

LABOUR IN COAL MINING INDUSTRY IN BIHAR (1939-47)

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an award
of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SHALINI MISHRA

**Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social
Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi 110067**

1991



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI-110067

Centre for Historical Studies
Chairperson

DECLARATION

The Dissertation entitled 'Labour in the Coal Mining Industry in Bihar' embodies the work of M/s Shalini Mishra of the Centre for Historical Studies and she has worked for the requisite number of semesters for the completion of the same.

R. Champakalakshmi
Signature of the
Chairperson

S. B. Bhattacharya
Signature of the
Supervisor

PREFACE

This work (Labour in the Coal Mining Industry in Bihar 1939-47) is a modest attempt at studying the living and working environment of the workforce in the Coal Mining Sector during the War years, which were especially trying for the working class as a whole. The economic miseries, coupled with greater intensification in the exploitation of labour, employed in the crucial sectors of the economy made conditions of life and work very difficult for them. Though a lot of measures were taken by the Government, to ease the burdens of the working class, these did not bring any substantial relief for them. This study has tried to deal with questions like the meagre amount of wages given to the workers, their low level of consciousness on account of social, cultural and economic backwardness, and the consequent ease with which they could be exploited.

I have been extremely fortunate to have worked under the guidance of Prof. Bhattacharya for this dissertation and take this opportunity to thank him. I am also indebted to my mother without whose constant encouragement and support, this work would not have been possible. Finally a word of thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Labour Library, without whose cooperation this endeavour would have remained incomplete.

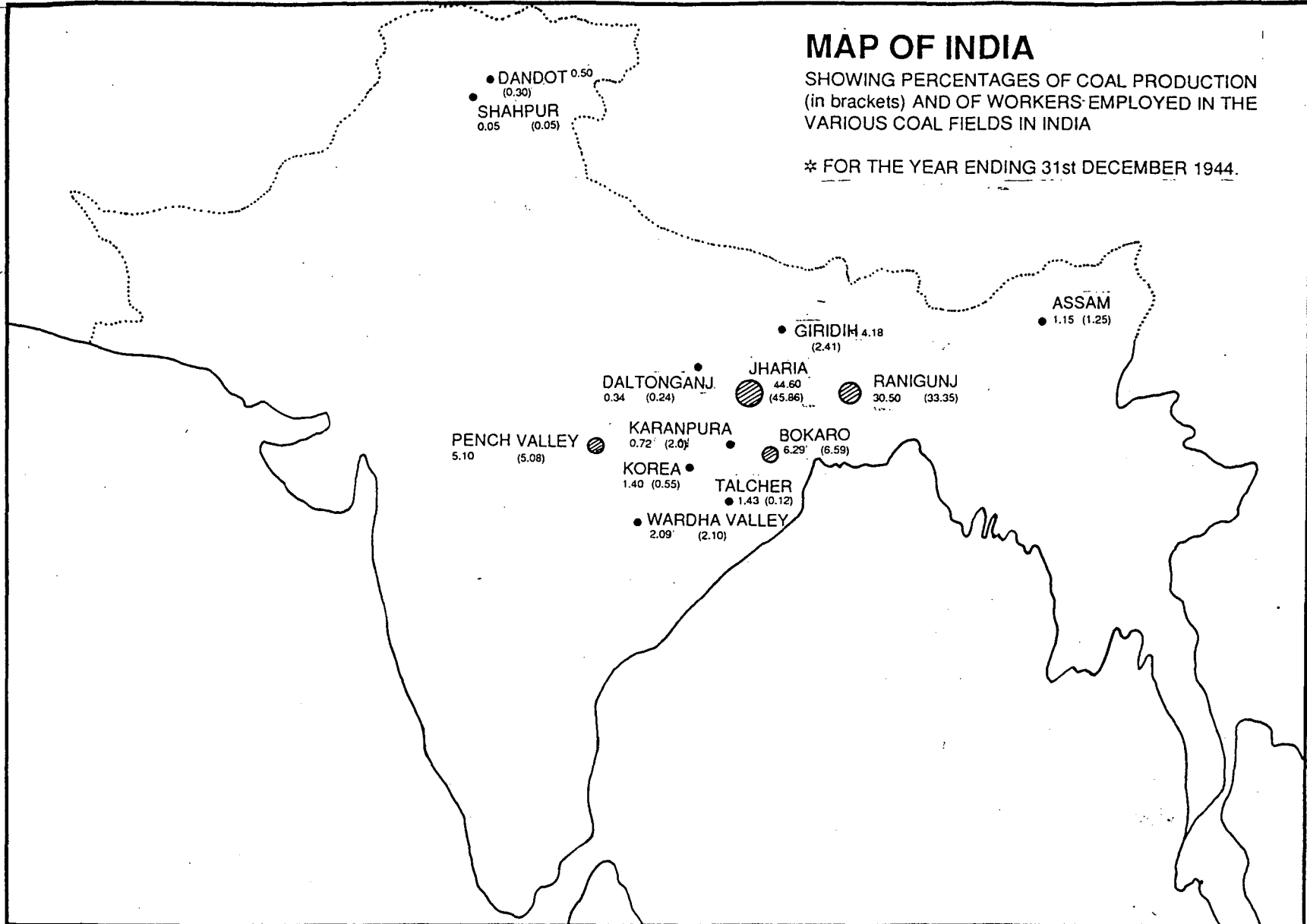
CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I	Growth of the Coal Mining Industry - 1 - 26
II	Working Conditions and Welfare
	Activities in Bihar Coal Mines 27 - 64
III	Wages 65 - 82
IV	Trade Union Movement and Colliery
	Labour 83 - 106
V	Conclusion 107 - 108

MAP OF INDIA

SHOWING PERCENTAGES OF COAL PRODUCTION
(in brackets) AND OF WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE
VARIOUS COAL FIELDS IN INDIA

* FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 1944.



Source : Report on an enquiry into conditions of Labour in the coal mining Industry in India 1946

CHAPTER I

GROWTH OF THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY

SECTION (A)

Coal Industry-an overview Bihar possesses almost all important minerals found in the country including coal to the tune of 80 per cent of the total output.¹ Chotanagpur is the central place of minerals in Bihar. There are twenty coal belts here, the five major coal belts are :

Koel Valley, Hazaribagh, Adjai Valley and Rajmahal Hill.

