given birth to the agency houses with their import and export trade, investments in indigo and opium plantations and finally their remittances to Britain Via the China trade in opium. Financial capitalism with its attempts at industrial development gave rise to the managing agencies. But first it is important to understand the nature and source of foreign private investments. While controlling modern industries in India after the middle of the nineteenth century it was mostly 'embodied in loans to government', or in the railways and public utilities. Most of the

remaining investment went into extractive or plantation industries aiming at export markets'.[18] It is interesting to note as Bagchi further points out that 'the capital invested in the European-controlled enterprises was made up of the ploughed-back profits of these enterprises, and the capital raised from European residents in India. There was little real transfer of resources from Europe (Britain) to India for investment in private enterprises.[19] Although export of capital from Britain did take place, yet actual British investments outstripped the amount exported.

Table 1

Year	Mean Annual Export of British capital to India and Ceylon (£ million)	British Investments in India (£ million)
1925-27	2.1	
1926-27		574.9
1932-34	4.2	
1931		1000.00
1935		438.00
1934-36	1.0	

Source: A.I. Levkovsky, Capitalism in India, New Delhi, 1972 p.148-9.

It was the managing agencies which served as the main source of foreign investments and thus facilitated the retention of financial control by British monopoly groups over the exported capital. As Levkovsky puts it: "the companies in India acting as managing agencies depended directly or

indirectly on some monopoly group or groups in Britain; hence these groups could control extensive British investments in India which did not belong to them."[20] For instance, one of the leading British business house of Morgan Grenfell had direct links and supervised the functioning of the largest managing agency in Calcutta, Andrew Yule and Company[21].

It was in labour contracts, or through financing of indigo and tea planters, that the early European entrants into Indian Industry, made their primary accumulation[22], as in the case of Bird and Company, Andrew Yule and Company, Binny and Company, etc. The managing agencies who were the arbiters of industrial development in Eastern India were mostly British owned. Started by either British civil servants (as in the case of Cooper Allen and Company of Kanpur)[23] or individual adventurers (as in the case of Bird and Company.)[24] 'they (i.e. the agency houses) were the promoters of the British companies registered in India or served as trustees of companies registered in Britain'.[25] Allegedly the institution of the managing agency emanated because of the shyness of Indian capital to engage in industrial investment and also because of lack of indigenous managerial ability. This is exemplified in the views of economists like N. Das who writes: "The rise of the managing agents was due to the fact that they fulfilled the role of promoters and pioneers in many of the newly established industries in India, they came into prominence because it was they and they alone who could supply a regular stream of trained and efficient managers; and they gathered power as they found that the capital market was notoriously shy, and that industry looked to them for financial aid, both direct and indirect. The continuance and prevalence of the managing agency system in industrial

enterprise in India has been due more to this last factor than to any other...."[26] A more discerning observer has observed the two levels of activity of the managing agency: "In essence, managing agency is the vesting of the management (~~agency is the vesting of the management~~) of a joint stock company in the hands of a firm of professional managers. In practice, the managing agent is usually responsible for the initial promotion, financing underwriting, and organization of the joint stock company"[27] (emphasis mine). Expatiating on the same theme Vera Anstey writes[28], "The outstanding features of the organization of firms concerned with India's foreign trade and large-scale industries are that most of the trading firms do not specialize but deal in a large variety of goods, and that they undertake the actual management of most of the plantations and other industrial enterprises capitalized and controlled by Europeans. This latter system is known as the 'Managing Agent System'." Evidently most of the scholars have been intrigued by the function of this particular form of business organization in India. Kling in his attempt to trace its origin, ultimately takes recourse to a personality-structured explanation of its emergence: "It is ironical that a system whose invention is always attributed to British mercantile houses and associated with colonialism should have begun with an Indian owned firm. The (Kling is talking about Carr, Tagore and Company) character of Dwarkanath Tagore was, in part, responsible for this..... He was a man with entrepreneurial imagination, business acumen, and capital resources, but with little inclination to devote all of his time and energy to company management.... He encouraged his partners to form joint stock companies and to place their management in the hands of his firm. In this way the "firm" took the place of the

"individual" as managing director of joint stock enterprises. Dwarkanath Tagore's personal style of operation - to remain in the background and work through others - became institutionalised in the prototype of the managing agency firm".[29]

Yet one feels that is it important to relate the emergency of the managing agency to the specific nature of colonial relations between Britian and India and to the interests of the British monopoly baurgeoisie which were largely mediated through the state. They were primarily interested in two facets of India as a colony. Firstly as a source of cheap raw materials for industrial production in the metropolitan country. Secondly as an assured market for their industrial output. The institution of the managing agency served as a perfect instrument for the exercise of monopoly control over industries in India. It had the added advantage of control without financial complicity or risk. Also because of 'lateral concentration' a few managing agencies could control the industrial development of entire regions. British colonial dominance was therefore a principal factor behind the development of the managing agencies, for their relative predominance was in the Eastern Part of India rather than in the West which was later integrated into the empire.[30]

Little wonder then that the coal industry would also be controlled by the managing agencies, as it constituted along with jute and tea the premier industry of the Eastern region. During the early years of the twentieth century coal was a serious competitor with jute for attracting capital investments by the managing agency houses. The growing demand with regard to expansion of the railways, public authorities, jute and cotton

mills and exports to Ceylon, the Straits Settlements, Sumatra and Hong Kong had a 'boom' effect on production. Prices of coal for export increased from Rs.3-8-0 per ton in 1905 to Rs.6-12-0 in 1908[31]. Most of the coal companies were 'rupee companies' or registered in India. In 1911 out of 128 companies, only 5 were registered in Britain[32], and the seven leading managing agencies controlled 46% of all the coal companies. The three houses of Andrew Yule and Company, Bird and Company, and Shaw Wallace and Company among them managed 33 of the companies[33]. Two of the biggest coal companies Bengal Coal Company and Burrakur Coal Company were respectively managed by Andrew Yule and Bird. Apparently among the managing agencies there was some amount of specialisation. Like, Birds after their initial failure in tea did not venture in again and confined their attention more to coal, jute and labour contracting[34]. What is more important is, over and above concentration of control in particular industries, there was at the same time a lateral concentration of various industries under a particular managing agency. Since the industries were complementary to one another in the sense of supply of raw materials or equipment, ~~and~~ thus complete control was exercised over the market by a few houses.

Thus there was the phenomenon of 'captive collieries' who supplied mainly to their sister concerns and consequently had an assured market[35]. British India Steam Navigation Company had its own collieries. Tata Iron and Steel Company contracted Kilburn and Company as their managing agency to look after the coal supply. But during the 1925 slump when TISCO had to buy coal at the higher pre-fixed rate from Kilburns, it sought to disengage from the contract. Later TISCO developed its own collieries for the supply of high grade coke. Finally with regard to the coal companies in the Andrew Yule

group, W.C. Bannerjee in a speech to the Indian Mining Association in 1932 suggested "that the Yule Group need not fear about the depression 'so much' as non-group collieries, since the enterprise of the Yules annually took about 10 lakhs worth of coal from Bengal Coal Company'[36]. Under British rule this enabled the managing agencies to effectively deter indigenous industrial development by creating a hostile environment for investment. Thus in the case of Bird and Company coal used as fuel in the jute mills was supplied by the firm's collieries and conversely the Kumardhubi Engineering Company supplied the collieries with tubs and other equipment[37]. Such a tight control over the market of coal by the European firms, supplying to their sister industrial concerns and also to the Railways and other Public Works had fatal consequences on the Indian enterprises which struggled manfully under unequal conditions. The latter located mainly in the Raniganj field mining inferior quality of coal, supplied primarily for domestic consumption (e.g. cooking) or to the brick manufacturers. But who were these Indian entrepreneurs? Earlier we have cited the efforts of Dwarkanath Tagore and Bengal Coal Company. By the first decade of the twentieth century we have N.C. Sircar and Sons an Indian enterprise controlling 7 coal companies, the Malia Brothers of Searsole, Rameswar and Dakshineswar of Punjabi Saraswat Brahman origin, A.C. Banerjee and W.C. Banerjee[38]. Thus unlike in tea or jute, the monopoly control of the European managing agents was not absolute. It is interesting to note the social origins of the above three Bengali entrepreneurs if only to give lie to the perpetuation of the scholarly myth that "the Bengali middle classes were averse to trade and industry and preferred the liberal professions".[39] N.C. Sircar the biggest of the Indian coal manufacturers 'began as a Rs.8 a month porter boy in the employ

of the Bengal Coal Company'. A.C. Banerjee was a lecturer in mathematics before he turned to coal in 1902, and W.C. Banerjee started as a government clerk and then moved to a job with the East Indian Railway Company, in one of the branches dealing with the transportation of coal.[40] Under their leadership was formed the Indian Mining Federation in 1913 which tried to advance the interest of the Indian entrepreneurs, with reference to the discrimination that they were subjected to, over the supply of wagons of which there was and is a chronic shortage, and supply of coal to the Railways monopolised by the European firms, etc[41]. Yet inspite of competition, vis-a-vis labour unrest there was a unity of class interests between both Indian and European entrepreneurs. Both the official bodies of the respective community of colliery owners, the Indian Mining Association (European) and the IMF viewed with concern the spread of labour unrest during the Non-Cooperation movement of 1921 under the leadership of Swami Darsanand and Biswanand[42]. Meanwhile in 1921 the second Conference of the All India Trade Union Congress was held at Jharia, hosted by Darsanand and Biswanand and other labour mobilizers[43]. The IMA and IMF agreed that 'no increase in wages would be considered without a guarantee of increased output'[44]. Ironically the target of the trade-union leaders and congress agitators was not the Indian enterprises but the European collieries where strikes were organized[45].

The hegemony which European managing agencies established in the coal industry persisted even after independence, although increasingly Indians like Karamchand Thapar made inroads. Yet the managing agencies retained their control, as is clearly enunciated from these figures

collected around 1955:

Table 2

	Joint Stock Company at work		Joint Stock Company controlled by managing agents		% share of paid up capital of companies managed by managing agencies
	No.	Paid up Capital (in crores)	No.	Paid up Capital (in crores)	
COAL	495	22.73	204	18.31	80.6

Source: S.K. Basu: The Managing Agency System, Calcutta, 1958, p.30.