Jharia coalfield, under the Damodar Valley coalfield, covering an area of 175 square miles, constitutes the most important source of high quality coking coal mined in India yielding 70 per cent of the total coal mined in India.² The next important coal belt in this province is the Giridih coalfield, in the district of Hazaribagh, covering an area of 11 square miles. The importance of this industry in Bihar's economy is in the employment opportunities generated by it and also its high output. In 1937 the number of persons employed in this industry in Bihar was 163, 195 and the output

1. Srivastava V.C., A Socio Economic survey of the workers' in the Coalmines of India. p, 15.

2. Ibid

13,83671¹ tones.³ It increased to 1,47650 in 1945 when the total number of mines in operation were 479.⁴ Even on an all India view the importance of the industry is impressive the proportion of labour and production ^{in Bihar} being about 53 per cent in each case.⁵ Thus a study of the conditions in the coal mines of Bihar would enable one to get a fairly representative picture of the coal mining industry in the country. A review of the historical development of the industry will be helpful in bringing out the fact of how gradually the coal mining sector became one of the major industries of the country from the point of view of affording employment to a large number of persons.⁶ A brief narrative is also required since its vital role in the growth of other heavy industries cannot be over-estimated. The construction of East Indian Railway through the coal region of Raniganj in 1854 laid the foundation of the industry.⁷

-
3. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1940 p. 185
 4. Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of labour in the Coal Mining Industry in India 1946 p. 2
 5. Labour Enquiry Committee Report Op cit., p. 185.
 6. Report of 1946 Op. cit., p. 2
 7. Sastri N.S.R, A Statistical Study of Indian Industrial Development, p. 2

The gradual extension of the railway increased the demand for coal by the facilities created for the transport of this commodity to distant places and also by its increased use as a fuel for engines. The Extension of East Indian Railway to Barakar in 1865 marked a new stage in the development of the coal industry.

Likewise the extension of railways to the Jharia fields betokened rapid development of coal mining in this field. The East Indian Railway opened a line from Barakar to Katrasgarh in 1894 and a branch line from Kusunda to Pathardih in 1895.⁸ The development of Bokaro and Karanpura fields, in which Government railway collieries are situated, commenced in 1915. The first line in Central Provinces was opened in 1866 at Barkui. Thus the major coalfields of Jharia (spread over 175 sq miles) Raniganj (500 sq miles) and Karanpura (400 sq miles) began producing coal in large quantities as a result of the growth and extension of railway facilities in these areas.

A number of collieries began to producing in the subsequent years. Since the opening of new mines and quarries was not controlled by any central authority, ^{the mushrooming of such small mines} ~~there~~ could not serve as an index to the growth of the industry.⁹ Hence the following table is of interest in this regard.

8. Deshpande Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.7

9. Ibid p. 8

TABLE 1.1

THE NUMBER OF COLLIERIES IN THE PRINCIPAL COALFIELDS
IN BRITISH INDIA DURING THE YEARS 1930-1944¹⁰

Year	Total No. of collieries	Jharia	Raniganj	Central Provinces	Other fields
1930	594	254	208	24	63
1931	540	247	206	24	73
1932	515	225	197	28	65
1933	501	219	185	32	75
1934	490	214	184	27	65
1935	494	206	191	31	64
1936	504	209	190	34	71
1937	604	254	226	35	89
1938	665	272	241	36	116
1939	619	241	231	34	105
1940	613	238	216	34	125
1941	633	249	225	38	121
1942	765	362	241	40	122
1943	828	391	252	39	148
1944	910	424	279	43	164

10. Ibid

TABLE 1.2 SIZE OF UNITS IN VARIOUS COALFIELDS IN INDIA¹¹

Name of coalfield	Number/ Sampled mines	Number of collieries employing the following number of Persons							
		below 50	50-100	100-200	200-300	300-400	400-500	500-1,000	1,000 & above
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jharia	101	3	12	18	16	14	6	19	13
Raniganj	68	3	4	10	12	8	9	13	9
Central Provinces	32	1	1	8	3	5	1	6	7
Punjab	8	2	2	2	1	—	—	—	1
Assam	3	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—
Total	212	9	19	39	32	28	6	39	30

11. Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.9

Thus in 1944 there were nearly a thousand coal mines (including open workings), half of which are located in Jharia. There has been an increase of nearly 70% in all coalfields, though the trends in Raniganj are different. Here the rise has been of the order of 34% only, which may be due to the fact that since the coal seams are situated at a greater depth here, the exploitation of coal is comparatively tougher.

As regards the size of the units they varied greatly and were determined on the basis of number of persons employed. Table 1.2 shows the size of units in the various coalfield and is given on Page No. 5. The table shows that the average size of units is relatively larger in Raniganj than in Jharia.

Another feature of the mining industry which merits attention is its highly localised nature. The following table gives the percentage of workers' in the coal industry in different regions.

TABLE - 1.3
PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS IN THE COAL INDUSTRY
IN DIFFERENT REGIONS

Region	1925	1933	1935	1937
Bihar	60.5	57.9	51.7	53.2
Bengal	22.8	25.8	27.9	26.2
Central Provinces	4.8	5.0	7.3	6.1
Punjab	0.8	0.6	1.0	1.2
Assam	2.2	2.1	1.0	1.1
Hyderabad	6.7	6.1	6.1	6.3
Central Indian States	1.5	1.1	1.4	1.3
C.P.	0.5	0.3	2.2	4.3

The concentration of the industry in the regions of Bihar and Bengal is due to the prevalence of the best coal deposits here and more than 90% of the coal raised in India comes from the chief coalfields of Raniganj, Jharia and Bokaro of that region.¹²

It was estimated by Dr. Fox of the Geological Survey of India that out of a total Indian coal reserve of nearly 54,000 million tons about 52,359 million tons are in the deposits of this region.¹³ It is not only in quantity but also in quality that other parts are at disadvantage. All classes of coal are available in this region, whereas other parts have only second class coal.¹⁴

There were three main structural forms in the coal mining industry. These included (i) Captive collieries owned by consumer interests e.g. Railways (ii) Collieries controlled by managing agents who controlled other enterprises too and (iii) private collieries operating in small units.¹⁵ 11 railway collieries were listed in the Report of the Labour Investigation Committee. This group had Rs. 4 crores in capital and large workable reserves. The recommendation of the Committee Report in regard to railway collieries stressed