From the above figures it is easy to infer the magnitude of concentration and control which the managing agencies exercised over the coal industry.

II.3. Profits and Investments:

So far we have mainly dealt with the institutional features of the coal industry, namely the control of the managing agencies. Next we shall try to enumerate the trends and fluctuations of the financial aspect of the industry as embodied in profits and investments.

The 'coal rush' of 1907-08 was a major boost for the industry. A contemporary source wrote: "There were about 50 companies with an aggregate capital of Rs.283 lakhs started in the official year ending March 1908, or an average of about one in every week, the record being attained in February of that year when some 14 companies were registered, or one every other day. The previous year saw an average of about one nearly every fortnight, while prior to that, it had not reached an average of one a year in the whole

history of mining and Joint Stock Companies. The demand had exceeded the supply. There was a coal famine in the land, and anything that was black seemed to sell as long as it would burn. Old abandoned places were re-opened and new places started, often regardless of quality..... This sudden and enormous increase of coal companies with the capital invested, received, however, a heavy setback over a year ago, when a sharp decline of demand and prices set in with a resulting slump in shares, which speculators became as anxious to get rid of as they had been to take up. Many of these new concerns were floated in enormous capitals, out of all proportion to their size, with, in many cases too little working capital left after the high prices demanded for them had been paid, - to develop and keep them going, or to venture on deep sinkings, which with the lesser demand, it had become all the more necessary to do for the better class of coal. It was, in fact, impossible for most of these newer concerns to compete and hold their own with the older, well-established companies with strong financial position, large properties and good coal, with the result that many were closed down or considerably restricted. In many cases, most of the profits made in these good times were paid away in dividends, the excellent opportunity of building up and strengthening the concerns against a rainy day being lost".[46] This long quotation serves as an indication of trends. Firstly we notice the fluctuations of demand and supply. In effect supply although mainly geared to internal consumption was unable to keep pace with the demand. Industrial consumption increased rapidly with the railways and textile (jute and cotton) mills consuming the bulk of it.

Table 3 RAILWAY CONSUMPTION

Year	Railway Mileage	Demand for Coal	% consumed by Railways
1893[a]	14,465	958,000 tons	27 (approx.)
1928-29[b]	40,950	74,38,969 tons	33 (approx.)

Sources: a) B.R.Seth: Labour in the Indian Coal Industry, Bombay,1940,p.8

b) D.H. Buchanan: The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India, London, 1966, p.264.

Heightened demand alongwith management by the managing agency whose primary interest was in the commission on profits, led to the underestimation of safety considerations. The managing agents received their remunerations 'either by fixed percentage on gross proceeds on all coal sold plus a percentage on other transactions, or by a commission on raisings plus a fixed monthly sum for office expenses'[47]. This resulted in a reckless method of mining so as to increase production and profit and ultimately the commission. Profit not development was the principal aim of the coal companies. Consequently the short term perspectives had a detrimental effect on the industry. The best coal was sought to be mined in whatever manner possible, during times of depression. While as the quote above suggests, during 'booms' even low quality coal was in great demand. Unsystematic mining was a wasteful and dangerous practice and accidents were frequent[48]. Secondly fluctuations in the market price of coal led to speculative tendencies among investors who were more interested in immediate profit

rather than long term development of the industry. High prices paid for the real estate and too little working capital, did not enable the introduction of technological innovations for mining. After all, labour was much too cheap to cause concern. Thirdly since all profits were distributed as dividends there was less accumulation of capital which might have encouraged investment on the technological infrastructure of the coal industry. Thus the coal Mining Committee of 1937 stated: "When markets ~~were~~ are favourable, coal is won quickly and without waiting for technically sound development.... When times are bad, coal is won cheaply raising costs are cut down ruthlessly, and as some overhead charges go on whether a mine is worked or not, output often has to continue and is occasionally speeded up in order to reduce comparative costs and counterbalance low prices. The result is a vicious circle of overproduction, cut throat competition and uneconomic prices, such refinements as depreciation and depletion being more or less disregarded".[49]

With regard to technology Deshpande[50] reported that between 1910 and 1935 in Jharia, Raniganj and Giridih combined only 95 coal cutting machines were in operation. In 1944 the combined total had risen to 210 coal cutting machines. The pattern of growth in the respective fields is shown in the table below.

Table 4

Number of Coal Cutting Machines in Use in Different Coalfields

Year	Jharia	Raniganj	Giridih
1935	28	59	-
1936	38	63	-

1937	46	78	-
1938	53	115	-
1939	56	130	-
1940	57	129	-
1941	49	119	-
1942	48	130	-
1943	45	120	-
1944	57	134	1

It is interesting to note that inspite of rapid expansion and European control of mines in Jharia, it is in Raniganj where European and Indian interests competed that the greater number of coal cutting machines were located. Deshpande suggests the reason for this as worse underground conditions in Raniganj while on the other hand predominance of smaller mines in Jharia.

The First World War (1914-18) gave a great impetus to coal manufacturing and production jumped from 9,783,250 tons in 1906 to 19 million tons in 1918. In the following years, 1920 to 1924 there was a depression which, however, did not affect the rising trend of coal prices. Between 1925 and 1930 there was a recovery increasing the number of companies in 1925 to 251 from 143 in 1914 and capital investment went up to Rs.1261 lakhs. The World Depression of 1929-30 severely shook the industry and capital investments declined to Rs.910 lakhs. Normalcy was restored and remained between 1937-42. Two factors facilitated recovery, first a special rebate on railway freight and port terminal charges and secondly the special shipments to China from 1938 during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria.

But during the World War II (1942-45) there was a severe coal famine as coal production fell by 4 million tons owing to inadequate plant replacements during the Depression years. Since during the war years machinery could not be replaced from abroad so the collieries had to limp on with their inadequate equipment. Again problems were aggravated by shortage of wagons and the luring away of prospective mining labour to better paid military employment. After the war, profits fluctuated because of the lack of war demand and the uncertain political situation of the country just before and after independence. By 1950 the situation had stabilised with production double that of 1940's. Meanwhile though joint stock companies proliferated, the number of mines declined through amalgamations or mergers.[51]

Before World War-I expanding exports of commodities like jute, tea and coal provided a stimulus to invest. Also the fluctuations of the world economy laid its imprint upon the coal industry. But by the early 1920's exports were dwindling, the government placed an embargo on coal export and even after it was lifted in 1923, the export market of Indian coal had already been encroached upon by South Africa. Thus, except for in 1938-39 when coal was exported to China, while Japan marched upon that country's coal-bearing northern regions, exports from India was little and the bulk of the country's production was utilised for internal consumption[52]. As described earlier, it was the industries and railways which consumed the bulk of coal output and as coal companies were largely controlled by foreign managing agencies who had developed 'lateral concentration' over a number of complementary industries, the market or demand and supply of coal was determined by them to their mutual benefit. This factor of strict control of industries by

British capital and managing agencies, a result of colonial domination, led to the virtual exclusion of Indian entrepreneurs from manufacturing industry in Eastern India. We give below some figures of lateral concentration under the leading managing agencies:-

Table 5

Name of Managing Agents	Number of Joint Stock Companies Controlled in.		
	Tea	Coal	Jute
1911: (a)			
Andrew Yule and Company	10	11	6
Begg, Dunlop and Company	10	-	2
Bird and Company	-	11	8
Shaw Wallace and Company	2	11	-
Williamson, Magor and Company	10	5	-
Octavius Steel and Company	10	2	-
1950: (b)			
Andrew Yule and Company	17	10	10
Bird and Company	-	4	7
Shaw Wallace and Company	6	5	-
Williamson, Magor and Company	13	1	-
Octavius Steel and Company	13	1	-

Source: (a): Bagchi: p.177.

(b): S. Melman: Foreign Monopoly Capital in Indian Economy, Delhi, 1963.

The four decades over which the above data spans shows the unrelenting

control of the managing agencies, during this time, over the production and market demand of coal. What is more the railways obtained their coal from the British and other foreign coal companies who in turn received a reciprocatory preference with regard to the supply of rakes and wagons for the transportation of coal.

This control of foreign capital over the coal industry enabled them to reap high profits. In other words investment in the coal industry was not only beneficial in terms of assuring a steady supply of an important raw material (coal as fuel) but also in terms of financial returns. Below we reproduce a table to illustrate the trend of profits in the industry:-

Table 6 COAL PROFITS

Year	Number of Comapnies	Chain Index (Base 1928 = 100)
1928	58	100
1929	58	98.4
1930	58	122.1
1931	62	91.2
1932	63	75.0
1933	64	60.3
1934	64	59.7
1935	62	63.8
1936	61	62.5
1937	56	71.8
1938	54	142.4
1939	55	139.1
1940	55	140.2

1941	55	115.0
1942	53	110.3
1943	53	133.7
1944	52	318.1
1945	49	360.6
1946	50	278.8
1947	55	239.4
1948	53	280.1

Source: A.B. Ghosh: op.cit. p.1118.

Thorner[53] has suggested that higher profits are generally associated with low wages. So far comparative purposes we provide below indices of wages and coal prices in Jharia over the same period.

Table 7

Indices of Wages and Coal Prices in Jharia

Year	Price Index	Wage Index
1926	100	100
1927	85	95
1928	77	90
1929	76	90
1930	78	90
1931	76	77
1932	68	65
1933	62	57
1934	57	53
1935	56	52

1936	56	50
1937	62	62
1938	73	63
1939	69	65
1940	70	63
1941	72	68
1942	85	73
1943	134	92
1944	200	105

Source: B.P. Guha: Wage Rates in the Indian Coal Industry, Simla, p.52.

From even a cursory glance it becomes evident that high profits correspond with indices of low wages. Our figures bear out Thorner's hunch and illustrate the colonial nature of control over industries.