12. Sastri Op. cit., pp 38-39

13. Ibid p. 39

14. Report of the Tariff Board on Steel Industry 1924 p. 96

15. Srivastav Op. cit., p. 11

on the need for the group to operate on the commercial principles of accountancy, since being the largest buyers, as well as producers, they were placed in an invidious position.¹⁶

The second large group of captive collieries was owned by the iron and steel companies. The position in 1945 was as follows.¹⁷

TABLE - 1.4

TATA IRON AND STEEL COMPANY LIMITED

COLLIERY	SEAMS	OUTPUT (1945)
Malkera Choitodih	11-16	1,88,179
Sijua	12-16	1,89,517
Jamadoba	13-18 and below 13 Jorapuker	2,94,194
	- do -	2,69,642
Total		9,41,532

TABLE - 1.5

INDIAN IRON AND STEEL COMPANY

Noondib Jaipur	18 and below	203,053
Chasnalla	- do -	47,201
Ram Nagar	Coking (Raniganj field)	1,06,714
Total		3,55,968

16. Ibid

17. Labour Investigation Committee Report Section 9

About 60 per cent of the total production of coal was controlled by members of the Indian Mining Association and their affairs were managed by paid agents in India, since they were based in England being members of Joint Stock Companies there. The Burrows Committee of 1937 in its Report termed the existence of management under these agents as not being of unmixed advantage to the coal industry despite having fulfilled their requirements as coal traders and profit producers.¹⁸ Their activities were geared towards earning maximum profit through extraction since they were paid either by a fixed percentage on the gross proceeds or a commission on raisings.¹⁹ The character of this form of organisation was summed up thus by the Coal Mining Committee 1937; "In short to use a sporting metaphor the coal trade in India has rather been like a race in which profit has always come in first, with safety a poor second, sound methods an also ran and national welfare a dead horse entered perhaps, but never likely to start".

Since their overriding concern seemed to be earning profits the managing agents naturally tried to raise the maximum amount of coal. As noted by the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee in their Report an easy way of reducing overhead costs was to push up the production of coal so that overhead costs were

18. Desphande Report of 1946 Op. cit., p. 14

19. Ibid p. 15

more spread out.²⁰ Of course its effect on prices was not the concern of agents. Infact such a situation was not unfavourable to them since the low prices of coal helped in reducing production costs in other industries in which these agents had a stake.

The privately owned collieries were of small size and had very diffused ownership. They opened during periods of prosperity and closed during bad times. They were ill equipped resulting in coal bearing areas being pock marked with small shallow workings, leading to unsound development and disastrous fires as in Jharia field.²¹

During the War years, the industry as a whole earned extremely high profits, as the cost of production did not go up anywhere near to the extent of increase in selling price and because of more or less guaranteed home market.²² The table below shows the trend of profits in the coal mining industry in India during the War years.²³

20. Report of 1940 Op. cit., p. 203

21. Srivastav Op. cit., p. 114

22. Report of '46' Op. cit., p. 15

23. Indian Coal Statistics 1942 p. 11

TABLE 1.6
DECLARED PROFITS OF COAL COMPANIES 1928-42

Year	No. of companies	Profits (R 000)	Profits, same companies preceding year	Chain index Base 1928=100
1928	58	80,47	-	100.0
1929	58	79,16	80,47	98.4
1930	58	98,24	79,16	122.1
1931	62	77,16	1,03,33	91.2
1932	63	63,59	77,25	75.0
1933	64	50,98	63,45	60.3
1934	64	50,48	50,98	59.7
1935	62	54,29	50,79	63.8
1936	61	53,05	54,16	62.5
1937	56	60,71	52,88	71.8
1938	54	1,22,71	61,86	142.4
1939	55	1,19,00	1,21,77	139.1
1940	55	1,19,93	1,19,00	140.2
1941	55	98,29	1,19,93	114.9
1942	53	94,00	97,95	110.3

The table clearly indicates a fall in profits in the year 1941. This was due to fierce internal competition, resulting in a fall in the prices of coal which were then being quoted at about Rs. 2-10-0 per ton to Rs. 5/- per ton. In the year

1942 government stepped in and controlled the prices of coal. The rate in 1945 stood at Rs. 8-0-0 to Rs. 13-0-0 per ton.²⁴

For the effective prosecution of activities arising out of the needs of War Colliery Control Order of 1944 was introduced under Defence of India Rules.²⁵ A Board was set up to advise Government in all matters connected with the working of the order. The Order authorised the government to fix the prices at which coal may be sold and it was laid down that no colliery owner could sell coal at a price different from the prices fixed by the government. To meet the crisis in coal production arising out of a shortage of labour, the ban on the employment of women underground was lifted with effect from November 1943. Thus the War years saw special measures being taken to ensure a steady and uninterrupted production of coal. Steps to establish conducive conditions for mining labour included the passing of an Ordinance for the levy of an excise duty at four annas per ton of coal despatched in order to finance labour welfare activities. (See chapter 2)

24. Deshpande Report 1946 Op. cit., p.15

25. Ibid

SECTION (B)

RECRUITMENT & COMPOSITION OF WORK FORCE

In this section we would be focussing on the recruitment pattern in the coal mining industry, the sources of labour supply, the gradual growth in the numbers employed over the years, attempts made by the government to establish recruitment on sounder principles and the desirability of abolishing the contract system found in the recruitment and production processes of the industry.

The table below gives the average daily number of workers employed in mines, regulated by the Indian Mines Act in 1929 and from 1939 to 47.²⁶

TABLE 1.7

AVERAGE DAILY EMPLOYED 1939-47

Year	Underground		Open Workings		Surface		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1929	12,856	24089	54,235	28,728	51,954	17,839	269,701
1939	146,827	- -	50,306	26,253	57,765	24093	305,344
1940	156,238	- -	53,344	30,241	61,476	26897	328,196
1941	165,356	- -	55,635	32,776	64,836	29334	347,937
1942	162,059	- -	61,030	37,053	66,212	31292	357,646
1943	153,455	7 11	56,636	32,547	66,861	32,745	349,369
1944	135,150	19,321	60,241	34,625	79,860	35,757	364,948
1945	137,279	22,577	62,335	32,975	91,698	39,486	386,290
1946	135,807	10,782	66,757	41,605	96,118	49,313	400,376

26. Indian Labour Yearbook 47-48 p. 7

1947 151,200 - - 63,228 40,067 101,585 51,183 407,263

These figures indicate a steady increase in the employment in mines since 1939 except for a slight fall in 1943. In 1946, employment was about 35 per cent higher as compared to the 1939 level. This was primarily due to a comparatively higher increase in the number of surface workers.

Employment of women underground was banned till 1942. The ban was lifted in 1943 due to the exigencies of the war but was reimposed in 1946. The figures of 1945 show that women formed about ^{24.6%} the total employed in mines during that year.²⁷ The Deshpande Report while considering the relative merits and demerits of the ban has dwelt on the fact, that though such reforms can be seen as an index of the development of social conscience, they do cause considerable hardship during the transitional period to those for whose benefit they are intended.

The labour, employed in the mines, was drawn from the surrounding villages and district of province in which coal mines are situated²⁸. The important districts which formed the recruiting centres were Hazaribagh, Manbhum, Gaya and Monghyr.²⁹

27. Ibid

28. Deshpande Report 1946 p.21

29. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1940 p. 185

The rest were drawn from other parts of India like the districts of Rajpur, Bilaspur and Durg in Central India, the district of Allahabad, Pratapgarh, Mirzapur, Rai Bareilly, Jaunpur, Lucknow, Unnao, Kanpur and Gorakhpur in Central Provinces, Ganjam in Orissa and Lahore and Amritsar in the Punjab.

Not only was the major proportion of the workforce local in nature, it was extremely heterogeneous in composition³⁰. Out of about a lakh of workers in the Bihar coalfields the aboriginals formed 25%, semi aboriginals about 7% and other communities about 68%. The earliest miners in the Jharia coalfields were the Bauris and with the opening up of East India Railway in 1890 the aboriginals from Chotanagpur such as Santhals and Koras joined the ranks of mining labours³¹. In course of time other aboriginals such as Bhuiyas, Mundas, Meahs, Dosadhs, Chamars, Goalas, Ghatwals etc. entered the coalfields in increasing numbers. As highlighted in Deshpande report certain castes and tribes have shown special aptitude for particular type of operations in mines. For example Santhals and Majhis were good pick miners. Among earth cutters and surface workers, Beldars and Nuniyahs predominated.³² The composition of the labour force and the sources of supply were more or less the same in Raniganj as in Jharia.

30. Deshpande Report 1946 Op. cit., p. 21.

31. Ibid

32. Ibid

The recruitment pattern in the coal mining industry shows that the zamindari as well as non-zamindari system of recruitment was followed in the coalfields. In the beginning, recruitment was done on the basis of the zamindari system, according to which, workers from outside were tempted to the coalmines by the offer of cultivable lands.³³ This system was largely responsible for the recruitment of Santhals in the Raniganj fields and also to certain extent in Jharia fields. In Giridih too land was offered as an incentive to labourers so that mining industry would be ensured of plentiful labour supply. The creation of tenancy with colliery service was commented upon by the Royal Commission on Indian Labour and the Labour Enquiry Committee as being an undesirable form of contract.

By 1946 the zamindari system of recruitment had, however, become more or less defunct.

In Jharia coalfields (i) direct as well as (ii) indirect recruitment by Recruiting Contractors, Commission Contractors and Sirdars existed. Apart from this the other agencies for recruitment were (iii) Managing contractors (iv) Raising contractors (v) Raniganj Coalfield Central Recruiting Organisation and (vi) Directorate of Unskilled labour supply. The Sirdars, Jamadars and Chaprasis were employed by certain

33. Labour Enquiry Report 1940 Op. cit., p.186

collieries and entrusted with the responsibility of securing labour from the villages and were paid all recruiting expenses to meet the cost of the same.³⁴ A considerable proportion of labourers were recruited through petty labour contractors³⁵. Till 1946 indirect recruitment was prevalent. Several mines engaged recruiting contractors who were responsible for the supply of labour, while some engaged mining contractors who were not only concerned with the supply of labour but also with part of the management of mines. The raising contractors were also involved in the recruitment of labour for the mines. All recruitment expenses were borne by them and they were also responsible for coal cutting and loading for which they were paid a certain rate per ton. The following table 1.8 on Page No. 18 gives the number of workers employed directly and indirectly in coal mines.

From the table it is clear, in the Railway Collieries a substantially larger proportion of the workforce is employed and paid indirectly. In Jharia and Raniganj on the other hand a higher percentage is employed directly. On the basis of the recommendations of the Industrial Committee on Coal Mining (January 1948) the Railway Collieries took up the question of abolition of the

34. Deshpande Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.23

35. Indian Labour Yearbook 1947-48 p.16

TABLE 1.8

NUMBER OF WORKERS EMPLOYED DIRECTLY & INDIRECTLY^{6c}

Name of coalfield	No. of Sampled mines	No's employed	No's employed & paid directly	employed and paid indirectly	No's employed directly & paid indirectly
1	2	3	4	5	6
Jharia	108	53,423	33,590 (62.9)	19,117 (35.8)	1,716 (1.3)
Raniganj	67	35,354	18,781 (53.12)	16,074 (45.47)	499 (1.4)
Giridih & Bokaro	4	22,824	3,815 (16.7)	19,003 (83.3)	6
Total	179	11,601			1,221 (1.7)

-18-

36. Ibid p. 17

contract system.³⁷ This question of abolition of contract system was taken up at the second session of the Industrial Committee on Coal Mining (September 1948) and it was decided that the present system should continue pending further investigation into the problem. However, according to the Labour Yearbook in some of collieries the 'raising contract system has been recently replaced by a system of commission contracts'. Under this system the responsibility of the contractors was confined only to the recruitment of labourers and commission was given for that only.

Owing to the exigencies created by the War, Government intervened in order to meet the scarcity of labour supply in Bengal and Bihar coalfields. An order called the 'Labour Recruitment Control Order' was passed in November 1944 which provided for the licensing of contractors for supply of labour.³⁸ A Directorate of Labour was set up in November 1944. The Labour was recruited in United Provinces. The experience gained was valuable and it would also encourage and pave the way for a settled labour force. It would be especially beneficial in view of the perpetual shortage of labour supply during certain parts of the year which has been a feature of this industry now for nearly a century.