The above discussion on the growth of the coal industry under colonial auspices has shown how the European companies dominated the industry through the instrument of the managing agency. Establishment of monopolistic control over superior quality coal production and distribution to sister concerns, put the Indian entrepreneurs at a disadvantageous position. They had neither the monoplistic combination over the market nor were they quality coke producers. Consequently in order to compete the Indian enterprises had to undercut wages of workers. This is amply illustrated by Datta's comparative wage indices for Bengal and Chotanagpur quoted in the next chapter. It was only after the World War II that Indian incursion into the coal industry increased substantially. Independence (1947) accelerated the process. But meanwhile the Bengali and Armenian

entrepreneurs had lost out to their non-Bengali counterparts mainly Marwaris like Goenka, B.P. Agarwalla and Poddar families. Karnani, a Sindhi took over the European firm of H.V. Low and Company., and also acquired N.C. Sircar's entire holding which had been mortgaged to him. Among the Punjabis who invested in coal was K.C. Thapar and Wali Ram Taneja. The Kutchis (Gujeratis) like the Ojha, Chanchani and Worah families also entered the coal business[54]. Consequently since 1913 when the Indian colliery owners formed the Indian Mining Federation there was a situation of competition and collaboration between the European and Indian companies. The politics of competition led to the incitement of strikes in European collieries by Indians during 1921-22 Non-Cooperation Movement[55]. Later we shall have occasion to deal with the political implications of colonial impact on the industry.

Chapter III : Community and Politics of Coal Labour in Eastern India, 1860-1960.

Inspite of being one of the oldest primary industry, coal production has remained labour intensive in nature. This has called for a continuous concern with the question of labour supply in the coalfields on the part of the employers. Such concern finds reflection in the numerous Government reports on labour in the mines.

Generally the scarcity of labour in the industries and specifically in the coal mines, has been attributed to the rurality of the labour force, compelled to take up industrial work because of poverty and want[1]. Migrant in nature, they come to work in the collieries during the agricultural slack season and return to their villages during the monsoon for cultivation. This itinerant stereotype of the coal-miner has been all too uncritically accepted[2]. But it is important to investigate into the causes of this phenomena not only in terms of urban-rural interaction with regard to labour supply, but also in terms of the structure of industrialization nurtured under colonial control.

The contradiction between the ideal and the real is manifest in the hiatus between aspiration and actuality of the managements' activities. On the one hand a desire for permanent and stable labour force in the coalfields is articulated in the various reports of Enquiry Commissions[3], on the other a singular lack of interest to create conditions conducive for the settlement of the labour force near the mines. Thus neither security of employment or 'living wage', nor suitable housing and other social amenities were provided. Even official observers like Foley state, 'they (employers) were not always sufficiently alive to the need for adopting certain necessary precautions in order to retain them after recruitment'[4]. In effect then the policy of the

employers was also a major impediment to the permanency of the labour force.

Labour intensive technology had a particular rationale for the coal industry. Most of the joint-stock companies floated before Word War-I although they mobilised relatively large amount of capital for their size, were in reality under-capitalised. This was because, after paying generally exorbitant sums for the zamindari lease of the mining estate, little working capital was left for other overhead expenditures like machinery which would enable machine mining of coal[5]. While labour, though itinerant, was available and cheap, leaving little incentive for technological innovation which would reduce dependence on human labour[6].

In this chapter our primary intention is to relate the structuring of the labour force in the coal industry with its politics. We start from the hunch that the structural background and composition of the workers has an important effect upon their politics in the sense of determining its forms of mobilization, specifically in terms of leadership and ideology. Consequently unlike the kinds of sociological literature referred to in the introductory chapter, industrial workers cannot be seen in isolation as merely an urban phenomenon. It will be our endeavour to interrelate the agricultural background from which most coal miners emanate, with their present conditions and in the process show how proletarianization takes place. So we will start from the rural end, discussing the historical impact of British rule upon agrarian structure and the ejection of rural surplus labour from the countryside. Then go on to enumerate the social composition of the workforce, methods of recruitment and conditions of life and work in the coalfields. The second section of the chapter will

deal with politics in the coalfields of Eastern India.

III.1: The Social Background of Coal Workers in Eastern India.

Though located in an area of sparse population, the Raniganj-Jharia coalfields did not face any severe shortage of labour. As early as 1845 a colliery manager reported, "We have now at all the collieries upwards of 850 miners and I hope before the end of the month to have it in my favour to report that we are atleast 1,000 strong".[7] The Royal Commission on Labour in India reported that 'the labourers in the coal industry are generally imported from the neighbouring districts'[8] mainly of santal or Bauri stock. Thus the aboriginals and semi-aboriginals form the bulk of the labour force. Before we proceed further it is necessary to locate the origins of the tribal and non-tribal workers in the coal mines.

Origins of the Tribal and non-tribal proletariat.

A tribal community is characterised by homogeneity and communal ownership of the means of production[9]. The Kols (a generic term for the tribes of Chotanagpur) were no exception to this. In their 'Khuntkatti' or 'bhuinhari' villages where they had originally settled, communal control over village land was maintained under the leadership of a Munda or chief. However, as S.C.Roy has commented, the Munda was a 'Chief among equals'.[10] With the development of the tribal organization a number of such villages were grouped into a patti or parha (usually 12 to 15 villages) and the most powerful Munda was elected as the Manki or Parha Raja.[11] Besides formal allegiance and promise of military service they were usually entitled to a small quit rent.[12]

Sharp internal differentiation beset the tribal communities of Chotanagpur when from among the Mankis a Raja was installed over the rest around 64 A.D.

thereby creating a hierarchical feudal polity[13]. It was the Nagbansi Rajas who around 1676 A.D., after the incorporation of Chotanagpur ('Khukra' as it was known then) into the Mughal empire, invited 'outsiders' mainly Brahmins and Rauteas, to respectively legitimise the Raja's Rajput status and to subdue the rebellious chieftains (Mundas).[14] Thus in his effort to emulate the Hindus, the Raja helped a number of Burraicks, Rajputs, Brahmins and Rowteas to settle in the area. As Davidson has aptly put it, 'the only mode of doing so, in their power was to grant villages, by which means, all the suds or foreign proprietors in Nagpur have been established'.[15] In this manner the tribal people lost control over land and began to be exploited by the non-tribals.

In 1770, Capt. Camac led an expedition into Chotanagpur and subjugated Raja Darpa Nath Sahi who thereby agreed to pay Rs.12,000 as revenue to the East India Company. Soon this was raised to Rs.15,000 and in 1809 he was saddled with the costs of maintaining a police force in the region. Such heavy taxation on the part of the British led to the letting out of land to 'aliens' or non-tribals by the Raja and his subordinate chiefs unaccustomed to extracting heavy rent from the tribal ryots. This afforded the opportunity contractors or thiccadars and mahajans to gain a foothold in the area initially as intermediary rent receivers, later appropriating zamindari or landownership rights.[16] These Muslim thiccadars and Hindu traders and money-lenders from North Bihar and Bengal soon dispossessed the traditional chiefs (Mankis) and by their rapacious greed totally alienated the tribals. The tribals called them 'Dikus' (or outsiders = exploiters)[17] but found that they were protected by the British through their Police and Adalat[18]. Consequently a number of tribal rebellions or uprisings took place mainly directed against

the mahajans and Banias and the British who controlled the state power in favour of the latter[19].

Meanwhile along with subinfeudation of land and increase in rent the British also brought in their wake the commercialisation of agriculture. Disintegration of the village community and introduction of a cash economy went hand in hand during the latter part of the nineteenth century[20]. It resulted in sharp social differentiation among the tribals. Tenants and land holding ryots were given advances to cultivate opium and then compelled to sell at reduced prices, Rs.3-8as. per seer.[21] The usurious control of the mahajan (usually Bengali or Marwari) culminated in alienation of land from the tribals.[22] The dispossessed tribal thus had to seek employment either as agricultural workers, tenants or in industries. Since agriculture could hardly provide sustenance for all through the year, consequently supplementary or alternative employment had to be sought.

This forms the background for mass exodus of tribals from Chotanagpur to either Assam tea-gardens or since 1840 onwards as indentured labour to the ~~tea-gardens~~ 'sugar colonies'[23]. The tribal tracts thus became 'labour reservoirs' for industries to draw upon.[24] Even in 1961-62 the situation remained basically unchanged with the tribals migrating to the cities for work during the agricultural slack season. Only 14% (as the data from one Oraon village suggests) could subsist from the yields of their land. The rest had to seek supplementary employment in industries.[25]

The development of the coal industry in the ~~neighbouring~~ districts of Manbhum and Burdwan provided an opportunity for employment to the tribals.

A large number of them thus became engaged in the coal mines. It was the local Bauris and later the santals and other tribals from Chotanagpur who formed the bulk of the colliery workers in the early phases of the industry[26].

For the non-tribal workers in the coal-mines, the process of 'proletarianization' was not greatly different. They mainly came from Bihar, U.P., and Central Provinces and were usually low castes, artisans or Mussulmans. The British ~~consequent~~ conquest of Oudh and the North West Frontier Provinces (as Western U.P. was then called) resulted in new land settlements. In most of Bengal, Bihar and eastern U.P. the Permanent settlement prevailed, with the zamindars holding proprietory rights over land, whereas in the North West Frontier Provinces (i.e. the Ceded and Conquered provinces of Western U.P.) the Mahalwari system was introduced, whereby the revenue assessment of land was settled for 20 or 30 years at a time[27]. Every new assessment added to the burden of taxation.

Meanwhile increase in revenue demand by British imperialism had a chain effect in raising agricultural rents. This enticed the ryots to cultivate lucrative cash crops like rice, opium or sugar cane. It invariably led the small peasants and tenant farmers into the clutches of the moneylender. This was because ~~while~~ cash crops required greater investments in the land which was usually advanced by the moneylender at exorbitant rates of interest. Fluctuations in rainfall and prices of the crops proved unpredictable and consequently the ryot was never able to repay the creditor. Even if he did so, in order to purchase his own consumption requirements he again had to take recourse to the usurer. In this manner rural credit in the 'permanent settlement' areas, served to enmesh the cultivating ryot in a vicious circle of indebtedness, which culminated in the eviction of

peasant proprietors and the expropriation of land by the merchant-moneylender.[28] Thus even in the non-tribal areas too, the dominance of merchant capital created a sharp internal differentiation among the peasantry. Stagnant agriculture, thus had to support a large rural surplus labour force which because of slow industrial growth could not find industrial employment either, and was consequently 'dependent' upon the kulak-cum-moneylender for employment[29]. Such 'dependence' leads to vertical integration of the peasants into an agrarian structure dominated by merchant capital. Within this structure, it is the low caste landless agricultural labourer or small tenant who find themselves helplessly redundant and thus have to seek employment in industries.

'De-industrialisation' was also the result of British rule in India. The import of English manufactures inundated the market with cheaper goods, resulting in the destruction of urban handicrafts. Centres of great renown for their handicrafts, like Dacca and Murshidabad both weaving centres, underwent a rapid decline[30]. Even the rural areas were not exempt from English manufactures, as the railways carried it into the countryside, on the other hand returning with commercial crops for the port-city (Calcutta in the Eastern region)[31]. In this way the rural artisan was also forced to swell the ranks of the wage labourers[32].

From the above discussion, it is quite evident that the British impact on Indian economy had a structurally shattering effect. It was the source of Indian economic underdevelopment[33], for by propping up a stagnant agrarian economy and slowing down industrial growth, a disbalanced articulation between agriculture and industry was set in motion. The latter

producing mainly luxury consumer items and processing goods for export was parasitic rather than complementary to agriculture. In effect this thwarted the growth of an internal home market resulting in the reproduction of underdevelopment.

The question of labour supply for the coal mines must therefore be viewed in this context keeping in mind the structural imbalance in the economy. This 'morphology of backwardness'[34] governed also the process of labour supply and composition at the local level. Under such circumstances, it is little wonder that class-formation would also be distorted and malformed.

Composition and Migration of Colliery Workers.

From our above discussion it is evident that mainly the people in the lower echelons of rural society and both rural and urban artisans were ejected from their former occupations. These were the people who sought industrial employment inspite of its low status initially. Higher caste infiltration into industrial work took place later, once its institutionalisation had eroded the stigma. The Inspecter of Mines wrote in his report of 1894, "the castes that will work as coal cutters are the Bauris, ~~Soulhals~~ Sonthals, Keoras, Dhangurs, Haris, Chamars, Mussulmans, Domes, Mosahus and Bhooas; and occasionally the Rajputs when of low caste.... There are ten or twelve castes who will work as coal cutters, but the majority are Bauris and Soulhals'.[35] Mine managers classified the caste of the workers under three broad heads: Mahomedans, Hindus and Hinduized aborigines and Aborigines.[36]

Later observers have noted the changing composition of labour in the coal mines. Reporting on the labour force in Bengal Coal mines Agabeg wrote

in 1913, "Thirty years ago when the output was insignificant... the various castes obtainable were very few in number, consisting in fact, with very few exceptions, of Sonthals and Bauris in the proportion of 3 to 1. Today Kols, Bhuyans, Mussahar Bhuyans, Rajwars and Chamars from Bengal and Pasis, Lodhas and Chamars from the United Provinces are all available."[37] More explicitly Simpson spells out the three phases of labour migration into the coalfields, "the earliest of them were the Bauris, a low caste tribe of mixed Hindu origin the members of which, although physically weak and degenerate, possess greater skill and mental ability than the hardier types of miners by whom they have largely been replaced. The latter are the aboriginals Sonthals, Kols, Koras and Gonds who occupy the hilly and forest-clad country stretching from Western Bengal far into the Central Provinces. These aboriginal tribes in their turn are giving way to new comers from the West - Bhuiyas, Rajwars, Gopes, Lodhs, Pasis, Kurmis, Nuniyas, Beldars and numerous tribes collectively known as Bilaspuri and Central Provinces miners. In addition there is a small leavening of Mahommedans locally known as Meahs and Julahas."[38]

The repeated reiteration of labour scarcity in the coal mines must be viewed in this setting. Early investigators like the Williams Commission (1896) noted that the small amount of labour available had affected work output for the Sonthali and Bauri and enabled them to dictate terms. "But it is certain that, until quite lately, no real attempt has been made to attract labour from the North Western Provinces and Oudh."[39] On the same theme, Foley reported that the recommendations of the earlier (Williams Commission) was disregarded in that 'the various companies should combine to

support one central recruiting agency' and that miners should be recruited from U.P. and Bihar.[40] Consequently labour scarcity was more apparent than real. Enumerating the difficulties of recruitment, Foley complained 'that employers of labour were not aware of the most suitable places in which to recruit their men, that they were not always sufficiently alive to the need for adopting certain necessary precautions in order to retain them after recruitment'.[41] It is difficult to reconcile on the one hand assertions of labour scarcity and on the other careless attitude towards retaining them in the coalfield'.

We have noted earlier that Bauris and Santals comprise a significant portion of the coal mining labour force. So now we shall try to use data from the Census of 1921 to compare their respective strength and occupational deployment vis-a-vis other caste groups in Ranigang and Jharia. Inspite of the dangers of a static view this is the only Census which includes exhaustive information (Ranigang). Quite noticeably in the Bengal coalfields according to the Census of 1921, the bulk of the unskilled labour force consisted of Santals and Bauris coming primarily from within the district (Burdwan) itself.

Table 1

Total unskilled Colliery Workers in Bengal. (1)	Total unskilled Colliery Workers in Burdwan. (2)	Total Santal and Bauri Unskilled in Burdwan Collieries. (3)	Column 3 as % of 2
37,168	37,760	21,963	60%

Source: Census of India, 1921, Bengal: Vol II, Table XXII: Part V p.432-33.

Of the workers enumerated in Burdwan, 17570 (or 47.7%) came from within the district itself, showing that it was short distance intra-district imigration. With regard to the skilled labour force, the Santals were only found as miners while the Bauris had a dominance in all the skilled categories. Out of 1722 skilled miners, santals consisted of 436 and Bauris of 425. Representation of the Bauris in the other categories is shown below:

Table 2

	Total	Bauris	
Machine Maintenance	917	151	(15%)
Engine and Boiler Mistries	57	33	(58%)
Shift and Haulage Attendants	124	68	(55%)
Supervisors	185	45	(24%)

Source: Census of India, 1921, Bengal Part II, Table XXII, Pt IV, p.422-23.

The Bauris were thus the single major caste group, predominant as skilled workers. With regard to Raniganj, Foley reported, "At Raniganj itself the labour consists chiefly of Bauris, inhabitants of the district, who were the original coal-cutters when the industry started..... In the mines near Raniganj a proportion of Santals appear and in the mines near Barakar they form the majority of workers. They come from the neighbourhood, from Gangajalghati thana of Bankura and the Jamtara thana of the Santal Parganas."[42]

In Bihar the main concentration of coal mines was in Manbhum district where about 76% of the entire coal workers in the state were located.[43]

The distribution of unskilled workers among some of the most numerous castes is given below.

Table 3

	Manbhum Total	Bauri	Bhuiya	Dhobi	Muhammedan	Munda
Coal Workers (unskilled)	46,335	4,231	4,640	2,597	2,193	3,014

Among the skilled workers in Bihar constituting a total of 38,959, about 25,234 or 64% were classified as miners or coal cutters. The most prominent coal cutting caste groups were Bauris (2,388), Chamar (2,008), Muhammedans (1,808), and Santals (3,878). Significantly even as Sirdars (1,527) it was the Bauris (103), Muhammedans (362) and Santal (104) who seemed predominant. But in comparison to their total number among the skilled work force it was the Kahar (38 out of 558), Kayasth (36 out of 318) and Kurmi (64 out of 1306) who had better proportional representation as Sirdars.[44]

In Bihar the principal castes employed in the coal industry according to the Census of 1921 were:

Bauris - 10,936

Bhuiyas - 12,674

Chamars - 9,794

Jolahas - 4,240

Santals - 11,972

The Bauris mostly came from Manbhum (outside the coalfields) district itself and was the birth district of 9,814 of them; Bhuiyas came from three districts

principally: Gaya (birth district of 2,091), Monghyr (birth district of 4,960) and Hazaribagh (birth district of 3,560); the Chamars came mainly from Raipur and Bilaspur together accounting for 6,161 of them; Jolahas migrated primarily from Monghyr and Hazaribagh (birth district of 1,917 and 1,116 respectively and finally the largest contingent of coal labour - the Santals mostly came from Manbhum district (outside the coalfields) itself (birth district of 9,353).[45]

From the above description it becomes quite evident that low caste Hindus, Muslims, and tribals formed the bulk of the working force in the coalfields, Moreover they were concentrated in the unskilled occupations lacking any major opportunity of mobility. This situation was further accentuated by the usurious control of the Sirdar about which we will have more to say later. Meanwhile most of the miners came from an agricultural background. Radhakamal Mukherjee has succinctly delineated the process of migration from agriculture to industry: "It is the landless labourers who are the first to migrate to the industrial centres, followed by cultivators of small uneconomic holdings who migrate during the slack season, or when drought or famine overtakes agriculture, the trend of migration tends to be larger, the greater the pressure of population on the soil or the more serious and widespred an agricultural calamity."[46] The ejection of surplus labour from the countryside or the 'push' factor during scarcity or famine is amply testified to by Foley in his report.[47] Reporting on the background from which these mine workers come, Mukherjee cites the results of a survey of 1030 miners' families in Bihar. It was found that 59% of these miners came from the landless class and another

24% had agricultural holdings in-sufficient to subsist upon and another 6% had migrated in an effort to clear arrears of rent and money-lenders dues.[48] Evidently the work force came from the lowest stratum of rural society. This is confirmed by the testimony of a mine manager who wrote in a letter, "the occupation of the miners in by no means a popular one but the necessities of the people compel to take to it in the absence of other employment."[49] For the unskilled workers mainly of rural origin, employment in coal mines was the limits of their mobility and especially so for the tribal and semi-tribal workers. Unlike their 'upcountry' counterparts from Bihar and U.P. the tribals were practically absent from the labour force in the manufacturing centres like the industrial belt around Calcutta, or Bombay[50]. Furthermore since a large number of tribals were seasonal migrants into industries, they lacked interest to acquire skills and settle down as part of the permanent industrial work force[51]. Their lack of education also proved an impediment to the acquiring of skills.