37. Ibid

38. Deshpande Report 1946 Op. cit., p.24

Section C

LEGISLATION AND INSPECTION

Labour Legislation represents statutory obligations for the most part on the employers by the state. In case of mining labour, the Indian Mines Act, provisions of which are dealt with in the next chapter, was the main regulatory mechanism. Apart from this the Mines Maternity Benefit Act (1941) Workmen's Compensation Act and the Payment of Wages Act formulated in this period helped in securing just conditions and proper legal framework of rights designed to secure the well being of colliery labour.

The Mines Act deals with questions of safety, prevention of accident etc. rather than the welfare of the workers.³⁹ The question of safety is of vital importance in mines owing to the hazardous nature of the work. Thus as pointed out by the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee in its Report there are 'some vital differences between mining and factory legislation.'⁴⁰ The entire control management and direction of the mines, had to be placed on one manager, having sufficient technical qualification. Secondly Mining Boards had to be set up (as conditions varied from place to place) for overseeing and laying down safety and mining regulations. Functioning of

39. Deshpande Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.109

40. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1940 p.211

these Boards was left in the hands of representatives of capital, labour and three experts. Lastly special byelaws were also enforced to deal with individual mines.⁴¹

The administration of Mines Act was under the Chief Inspector of mines. The following statistics is of interest since it relates to inspection of mines.⁴²

Table 1.9

INSPECTION OF MINES

Year	Total No.	Mine (Inspected)	Mines (not Inspected)
1929	1,732	1416(81.8)	316(18.2)
1934	1,675	989(59.0)	686(41.0)
1939	1,864	1210(64.9)	654(35.1)
1944	2,359	1361(57.7)	998(42.3)
1945	2,151	1494(49.5)	657(30.5)
1946	2,119	1316(62.1)	803(37.9)

TH-3811

The figures show that more than 50% of the mines were inspected in the years since 1934 but the high percentage of non-inspected mines is indicative of the fact that enactment relating to inspection was not given due attention.

41. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report p.221

42. Indian Labour Year 47-48

DISS
338.47622334095412
M6877 La
TH3811

← N 39



XX

TABLE 1.10

STATEMENT SHOWING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN WORKERS AND CLAIMS REGISTERED
AND PAID UNDER THE MINES MATERNITY BENEFITS ACT DURING 1945 IN
THE COLLIERIES COVERED BY DESHPANDE COMMITTEE REPORT

Name of coalfield	Number of Sampled mines	No. of mines to which the figures relate	No. of women workers in mines in col. 3	No. of claims registered	No. of claims admitted	Percentage of column 6 to 4
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jahria	106	96	14,836	891	872	5.9
Giridih	2	2	2,175	225	135	6.2
Bokaro	4	4	9,259	269	269	2.9
Raniganj	68	22	4,787	500	495	9.9
Central Provinces	32	11	1,625	168	168	10.4
Assam	6	4	341	53	53	15.5
Total	218	139	33,223	2,106	1,992	55.8

The Mines Maternity Benefit Act was enacted in 1941 and amended in 1945. It provided maternity benefit to underground and surface workers at different rates.⁴³ For underground workers payment of maternity benefit was at the rate of -/6/- per week for 10 weeks before and 6 weeks after delivery. The rate of benefit for surface workers was fixed at 12 annas per day for a period of 16 weeks. The qualifying period for benefit was fixed at 90 days' attendance 'during a period not less than six months preceding the date of delivery.'⁴⁴ As regards the working of the Act. Table 1.10 on Page No. 22 is of interest.⁴⁵

The figures, given in the table must be read with a certain amount of caution and reserve, according to the Deshpande Report since the manner of maintaining record books was extremely crude. One trend which is very noticeable from the above figures is that there was a wide variation in the percentage of claims being admitted. This variation may have been due to the variations in the enforcement of the act rather than to any inherent causes such as differences in age distribution, civil condition etc. There was considerable similarity in these matters in these two centres as is clear from the composition of the labour force in Jharia & Raniganj. The low figures for Jharia

43. Deshpande Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.111

44. Ibid

45. Ibid p.112

according to the Deshpande report, was due to the flagrant evasion of the Act by many smaller collieries. The bigger collieries generally observed the law. Thus the working of the Act revealed, that mine managers were either unaware of its provisions, or resorted to unscrupulous means to circumvent the provisions of the Act, for instance transferring underground miners to surface, so that lesser amount by way of benefit would have to be paid to them.

The Workmen's Compensation Act was applicable to the coal mines too. The administration of the act was the responsibility of the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhanbad. Though no published enquiry existed regarding compensation claims paid to the workers, the Deshpande Committee collected some data during the course of its enquiry in 1946. These are set down in tabular form below. ⁴⁶

TABLE 1.11

ACCIDENTS IN MINES AND COMPENSATION THEREOF

Center	No of mines towhich the figures relate	No. of cases of accidents				Total	Amount Paid Rs. a p
		Fatal	Serious	Non serious	Total		
Jharia	96	-	-	-	296	9717-1-0	
Giridih	2	5	3	140	150	5176-10-0	
Raniganj	34	-	3	6	9	2321-8-0	
Central Provinces	17	6	41	289	336	6642-2-0	
Punjab	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Assam	4	-	-	-	26	671-2-0	

46. Deshpande Report 1946 Op. cit., p. 115

It would appear that the number of contested cases is extremely small. For fatal accidents compensation was to be paid only by the Commissioner appointed under the act. It was reported that a large amount remained undisbursed owing to the difficulty in tracing the dependents.

Both the Royal Commission on Labour and the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee recommended that Payment of Wages Act should be made applicable to the factories, mines, railways and plantation. Since 1936, Payment of Wages is regulated by an act. The clauses of the Act try to ensure fairness in payment of wages, by setting down rules that govern such payments, and ensuring that there are no delays or deductions in respect of wages. However, opinion was divided on making the Act applicable to the mines, especially since the act laid down statutory norms relating to fines. This, the Burrows Committee felt, was inadequate as a disciplinary measure in mines. The Bihar Enquiry Committee in its report discussed the heavy deductions made on miners wages on account of cutting of tubs and complaints of short payments. Both were related to the disbursement of wages. It demanded the extension of the act to the mines. The Deshpande Report concedes that the employment of middle men, prevalence of the system of indirect payment, and utter lack of methods in maintenance of registers were factors which deprived the workers of their dues. The only way of curbing such tendencies, according to the Report, was that the provisions of the Wages Act with suitable modifications would have to be enforced, as these

would greatly assist in removing many of the irregularities in regard to the payment of wages.