With regard to occupational distribution of caste groups, certain continuities of caste and occupational hierarchy can be easily discerned from ~~the table~~ Table-4 given below, constructed on the basis of information from the Census of 1921. The lower castes like Bauris and Chamars and the Santals predominate as coal-cutters (a semi skilled job) and coolies. Whereas the Jolahas are prominent in such skilled profession of mechanics and fitters, pit-carpenters and proppers, enginemen and firemen and masons. While the high caste Brahman and Kayastha are found significantly in supervisory categories of overmen and contractors. Proportionately fewer upper castes are represented in unskilled occupations. In effect then, we find that the ritual hierarchy is reproduced on the secular

Table 4: Caste and Occupation

Castes	Mechanics and Fitters	Miners (Coal cutters)	Hookers on	Sinkers	Pit Carpenters and Propers	Overmen	Contractors	Sirdars	Engine men and Firemen	Masons	Brick Makers	Coolies of all kinds	Fillers	Trolley men	Others
Bauri	33	3264	26		9		20	29	55	38	4	4507		57	519
Chamars	12	2701	25		22		1	44	37	33	67	2980	21	103	808
Jolaha	71	386	20		63	4	42	39	93	236	8	1238		64	493
Brahman	14	57	13		11	108	68	8	11	1		384	2	23	1505
Kayasth	23	15	7		16	94	47	43	5	1		112		2	813
Santal	1	4401	5		3	1		20	8	9		4679		5	622

Source: Census of India, 1921, Bihar Part II, p.298-99 Subsidiary Table XII

plane. This is not because caste predetermines occupational choice but primarily owing to factors like better access to education, skills and information, in other words control over material resources enables higher caste people to occupy the upper echelons of the occupational structure. Low control over material resources and networks reproduces lower occupational status for the low caste and tribal labourers. In a situation of mostly unskilled labour requirement as in the coal industry rural-urban interaction with regard to labour supply is facilitated.

Migration of rural surplus labour which was seasonal in the early days became more regulated with the engagement of Sirdars as recruiters. But simultaneously seasonal migration continued. During the initial period of the industry seasonal abundance of labour during the slack agricultural season was utilised to cut excess coal so as to compensate for the busy agricultural sowing and harvesting time, when miners deserted en masse to work in the agrarian sector[52]. The standard explanation has been that the coal miners were agriculturists at heart. Probably, a more economic rationale was at work. Agricultural workers were paid relatively higher wages (in kind), during sowing and harvesting time, which proved a greater attraction than the marginally subsistence wages paid at the mines for arduous labour in a dangerous environment[53].

The pre-capitalist structure of agriculture retained within itself a large surplus labour force which was easily 'pushed' into industries during times of scarcity. Thus scarcity of labour was less acute in the

coalfield[54]. Yet coal mining with its physical hazards, arduous labour in uncongenial atmosphere and low wages was not an attractive occupation. As a result it only attracted the most depressed sections of the working population. Under such circumstances the role of the labour contractor and Sirdar became crucial. Characteristic of a colonial economy is the presence of intermediaries in the distribution network. In the rural sector a number of intermediaries controlled the circulation of commodities thus strengthening the dominance of merchant capital[55]. With regard to recruitment of an industrial labour force the ubiquity of an intermediary in the form of 'jobber' or 'Sirdar'has been noticed by commentators[56]. Their task comprised of locating pockets of potential recruits and enticing them to the workplace by advancing them money. In this manner control was sought to be established through debt bondage. 'Dadni', as this system was known, reproduced agricultural debt bondage on the industrial scene, characteristic of a pre-capitalist social formation.

Methods of Recruitment:

Basically two types of recruitment prevailed: Zamindary and Non-Zamindari[57]. The latter can be further specified into 'sarkari' or direct recruitment and recruitment through contractors. Under the zamindary system workers were lured to the mines by the offer of plots of cultivable land. This they were allowed to hold either free or at a nominal rent, subject to their working in the mines. Known as Nokrani or service tenures, in this way labour service in the mines became the basic precondition for the holding of tenancy, in a way

similar to the extraction of labour services as rent during feudal times, the only difference being that the workers were paid for their work. Raniganj, the earlier opened coalfield, was where this system flourished and coal companies acquired zamindari villages or 'taluks' so that the tenants could be utilised in the collieries. Testimony is provided by this letter from the Bengal Coal Company Letterbook which states; "In reply to your favour dated 28th November wishing to be informed whether any lands belonging to the Company are held direct from Government by Zamindari or not.... I beg to say there are none held as such strictly ~~strictly~~ speaking but there are plots of land in different villages held by the company which having been resumed from Lakherajdars and etc, by the Government were settled with the company who pay rent direct to the Government."[58] Further, in Giridih 60 to 70% of the workers were Nokrani tenants[59]. However, except in Raniganj and the railway collieries in Giridih this system of recruitment did not find much favour, for in Jharia cultivable land was not available. Yet in the initial stages of the industry it served its purpose by settling a labour force recently uprooted from land although later its dysfunctional aspects became pronounced. Thus witnesses before the coalfields Committee (1920) testified that they were 'interested in producing miners not farmers' as land for cultivation 'would prove to be a distraction from mining work'. Another witness narrated that, "from experience I find that, with labour in the Raniganj coalfield who generally have land given them, the output per man per year is much less than in the Jharia field. A miner will only work for his immediate wants and, if he can grow rice, will only work intermittently."[60] In otherwords managers were more keen on an industrial workforce divorced

from agriculture and were apprehensive that provision of land for miners would have a detrimental effect on his work performance. The Committee thus summed up the evidence in their report: "but the evidence indicates that it is not advisable to give them lands of any extent for this purpose. In many instances where paddy lands have been given, the result has the opposite of what we desired; the labourers have either given up mining for cultivation, or have leased out the land to others and continued as before."

Evidently then, while land did help to stabilise the work-force it did not help to increase coal production. There was the further difficulty that except in Raniganj and Giridih land was not available for distribution among workers. One of the reasons for bearing excess surface rights as Simmons writes was to 'provide' labour with some agricultural land as an investment to work in the mines'.[61] In Jharia scarcity of land prohibited a reproduction of the system and so recruitment was either 'sarkari' or 'non-sarkari' through the contractor.

The 'sarkari' or direct methods of recruitment was performed by salaried employees of the collieries known as jamadars, chaprasis or labour sirdars. Expenses pertaining to recruitment like advances and travel allowance of the new recruit was borne by the mines and workers remained under the direct control of the mine manager. Workers were paid directly by the management without recourse to middlemen. It is to be noted that this system prevailed mainly among the Indian and small European collieries.[62]

However, most of the colliery workers were recruited indirectly through 'contractors'. They were of three kinds; recruiting contractors, managing contractors and raising contractors.[63] The recruiting contractors received a

commission between one to four annas per ton of coal raised by workers recruited by them. Only when the contractors bore the entire cost of recruitment were they paid four annas, more usually they received one anna per ton. But this kind of contractors were not many. Managing contractors not only supplied labour but also supervised the coal-raising operation (i.e. engaged substantially in management of the workers) and were paid a commission per ton of coal despatched, had to bear the cost of management in terms of supervisory personnel. They, however, did not have to bear the cost of depreciation of machinery, interest on capital invested, cost of marketing the coal and other charges on 'fixed capital'. This type of contractors prevailed in the Pench Valley coalfield in Central Provinces. In the Bengal and Bihar collieries the raising contractor was the most prominent figure. According to one estimate 70% of the coal output in Jharia was raised by labour recruited by raising contractors.[64] Their functions consisted of recruiting labour, raising and loading the coal. Thus they were distinguished from the managing contractors in the sense that management and engineering expenses were not borne by them. In 1934 their rates varied from Rs.1 to Rs.1-4as in Jharia to Rs.1-2as to Rs.1-8as in Giridih, Bokaro, Karanpura and Talcher. Since it was the raising contractor who was most popular in the Raniganj-Jharia coalbelt, we will seek to look into them a little further.

With regard to the raising contractors Radhakamal Mukherjee writes that they "are substantial persons and sometimes have zamindaries on which tenants are settled on the condition that they would work in the mines."[1] This is confirmed by both the Report of Royal Commission on Labour which suggests that 'contracts are still given to those persons whose interest in land made easier

for them to secure labour from their tenants'[66], and by the Report of the Bihar Labour Enquiry (1940) which indentifies the raising contractors 'as local landlords who have control over supplies of labour'.[67] It is probably not unlikely that the rural gentry who had leased out their land to minging companies were also engaged as raising contractors which enabled them to reap intermediary for (collaborative) profit without soiling their hands by participation in the direct process of production. The contractor employed sirdars and recruitors who actually recruited potential workers from the villages. This was done through channels of primordial loyalties like the bringing of relatives, acquaintances and co-villagers or through bribing the headman of a village[68] or through holding feasts and presenting a picture of alluring future prospects. Then money advances were given to willing recruits to pay off their debts and other obligations.[69] This was called Dadan and consequently 'obligated' the worker to the particular sirdar who in turn had taken advance from the contractor. Most of the time these advances acted as debt bondages and consequently made the worker ultimately dependent on the contractor and sirdar for his livelihood. Further this advance was usually recovered in small instalments later when they were employed. Between the worker and the raising contractor it was the sirdar who mediated and acted as representative of labour, fixing the terms of employment and ventilating grievances of workers for redressal. Moneylending was also done by the sirdar who thereby enhanced his putative control over his 'client' workers.[70] As a result the sirdari system continued the social organization of the village community where it was the headman who replaced the sirdar. Such continuance facilitated adaption in a mining settlement. Thus we have the name of Bhawani Din Dikshit who came from Rai Bareli and supplied labour

to the mines recruiting them from the three adjoining districts beside his home one, Unao, Partabgarh, and Fatehpur.[71] Similarly another U.P. sirdar originally from Unao who worked for the Barakur Coal Company at Gaurangdi reported that '40 of the men under him had their wives with them. They returned home mostly in Phagun (Feb-March) and Bysakh (April-May) for 4 to 6 months after three or four years. Ordinarily a man 'earned Rs.14 or 15 a month. His living cost him Rs.4 to 5'.[72] Although both the sirdars we mention above came from U.P. it should not be presumed that most of the workers were from there. Most of the workers actually came from the neighbouring districts of Bihar and Chotanagpur as we have seen earlier. This prompted the Coalfields Committee (1920) to assert that recruitment for the tea plantations of North East India should be prohibited from Chotanagpur.

Migration of rural surplus labour which was seasonal in the early days became more regulated with the employment of sirdars as recruiters. At the same time seasonal migration continued. In the beginning seasonal abundance of labour during the slack season of agriculture was utilised to cut excess coal so as to compensate for the busy agricultural sowing and harvesting time, when miners deserted the mines en masse to work in the agrarian sector[73]. The standard explanation of this phenomenon has been the attribution of a split personality to the miners. Probably, a more economic rationale was at work. The agricultural workers were paid relatively higher wages during sowing and reaping time, which proved a greater attraction than the marginally subsistence wages paid at the mines for ardous labour in a dangerous environment[74]. This brings us to the question of working conditions in the coal mines and the prevalence of rural links of the working force.

Conditions of Work:

Working Conditions as embodied in safety measures at the mines was appalling. Except in the bigger collieries safety measures were not adhered to and accidents were common. During times of depression in the coal market in an attempt to produce more coal at cheaper rates, 'slaughter mining' was resorted to which meant that coal was obtained from abandoned mines by 'de-pillarisation' or that the best quality coal was carelessly mined without regard for longterm preservation. The sectarian outlook of the coal industry is exemplified in the statement of the 1937 Coal Mining Committee: 'When markets are favourable, coal is won quickly and without waiting for technically sound development....when times are bad, coal is won-cheaply, raising costs are cut down ruthlessly and as some overhead charges go on whether a mine is worked or not, output often has to continue and is occasionally speeded up in order to reduce comparative costs and counter balance low prices'.[75] Thus in the face of profit motive of the managing agencies, safety was a relatively insignificant consideration.

The negligence of safety in the collieries is evident from the table showing the mortality rates in mine accidents.

Table 5

Year	FATAL			
	Number of Cases	Number of Persons killed	Death Rates per 1000 persons employed	Death rate per million tons of coal raised
1917	138	163	1.06	9.41

1918	168	168	1.12	9.93
1919	212	260	1.37	11.95
1920	147	172	0.98	10.07
1921	197	257	1.35	13.99
1922	174	209	1.13	11.50
1923	194	332	1.82	17.50
1924	189	230	1.23	11.35
1925	157	186	1.07	9.31
1926	152	171	1.00	8.51
1927	166	181	1.10	8.57
1928	183	218	1.33	10.13
1929	152	194	1.17	8.70
1930	175	211	1.25	9.30
1931	156	185	1.17	9.02
1932	137	151	1.02	8.02
1933	116	124	0.86	6.83
1934	131	157	1.04	7.76
1935	158	264	1.66	12.56
1936	167	420	2.58	20.40
1937	172	200	1.17	8.95
1938	217	248	1.23	9.81

Source: B.R. Seth: Labour in the Indian Coal Industry, 1940, p.282.

Even as late as 1961, the number of accidents and the people involved in them were quite high.

Table 6

Estimated Percentage Distribution of Persons Involved in Accidents During 1961.

Centre	Estimated Number of Persons involved in Accidents.	Estimated Percentage Distribution of Persons Involved in Accidents Resulting in:		
		Death	Permanent Disability	Temporary Disability
Bihar	12,293	1.1	9.3	89.6
a) Large Mines	11,302	0.7	9.3	90.0
b) Small Mines	991	5.2	9.8	85.0

Source: Report on Survey of Labour Conditions in Coal Mining Industry in India, Labour Bureau, Government of India, Delhi, 1967, p.86.

Expectedly the mortality rate was higher in the smaller mines which were singularly lacking in safety equipment. But inspite of variations in the number of persons involved in accidents what is more important to notice is the fact that the structure of the coal industry relegated safety considerations to a secondary level. By implication this reflects the attitude of the employers towards the workers.

Wages:

Another important factor affecting the conditions of the workforce is wages. Commenting on the real wages of the mine workers, Palekar says, 'the mine workers suffered relatively more severe losses in their real wages than the factory workers'.[76] This is well understandable in a situation

where a large rural surplus labour is available for employment in the unskilled occupation of industries. By virtue of its location on the rural periphery, the interaction between the mines and agrarian sector with regard to supply of labour to the former is strong. This has a depressive effect on industrial wages, for the rural sector, serves as an abundant reservoir of potential industrial workers. And any disturbance in the agricultural cycle casts its imprint on the industrial front by overflooding the unskilled labour market. Possibly this led Radhakamal Mukherjee to comment that 'wherever the connexion between agricultural and industrial work is the most intimate, the wages and the manner of life of industrial workers are lowest'[77], wages in the coalfield was based on piece-rate work.[78] Miners were paid by the tubs of coal cut. Foley's investigation at individual collieries yielded rich data on the wage-rates paid to the workers'. In Egara colliery the prevailing rate was 5 annas 6 pies per tub compared to 4 annas per tub which was the rate in 1896. Women were paid 2 annas for clearing up dust. In Seebpore and Katras-Jherria Collieries the rates had increased from 3½ annas per tub in 1895 to 5 annas. At Apcar and Company's collieries the tub rates had increased over the last 15 years from 3 annas per tub of 10 cwt, to 5 or 6 annas. While women who were previously paid 5 pice a day were now paid @ of 2 annas. In some collieries the workers were given advances before the Pujas. According to the managers' estimate, a miner could earn Rs.25 per month. The tub rates in Jharia-Raniganj varied from 4 to 6 annas. But the earnings of a worker depended upon the availability of tubs for which there was a general shortage. Money wages, however, are no indication of earnings. So we have tried to marshal some data on real wages.

Table 7

The Index Numbers of Average Monthly Real Wages:

	MINING	
Year	Bengal Southern and Western.	Chotanagpur
1900	100	159
1901	103	201
1902	111	210
1903	120	228
1904	125	222
1905	116	232
1906	106	202
1907	104	192
1908	108	165
1909	121	207
1910	130	224
1911	128	222
1912	121	207

Source: K.L. Dutta: Report on an Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India quoted in A.K. Bagchi: Private Investments in India, p.123.

From the above it is evident that the real wages were practically double in Chotanagpur (i.e. Jharia) than the rates in Bengal. The predominance of

European companies mining better quality coal in Jharia enabled them to pay better wages. However, as Palekar has shown, that inspite of increasing employment and money wages, the latter rising as high as 300% over a period of 12 years, the real wages declined sharply.

Table 8

Year	Index Number of Employment	Money Wages	Real Wages
1939	100	100	100
1940	110	98	96
1941	115	100	88
1942	113	115	76
1943	111	138	47
1944	133	164	59
1945	153	174	65
1946	167	213	74
1947	168	316	96
1948	161	328	87
1949	153	341	88
1950	167	359	88

Source: S.A. Palekar: "Real Wages of Mine Workers in India, 1939-50" EW: 1957: 229.

From the above enumeration of real wage rates of the coal miners we are left in little doubt about their plight. In the first decade of the

twentieth century with the rapid expansion of the Jharia coalfields the competiton for scarce labour had led to the rising wage level. But once the labour situation had stabilised not even marginal subsistence wages were provided. In 1946 the Deshpande Committee reported that the permanently settled labour force in Jharia amounted to 25 to 45% and in Raniganj to about 30 to 50%.[79]

Such low wages plus the housing conditions in the overcrowded dhourahs did not enable the miners to bring their families to their work place.[80] Consequently they had to maintain their village ties. Much has been written on the rural links of the miner, speculating that he remained at heart an agriculturist returning to the village during the harvesting and sowing season[81]. The agriculturist as miner is the archetypal image found in the government reports as testified by managers and employers. Not surprisingly this fits into the economic rationality of the management. Their interest in cheap labour left them totally unconcerned with the extension of facilities like better living and working conditions and a subsistence wage for the miners family, which in turn created a situation whereby the miner was forced to leave the coalfield to recuperate. This he did by returning to his village. In this way the countryside helped to reproduce an industrial labour force and supply the industries[82].

The process of labour supply needs to be explained here to explicate the relation between industry and agriculture in a situation of underdevelopment. Employers in India nurtured within the context of colonial industrialization were more concerned with profits than with the development of an industrial infrastructure. Consequently labour as a factor of production was viewed in

its functional role. The necessity to institutionalise a wage-labour market was not keenly felt in a situation of rural surplus labour which inevitably sought employment as unskilled labour in industries. Prevalence of contract labour, continued till the present time, was well suited to the employers needs. The Sirdar's control over his workers and their fulfilling of quasi-management roles as trainers for new recruits was economical for the mine management[83]. Secondly the contractors interest in rapid turnover of workers which enabled him to earn more commission also coincided with the employers interest in not letting solidarity develop among workers which could spell potential political unrest. Also such a shifting labour force could be paid daily rates thus lessening infrastructural expenditure like social welfare benefits and pension which could be demanded by a permanent labour force[84]. Probably this might have led the Royal Commission on Labour to suggest in its report that 'the link with the village is a distinct asset and that the general aim should be not to undermine it, but to encourage it and, as far as possible, to regularise it'[85]. In other words the disarticulated manner of interaction between industry and agriculture was to be preserved since it was advantageous to the industries. This in turn led to reproduction of vertical dependence upon the labour sirdar similar to the patronage of the jotedar in the agrarian sector. Under such circumstances horizontal class solidarity for political purposes was impeded.