Conclusion : Thus we have in this chapter seen how the mining industry grew with the extension of railways to the coalfields. We have also examined the structure of the industry, geared as it was towards maximisation of profits completely submerging the interest of the workers to its own larger interests. The legal enactments which were framed for the benefit of the workers did not go a long way in making for a settled and contented colliery population.

CHAPTER - II
WORKING CONDITIONS AND WELFARE
ACTIVITIES IN BIHAR COAL MINES, 1939-47
SECTION (A)

WORKING CONDITIONS

Working conditions include cleanliness, light, heat, ventilation, physical energy required, length of work hours, such as night shifts, or rotation of shifts, physical hazards and similar conditions that directly affect or indirectly influence the workers' happiness, satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work¹. In case of colliery labour the importance of securing conducive conditions of work, stems from the fact that labour in mines is hazardous work. This chapter will therefore focus on the physical environment of the workers and the managerial set up, which was enjoined with the responsibility of ensuring that statutory regulations in respect of working conditions were adhered to. It would highlight the conditions prevailing in the mines during the period 1939-47 and discuss whether or not these conditions conformed to those stipulated to secure benefits for the labourers. It would be difficult to measure workers' happiness or satisfaction, but nevertheless an examination of the prevailing conditions will help in focussing on those aspects

1 Scott Clothier Spiegel, Personnel Management p.451

which had a bearing on efficiency and output of labour. In the second section of the chapter, welfare steps undertaken to improve and establish a contented labour force in the colliery areas would be examined.

In the coal mines of Bihar, during 1939-47, a number of regulations were in force. These were meant to ensure maintenance of those conditions that would make work place and environment both above and below ground suitable for mining labour, so that coal extraction could be carried out smoothly. During this period, as a result of the outbreak of the war, coal production needed to be stepped up. Since the bulk of coal extraction was done manually attractive conditions of work had to be ensured especially since by nature the work is very risky².

Till 1923 working conditions in mines in India were left unregulated. The Mines Act of 1923 laid down rules relating to a weekly holiday for limiting hours of work for adults above ground and below ground. It was radically altered in 1935 as a result of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour in India and the adoption of the draft International Labour Convention on hours of work in coal mines³. Since

2. Deshpande, Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Coal Mines 1946. p.42.

3. Indian Labour Yearbook, 47-48, p.37

1935 further changes were made by the amending Acts of 1936, 1937, 1940 and 1946 and the Ordinance of 1945⁴. Among the main provisions of the Act, as it stood in 1948, were restrictions imposed on the hours of work for persons employed on surface at 10hrs per day and 54 per week; for those working below ground the weekly limit was the same but the number of hours per day was fixed as 9⁵. Children below 15 could not be employed and those below 17 could not work underground unless certified medically fit. The Act dealt with provisions relating to supply of adequate drinking water, maintenance of medical appliances and proper sanitary arrangements. A number of regulations, covering the entire field of special safety devices and prescribing in detail conditions to make the whole mining operations as safe as possible, were formulated over the years and incorporated in the Act⁶.

Thus legislation to maintain conducive conditions of work kept being introduced from time to time but how far were they able to secure the interests of the workers ? A survey of conditions inside the mines will show that the conditions were haphazard and unregulated with a lot of laxity and indifference in the enforcement

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

6. Ibid

of legislation which naturally had a very detrimental effect on workers' wellbeing and efficiency.

SANDSTOWING : Since mining is a hazardous activity, it is desirable to take steps to minimise the danger of falling roofs and pillars and fires in mines. Sandstowing is therefore resorted to obtain the maximum amount of coal and to ensure that as little coal is lost as possible due to fire and collapses⁷. This question of sandstowing assumed importance after the Burrows Committee of 1937 brought to light the fact that between 1928 and 1936 an 'enormous amount of coal was lost by fires and collapses and in principal coalfields a large amount of good coal was standing in pillars and going to waste'⁸.

The setting up of Coal Mines Stowing Board in 1939 marked the beginning of sand stowing operations in the Jharia coalfields⁹. According to the Act, the expenses of the fund were to be met by an excise duty, and its administration was entrusted to a Coal Mine Stowing Board. The Act empowered the Chief Inspector and inspectors of mines to require the owner agent or manager of a coal mine to take such protective measures

7. Deshpande, Op. cit p.42

8. Ibid

9. Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines, 1940, p.52 hereafter 'CIM'

including stowing in the mines as they thought necessary¹⁰. The protective works at Jharia were begun under the auspices of the Board and by the end of the year about 1,000 tons of sand a day were blanketed in this area¹¹. The Damodar river, which is in close proximity of important coal mining area is such source of suitable sand. However, progress was initially hampered by the absence of adequate railway links with some mines, where protective work was started like the Karijore and Bhuggutdih colliery and extension of railway sidings was needed to enable greater number of wagons to be filled with sand from the Damodar river¹².

In 1941 there was greater activity and 170,00 tons of sand were used for blanketing the fire area at Jharia and stowing the underground galleries of the adjoining Niluripathra colliery¹³. A large number of applications seeking assistance for voluntary stowing was received by the Board. It means that there was greater awareness among the mine managers of the need to undertake protective works. The Mining Inspectors Report of 1943 refers to the multiple activities of the Board in respect of protective works undertaken or financed by

10. Indian Labour Yearbook, op. cit p.51

11. Annual Report, 'CIM' 1940, p.52

12. Ibid

13. Annual report of the 'CIM', 1941, . p.39

it¹⁴. These included (i) blanketing with sand the surface of the Jharia fire area, (ii) blanketing with sand on the southern boundary with muttee on the eastern boundary of the Kori Jori fire area, (iii) flushing soil and subsoil down inclines and boreholes in the Alkusa Kusunda, Kusunda Nayadee and North Kustore Bhuggutdih area, (iv) surface blanket operations at Bararee and Bagdig collieries¹⁵.