Organization of Work:

The Organisation of mining work also contributed to the retention of primordial sentiments. Till 1939 when women were prohibited from working underground, it was the family which served as a unit of labour[86]. Thus

the men (mostly Bauris and Santals) cut the coal while their womenfolk and children acted as loaders and trammers. But coal cutters from other castes coming from U.P. or C.P. did not bring their women with them and were also unwilling to load the tubs themselves. Secondly particularistic ties were maintained through the specialisation of certain castes in particular type of work. Mr. G.G. Carapiet a mine manager, stated that "the Bhuiyas and Rajowars are mostly loading coolies and trammers, although some of them do cut coal. Nunias and Beldars are almost exclusively earth cutters. The Bilaspurias have a special liking for quarry work, machine coal-loading and earth cutting....The Mohammedans, who are locally known as Mias and Jolahas, are engaged mostly on surface etc".[86] Deshpande adds that "Santhals and Majhis are known to be good pick miners. So are the Bauris and Koras".[88] For the rest he corroborates Carapiet's ~~Simpsons~~ description.

Absenteeism:

Mine managers have characteristically complained of absenteeism among the miners. Yet little evidence exists of casual absence from work. A government survey report admitted 'unauthorised absence was not common amongst the coal miners because there being no shortage of labour, the workers could illafforded to lose their job on account of unauthorised absence'.[89] Mukherjee reported that absenteeism in Jharia was as low as 3.3% while in Raniganj it was 8.3%.

Table 9

Average Weekly Attendance Per Worker in Coal Mines.

	Underground		Surface	
	Miners	Loaders	Trolleyman	Wagonloaders
JHARIA	4.56	-	5.66	5.13
RANI-GANJ	4.25	-	5.14	4.87

Source: Radhakamal Mukherjee: Indian Working Class, p.28.

From the above table we see that absenteeism is greater among the underground workers than among the surface workers. This is understandable in that the miners have to work under strenuous circumstances and from their nutritional intake can hardly be expected to work longer during the week.

In this part of the chapter we have sought to situate the miner in his social context. Before we go on to the politics which emanate from this it must be emphasized that under situations of vertical solidarity in which the worker finds himself vis-a-vis the 'sirdar', horizontal class mobilization is difficult to achieve. Furthermore from our discussion on the retention of primordial loyalties, the miners' concept of themselves as a homogeneous class is fragmented. Yet inspite of constraints what kind of political mobilization emerges among the coal-miners? This is the subject of our query in the next section.

III.2: Changing Nature of Politics in the Coalfields of Eastern India 1860-1960.

With regard to politics in the coalfield, our prior definition of political mobilization does not confine us to only labour-management relations. In effect by following the course of socio-political movements we intend to illuminate the nature of the contending groups and also how supralocal influence has an impact on local-level politics. Since the two most sharply defined classes are the workers and employers consequently they will form the focus of our discussion. Our effort will be to show how the pattern of political mobilization evolves from the structuring of the classes in the coalfield.

Inspite of scanty references to strikes or other political conflicts in the collieries in the extent literature, it will not be misleading to suggest that it persisted from the beginning of the industry. One of the earliest reported strike in the collieries is mentioned in these terms by the mine manager: "We are experiencing great difficulty in keeping any particular class of work people to their engagements. The carpenters have been on strike during the week for higher wages which demand, I would not listen to as they are sufficiently well paid for the work they do."[90] This letter possibly embodies the archetypal attitudes of employers and employees. Intolerable working and living conditions combined with low wages proved to be a constant source of disaffection among workers. Sir Ernest Cable testifies, "I can confirm the statement that labour is yearly becoming more and more difficult to procure, is insisting upon higher wages, is evincing greater willingness to strike upon the slightest provocation."[91]

The employers attitude to the workers was further exemplified in the statement of the Indian Mining Association expressed at their meeting held

on 20th June 1894, "That while this meeting will not oppose any well-considered and competently devised rules and regulations calculated to improve the safety of the mines, it desires to express very emphatically its disapproval of any attempt to interfere with the labour which works in or about such mines."[92] But during this formative stage of the industrial working class in the collieries, when primoridial loyalties and the sirdar's vertical control prevailed, no long-lasting protest movement could be launched. Lacking any political organization, spontaneous eruptions of discontent arose and faded away leaving little permanent impact.

Organised political mobilization by political parties began under the aegis of the national movement. Thus the politics of the coalfields came to be integrated with a nation-wide movement. The coal workers responded enthusiastically to the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. Meanwhile Swami Viswanand, a Congress political worker had begun to organize colliery labour from 1919[93]. Formal trade unions came to be established around 1920. When under the leadership of Indu Bhusan Sen, a lawyer, the Indian Colliery Employer's Association was formed in Dhanbad[94]. Initially it was the clerical workers who were constituted in the ICEA, but soon manual workers were included as well. In 1921-22 nationalist politics ranged widely in the coal belt. The All India Trade Union Conference held its second Annual Session in Jharia at the invitation of Swami Viswanand and other labour leaders like P.C. Bose, Seth Ramjash Agarwalla an Indian colliery owner cooperated with the organisers of the Congress by not only contributing funds but also by allowing the session to be held in his colliery compound[95]. This provoked the Indian Mining Association Chairman to comment that the Marwari Shopkeepers

and entrepreneurs were inciting labour unrest in the coalfields[96]. Could this seeming conflict be characterised as that between European entrepreneurs and the patriotic 'national' bourgeoisie as Dange would have us believe[97]? Historical evidence seems to point to the contrary, for labour unrest and strikes although specifically directed at the European collieries, brought about an unholy alliance of interest between the two colliery owners association: IMA and IMF, representing European and Indian interest respectively. The hostility of the IMF towards trade-unions, AITUC, and the East Indian Railway strike of 1922 is clearly manifest in the speech of N.C. Sircar at the annual meeting of April 21, 1922. He maintained, "We who are engaged in industrial pursuit have had not a few occasions when we have found ourselves unable to endorse the views and activities of the political section of our countrymen. In fact, in certain respects, our differences with them is acute and fundamental. We have for instance been charged with lack of sympathy for labour. This is an accusation which was openly hurled at us in connection with our attitude to the recent All India Trade Union Congress.... Nothing is further from the truth than to regard that we who represent Indian capital are not interested in the uplift of the Indian masses by which alone the nationalist aspiration may find its realisation. In this movement in its general aspect we are interested enough but it is to be remembered that the ignorant mass we come in contact with does not represent in our special sphere an underdeveloped citizen but only a human factor in the production of wealth in the widest sense. This is an important difference which seems very often to be lost sight of by the political section"[98].

Trade Unionism and the Non-Cooperation Movement initiated the process of politicization of workers. In 1928, the 9th Session of the AITUC was again

held in Jharia under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was at this time that the Indian Colliery Employers Association split and the Indian Miners Association was formed under K.N. Bhattacharyya. Meanwhile a number of strikes were launched the most notable being in the Amlabad Colliery in 1930[99]. Simultaneously the 'satyagraha' movement of Gandhi found an echo in the coalfields. In 1930 the Tata Collieries Labour Association came into being under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. He led the strike in the Tata collieries in 1938. Meanwhile both Professor Abdul Bari and Mukutdhari Singh of the Bihar Congress Party started to organise the colliery workers and formed the Chotanagpur Mazdoor Sangh. It was Mukutdhari Singh who gave leadership to the historic Kustore colliery strikes in 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1946-47. Wage increase demanded by the workers was the main contention. Along with it was the issue of recognition of the Union by the management. During 1942-45 when the Congress leaders were arrested, the Royists under the Radical Democratic Party tried to lead the trade union movement in the coalfield. But they were unable to consolidate their hold over the mine workers.

In 1945, the Congress leaders were released and returned to the Coalbelt. 1947 saw the appointment of the Board of Conciliation 'with representatives of workers, employers and the government to probe into the question of wage increment of colliery labour of Bengal and Bihar'[100], which recommended increases in pay and allowances for the workers. This was the first effective intervention by trade unions in the fixation of miners 'wages'. During 1946-47 the Congress socialists under Jayaprakash Narain gained a foothold among the coal workers. Under their leadership struggles were carried out in a number of collieries including Lodna and Kustore[101].

With independence and the coming into power of Congress Ministries at the Centre and States, political differences between the Congress and Communist trade-unionists was precipitated. Soon the Congress formed its trade union organisation - Indian National Trade Union Congress, followed by the socialists - Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Multiple unions while it fragmented the loyalty of the labour force could not create alternative channels of political mobilization. The ideological differences dissipated, once the role of the trade unions within the legal structure of the state was accepted. As Mahesh Desai, an HMS trade-unionist in the coalfield, aptly expressed it, 'we just defend before tribunals.....Trade unions have now become habituated to courts and adjudications'.[102] Thus trade unions were ultimately reduced to being legal manipulators on behalf of workers rather than involving the workers in the assertion of their 'class rights'. Since the ideology of trade unions affiliated to different political parties derived from the parent parties consequently it did not necessarily coincide with the interest of the workers. This is clearly manifest in the aims of Colliery Mazdoor Sangh (INTUC) which while incorporating the largest number of workers calls for a collaborative effort on the part of the workers and employers for national interest.'

Political Control and Union Leadership:

In a situation of extensive rural underemployment the labour recruiters by virtue of their capacity to provide employment commanded the personal loyalty of all the workers under them. Consequently in earlier times there is evidence of workers following their Sirdar when the latter had for some reason been suspended[103]. As a 'patron' to the workers, he sought to control a large number of people and so provided each with few days work each. In

this way vertical control was established by the recruiter and generally reinforced by ties of caste, kinship and village. This vertical control was enhanced by the combination of usury on the part of the sirdar. Since a dependent relationship with him was favoured as it would enable them to curry favour with him. On the other hand usurious control strengthened the position of the Sirdar vis-a-vis his workers and established his political dominance over them[104]. The social organization of the 'community' was carried over into industry.