During the year on the orders of the Chief Inspector of Mines, compulsory stowing operations were carried out in six collieries in accordance with Section 9 of the Coal Mines Safety Stowing Act for which assistance was sanctioned by the Board. At the same time assistance was given for voluntary stowing in 35 collieries. Even in 1944 compulsory stowing was carried on in Singaran and Toposi collieries. The assistance fund was built up from a cess which was collected as a surcharge on railway freight by the statutory authority constituted under the Act.¹⁶

But did these operations have any positive effect ? They did since the Annual Reports of Chief Inspectors' mention in their details of accidents an important means of avoiding fall of sides or coal burst from pillars know as bumps (these occur at depths of 1000

14. Annual report of the 'CIM', 1943, p..29.

15. Ibid

16. Deshpande, op. cit., p.42

feet or over due to the breaking up of the strong super incumbent strata) was to stow solidly with sand all goaves as depillaring operations proceeded. The solid stowing of goaves mitigated the effects of these serious occurrences, says the report of 1941. Hence the importance of sand stowing for the safety of workers' especially those working below ground cannot be overemphasised and the Report of 1946 noted that sandstowing was a profitable proposition inspite of the initial additional cost of raising.¹⁷ Yet it was found during an ad hoc investigation that very few mines had taken advantage of the Act, and that sand stowing was in evidence only in a few mines.¹⁸

The Coalfield Committee (1945) made certain recommendations regarding sand stowing like stowing for safety should be assisted to the extent of 75 per cent of the total cost subject to a maximum assistance of Rs. 2 per ton of coal extracted¹⁹. The Government was agreeable to this scheme and in case of collieries stowing voluntarily by hand picking the rate of assistance was to be 85% subject to a maximum of Rs. 2- 8-0 per ton.

17, Ibid

18. Indian Labour Yearbook, 47-48, p.51

19. Ibid

VENTILATION : In case of mines, where the working face is at a long distance from the shaft, proper ventilation becomes very necessary. This is so because a lot of heat is given out by seams, and gassy conditions and dust charged atmosphere make proper ventilation essential. Discomfort and fatigue are the experience of anyone working in a badly ventilated workplace, especially so in underground mines where unhealthy conditions can affect the health of the worker not only directly but even indirectly by diminishing his output and consequently his income.

Ventilation in coal mines was provided either by the installation of mechanical ventilators or was of the natural type.²⁰ Even in the mines where mechanical ventilators were provided at the pit bottom, the effectivity of the same to a large extent was reduced since all the working places were not served adequately. In case of mines where mechanical ventilators were not installed, natural type of ventilation was brought about by the arrangement of galleries.²¹ There could be no regulation of temperature in such mines and while at certain places the atmosphere was too warm it was too cold in the others. Since no statutory stipulations regarding permissible temperature and dampness existed,

20. Deshpande, Op. cit., p.43

21. Ibid

the health of the underground worker could be severely^e
^
affected.

Inadequate statutory provisions relating to the installation of ventilators, and large powers bestowed on Chief Inspector of Mines were the two issues raised in the Deshpande Report in 1946. The report noted, 'So far as is known except for the provisions made in the Mines Act empowering the Chief Inspector of Mines to insist upon mechanical ventilators, in certain mines, there are no regulations laid down for regulating the atmospheric conditions in underground workings.'²² The following table shows the progress of installation of mechanical ventilators in the three principal coalfields in India.

TABLE - 2.1
NUMBER OF MECHANICAL VENTILATORS IN THE
THREE PRINCIPAL COALFIELDS IN INDIA

	Jharia	Raniganj	C.P. Other coalfields	
1929	34	20	8	12
1937	64	33	9	11
1938	65	41	11	11
1939	70	47	11	11
1940	74	49	11	10
1941	78	49	15	10
1942	76	49	15	8
1943	84	49	15	8
1944	83	45	15	6
1945	82	56	12	8

(Figures compiled from the Annual Report of the
Chief Inspector of Mines)

22. Ibid

The table clearly shows that though there was a gradual increase in the number of ventilators in use in coal mines of Jharia as well as other coalfields (though in some years some ventilators were not operated) the figures appears to be too low when we keep in view the fact that there were as many as 424 collieries in Jharia.²³ In Raniganj, out of the total number of collieries, which was 279 in 1944 only 45 had mechanical ventilators.²⁴ The excessive heat given out by the seams made it difficult for workers to cut and load the coal and during the surveys undertaken in 1946 it was found that workers were perspiring profusely and the only means of keeping themselves dry was to rub themselves with their dhoti. Thus not much was done to alleviate the conditions of work below ground.

MECHANISATION of underground mining operations which leads to higher output per person employed did not progress rapidly in India since cheap labour was abundant. The coal statistics of 1938 shows that per head tons extracted by a miner in India in that year was only 205 whereas in U.S.A. and Great Britain it was 923 and 369 respectively in the years 1936 and 1939.²⁵ The Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector refer to the

23. Deshpande, Op. Cit., p.8

24. Ibid p. 43

25. Indian Coal Statistics, 1938, p.7

plentiful supply of labour in Bengal and Bihar Coalfields which together account for more than half of the output of coal, and which was maintained throughout the year except for usual absenteeism during the harvesting season.²⁶

Due to limited nature of mechanisation the output per head in India tended to be lower. The total number of coal cutting machines in operation during the years 1910-1935 was only 95. Since then the number progressively increased till 1940 and it was about 210 in 1944.²⁷

The following table shows the number of coal cutting machines in use in the principal coalfields from 1935 onwards.

TABLE 2.2
NAMES OF THE COAL FIELDS AND NUMBER OF
COAL CUTTING MACHINES IN USE

YEAR	JHARIA	RANIGANJ	BOKARO	GIRIDIH	KARANPURA	C.P.	TOTAL
1935	28	59	—	—	2	6	95
1936	38	63	—	—	2	7	110
1937	46	78	1	1	2	9	140
1938	53	115	3	2	2	10	186
1939	56	130	2	1	2	12	203
1940	57	129	2	1	2	14	205
1941	49	119	2	1	2	14	187
1942	48	130	2	1	2	14	197
1943	45	128	2	1	2	14	192
1944	57	134	2	1	2	14	210

(Compiled from the Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines, Dhanbad)