When voluntary associations like trade unions emerged it was either the outside politician, urban lawyer and philmanthropist or the labour sirdar who occupied the leadership positions. For the latter the persons whom they had recruited formed their support base. Workers were supplicants of their 'sirdar' patron. So the sirdars exercised their control through the union organization (mainly CMS) working in collaboration with the management.

Thus a number of erstwhile contractors became trade union leaders and important political personages. As in the mining towns workers constituted a large body so it was easy for trade union leaders to get elected to the Legislature of Assembly from the Mining Constituencies. B.P. Sinha the President of CMS who succeeded Mukutdhari Singh had been a 'roving contractors' in the Turner-Morrison Collieries. Also Shankar Dayal Singh a Dhanbad Minister to the Patna Cabinet had also been a contractor[105]. Resultantly the control of the contractor is now institutionally mediated and maintained by coercion[106].

The labour arena with its vertically integrated character in terms of 'patron-client' relationship was therefore illsuited to give rise to a politically conscious working class in the collieries. Consequently the trade unions were not based upon the ideology and interest of the working class, but were rather a subsidiary institution of political parties which sought to mobilise the workers primarily in times of elections. Ventilation of the workers interest as opposed to that of the employers thus became a secondary consideration. So the unions instead of being organs of workers power were transformed into strictly legalistic organizations geared towards the election of labour leaders who retained primordial control in continuance of the contract labour system.

Chapter IV : Concluding Comments.

In this chapter on the basis of our specific study of labour in the coal industry, we shall attempt to put forward some general comments on the process of proletarianization. The discussion will proceed at three levels; 1) with regard to the specificity of underdevelopment and sociology of industrial labour, 2) rural-urban interaction and labour supply and 3) the structure of politics in mining communities. This might help us to understand the nature of class formation in underdeveloped societies.

IV:1: Underdevelopment and Sociology of Industrial Labour in India.

Sociologists have been prone to explain Indian underdevelopment in terms of the persistence of 'traditional values'[1] rather than by the objective economic factors of colonialism and its concomittant 'sluggishness of private investment'.[2] Caste, Kinship and other primordial loyalties have been the nodes around which sociological research on India has revolved. The process of industrialization as the central feature of social change has largely gone unnoticed.[3] Historically the crippling impact of colonialism can be enumerated briefly in terms of the 'drain of wealth,' 'de-industrialization', and 'de-peasantization',[4] served as the biggest constraint on the industrialization of India. Industrial development when it did take place between the two World Wars was ultimately dependent upon the 'metropolitan' bourgeoisie and was consequently integrated in a subordinate position within international capitalism. This was an effective deterrent to the development of an industrial infrastructure in India.[5]

Largely innocent of the historical process of industrialization in India, sociological research on industrial labour carries the imprint of 'functional' bias. As it has been shown earlier, it gravitates around the structure of norms and behaviour conducive to the 'industrial ethos'. The assumption being of a singular model of industrialization (i.e. the Western European one). Consequently 'value commitment' of the worker to an industrial way of life becomes the sole query of sociologists. In this manner the industrial worker is seen in his existential isolation in an industrial setting and his behaviour is recorded for measuring his, 'commitment',[6]. Two crucial factors are thus ignored. Firstly the process of 'proletarianization' (or the dispossession of a person of his means of production) which is associated with the nature of industrialization is glossed over; and secondly the totality of rural-urban interaction in the context of underdevelopment and its effect on industrial workers is missed. Sociologists concentrate only on the urban end of the spectrum. Without the broader context of industrialization the behaviour of workers appear anomalous for they seemingly conform to traditional norms inspite of their industrial work-context conducive to modernization.[7] Thus in terms of the neat 'tradition-modernity' dichotomy they posit a continuity with the former. Yet what remains unexplained is the selective incorporation of 'tradition' and the reasons for the changing pattern of incorporation over time.

IV:2: Underdevelopment, Rural-Urban Relation and Class Formation.

We have noted previously that the coal industry developed in a situation of colonial underdevelopment. Alongside we also find certain peculiarities of

class formation among the colliery workers; specifically its migrant character and rural origin. Even as late as 1961-62, a significant proportion of the workers, about 30%[8] in coal mines all over India were temporary or casual labour. Also 26% of the entire coal workforce in the country was recruited through intermediaries[9]. Evidently a labour market has yet to develop especially for the unskilled workers and so the intermediaries remain indispensible. The incomplete character of the 'proletarianization process' is characteristic of underdevelopment.

In a situation where industrialization is unable to gain a strong indigenous foundation, because the 'antideluvian'[10] mode of surplus extraction in agriculture impoverishes the peasantry and thwarts the growth of an internal market for industrial goods, the complementarity of rural-urban relation is disarticulated. The urban-industrial complex 'consumes' rural surplus labour without incorporating them permanently and sends back the non-productive 'waste' after use. A 'parasitic' and unequal relationship develops between the country and the city with the latter living off the former.[11] Meanwhile the industrial worker constrained by low wages, the absence of social amenities and social security, necessary prerequisites of his social reproduction is compelled to maintain his rural ties. Meillassoux explains the 'capitalist' rationality of this in these terms: "The agricultural self-sustaining communities, because of their comprehensiveness and their raison d'etre are able to fulfil functions that capitalism prefers not to assume in the underdeveloped countries: the function of social security. The cheap cost of labour in these countries comes from the super-exploitation, not only of the labour from the wage-earner

himself but also the labour of his kin group".[12] With regard to India (workers in Kanpur) Bellwinked suggests that "family and caste ties, are the 'guarantees' of existence."[13] In this manner capitalism (confined mainly to urban industries) integrates earlier modes while retaining them for its own purpose. Consequently the destruction of the 'natural economy' is not inevitable and here one would tend to agree with P.P. Roy when he says that, "in today's 'underdeveloped' countries capitalism is still at the stage where it can only widen the labour-base by reinforcing pre-capitalist relations of production."[14]

This is also true of the Indian situation. The pre-capitalist forms of surplus expropriation is mediated through the sirdar-cum-usurer. Vertical solidarity or dependence upon a particular person or 'patron' for employment is perpetuated. Class mobilization or horizontal solidarity is thus impeded because of the power and control of the 'patron'.

The workers themselves do not constitute a homogenous group. Within themselves interests intersect. They can be classified in terms of skills (skilled-unskilled) corresponding to their levels of permanence (permanent-casual labour) as workers. The differentiation would vary according to industries. One observer suggests that the skilled-permanent workers occupy the <u>citadel</u>[15] and since they have a footing in the occupation can seek to better their lot through institutional channels (trade unions). Those outside the citadel, working as casual labour in the 'informal' sector have little opportunity either to organise politically or to improve themselves through collective action[16]. It is the latter category forming the majority in an

underdeveloped country, who have greater affinity with the archetypal proletarian. But in a situation of labour abundance his bargaining power is minimal.

IV.3: Politics of Mining Communities.

The structural 'dependence' of many upon few enables the labour contractors to convert their patronage style of dominance to political capital in terms of elective politics. His clients form his vote bank as he exercises control both as an employer and usurer[17]. Control over scarce resources corresponds to political control. Thus we find that a number of trade-unionists have become politicians as members of the state Assembly. Some of them had been labour contractors and had then built their political bases.

So the specificity of social and political control is missing from abstract models of mining communities[18]. Their explanatory value is only enhanced by historical depth.

IV:4: Conclusion.

The reproduction of precapitalist forms of surplus appropriation in industries is part of the colonial heritage. Since the European industrialists who invested in India were specifically interested in impeding the politicization of the workers, consequently they retained the system of 'contract labour' with its effective fragmentation of horizontal solidarity. Thus the politics which took hold can be termed 'patronage politics' by which individuals from non-working class background used the workers as an

elective base. The workers on their part supported those who could bargain with the employers and assure their material interests, Under the circumstances the trade union movement, dominated by the Government-sponsored INTUC which acting more in conjunction with the management, managed only to get 'crumbs' for the workers. On the other hand the radical trade unions acting as instruments of workers' self defence tried to assert the rights of the workers in vain. Their failure to develop a class conscious working class in the coal mines may be attributed to their reformism and economism. Since in order to maintain support among the workers they also took more to legal bargaining rather than class-politics[19]. Ideology became a symbol of identity rather than providing the guidlines for struggle. Also labour mobilization in the mines could hardly be done in isolation from their rural roots. In sum effective class mobilization would have required a simultaneous attack on both the rural and urban (i.e. mining towns) power structure by the exploited class. This was not comprehened by the leftist trade unions (specifically CPI dominated AITUC and CPM dominated CITU). Their functional role in terms of providing legal safeguards to the workers through bargaining with the Government on the one hand and the companies on the other cast them ultimately in the role of legitimisers of the status-quo.

The emergence of a more conscious work force in the mid-sixties, led to a change in the political climate of the coalfields. Violence-fraught experience of militant struggles of the coal workers in West Bengal during the United Front Ministries of 1967 and 1969 had an impact on the 'politicking' in the collieries. It has resulted in an attempt at forging

together rural and urban struggles as Prasad seems to suggest[20]. That, however, is beyond our purview for the present.

Chapter 1: Notes and References

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of the system under which the mines are able to obtain unskilled labour at a rate less than ordinarily paid in industry depends upon this, for otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labourer would tend to become a permanent resident upon the Witwatersrand, with increased requirements." (From a Report of the Mine Native Wages Commission). This is also testified to by H. Wolpe: "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa," Economy and Society I: 4:425-56, 1972.

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Table

Appendix to Chapter II

Imports and Exports of Coal

Year	Imports	Exports
1892-95 (ave)	705,000 (tons)	42,000 (tons)
1896-1900 "	333,000	305,000
1901-05 "	205,000	369,000
1906-10 "	344,000	775,000
1911-15 "	427,000	771,000
1916-20 "	44,000	620,000
1921-25 "	777,000	182,000
1926	193,908	617,000
1927	243,608	576,000
1928-29	190,542	641,000

Source: D.H. Buchanan: The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India, London, 1966, p.265.

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