26. Annual Report of the 'CIN' 1940 p.3
27. Deshpande Report 1946 p.41

The progressive increase in the number of coal cutting machines over the years is a marked feature of the table and so is the fact of greater use of machines in Raniganj coalfield than Jharia from 1935 onwards. This may be partly due to the fact that working conditions on the lower fields are much more difficult than in the Jharia field. Of the total amount of coal raised in 1947 which was 26 892, 893 tons the quantity of coal cut by coal cutting machines was only 3,761,087 tons.²⁸ This compares very unfavourably with figures of U.K. where mechanisation and consequently use of coal cutting machines was as high as 91 per cent and in Germany over 90 per cent in Ruhr²⁹. The Deshpande Report sums up the position thus 'coal cutting machines are expensive and each machine is understood to cost about Rs. 25,000. Since labour is comparatively cheap and since also bulk of the mines are small units the very slow progress of mechanisation is easily understood'.³⁰

LIGHTING: It is important to ensure that adequate provision for illumination exist in the work places since bad lighting would lead to lower output, overstrain and this duty is the management's concern. From the Deshpande Report, it is clear that of the total

28. Annual Report of the 'CIM', 1947 p.15

29. I.L.O. Report, The World Coal Mining Industry, pp.170-171

30. Deshpande, Op. cit, p.42

mines sampled only a very small number had provision for electricity. The question of lighting underground has to be understood from the point of view of the lighting of mine itself and the lighting used by miners for purposes of illumination. The following table shows the number of mines which were electrified by 1946.

TABLE : 2.3

NUMBER OF SAMPLED MINES IN WHICH ELECTRIC LIGHTS HAVE BEEN INSTALLED 1946 UNDERGROUND³¹

Centre	Total No. of mines sampled	No. of Mines electrified	Percentage Col 3 to Col 2
Jharia	101	6	5.9
Raniganj	68	10	14.7
C.P.	15	5	33.3
Assam	6	2	33.3
Punjab	8	Nil	-
Total	198	23	11.6

It is clear from the table that in the main coalfield Jharia the percentage of electrified mines to the total sampled is the lowest being only about 6%. Even where electric lights were installed in bigger mines, since electric points were few in galleries there was good

31. Deshpande, Op. Cit., p.43.

illumination only at the pit bottom. Thus many galleries were usually left in utter darkness. So the requirement was of a greater number of electric points so that despite the distance between two extreme working place(s) (some times being as great as two to three miles) sufficient light could be provided for the benefit of the mine workers. The report opines that barring a few exceptions lighting underground in Indian coal mines both in the galleries and in the working place is somewhat poor.³²

Inadequate lighting inside the mines, can have a deleterious effect on workers' health as is evident from the prevalence of Miner's Nystagmus caused by deficient illumination. This deficiency may be due to the lower power of the lamp used, the distance of lamp from the place of work, the shadows thrown by the pillars and the absorption of 90 per cent of the light by the coal covered surface. Thus proper underground illumination was recommended by the Deshpande Committee Report as a step towards preventing miner's Nystagmus. Since provision of electricity was almost absent in the Central Provinces, in Jharia and in non gassy mines in Raniganj, naked lamp was used. It was known as kuppi or mugabathi. In gassy mines only approved safety lamps could be used. These safety lamps were used in mines

32. Ibid, p.44

which in the opinion of Chief Inspector of Mines were liable to the risk of fire. Figures taken from the Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines show that there was a gradual increase in the number of safety lamps in use in the Jharia coalfields from 8, 431, in 1929 to 28, 836 in 1942. There were two kinds of safety lamps in use in the coalfields of Bengal & Bihar electric and flame type. In Bihar, in 1944 for example 5,092 electric safety lamps were in use whereas about 22,794 lamps were flame type.³³

Thus the above description makes it clear that a serious deficiency existed as regards provision for lighting and even in mines where electric lights were provided provisions were inadequate to carry the current to all important working places.

DRINKING WATER : Section 17 of the Indian Mines Act lays down that "there shall be provided and maintained for every mine such supply of water fit for drinking as may be prescribed". However, this rule was observed more in its breach since in the important coalfields there was no arrangement made to ensure clean and regular supply of water either underground or on the surface. In hot summer months the workers carried their own water bottles.³⁴ In most cases workers were found

33. Annual Report of the 'CIM' 1944 Appendix I Table II

34. Deshpande, op. Cit., p. 45

drinking water percolating down the seams. This water is harmless most of the times but it can be injurious to health some times. Even for the surface workers there was no provision made for the supply of drinking water except in quarries belonging to the Railways. The flagrant disregard of the statutory norms in regard to supply of drinking water in the mines shows very clearly that the management was not at all interested in securing even those minimum basic standards and it was interested only in exploiting labour for the sake of production.

SANITATION: The Indian Mines Act (Section 17) lays down that "there shall be provided and maintained for every mine latrine and urinal accommodation of kind & scale as may be prescribed." In all the coalfields visited by the Deshpande Committee in 1946 no provision had been made for any sanitary arrangement underground.³⁵ The authorities pointed out that even if sanitary arrangements were provided they would not be made use of by the employees because of caste and other prejudices and according to employers an experiment was made by a particular coal mine a few years ago which showed that the workers were averse to the use of such facilities. However, on investigation it was observed that the experiment was unsuccessful as the sanitary

35. Deshpande, p. 45

arrangements made were never kept clean and therefore the workers were averse to using them.³⁶ The workers on being questioned stated that if such facilities were provided, they would certainly make use of them.

In the absence of proper arrangements the workers were forced to use abandoned work places and ^asweeper or two was kept to remove impurities. How did this [^]lack of sanitation ^affect the worker? It certainly added to the prevalence and growth of disease especially hookworm. The Labour Commission in their Report also strongly recommended the provision of sanitary arrangements underground and cited figures in this connection of the high incidence of hook worm disease particularly among underground workers.³⁷ The report cites the evidence given by the Jharia Mines Board of Health and states that probably over 90% of the adult labourers in this area are infected although illness is produced only in a very small proportion of cases.³⁸

Thus the sanitary conditions needed to be improved since the workers were employed for a stretch of eight to nine hours and it became one of the pressing needs. For the workers on the surface also not much was provided by way of sanitary arrangements. In Assam, however, one important group of collieries did provide

36. Ibid, p. 45

37. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour p. 115

38. Ibid

for adequate number of lavatories on the surface which was used by workers. The experience in Assam disproves the belief that the workers would not use such amenities if they were provided.

HOURS OF WORK AND SHIFTS: The regulations relating to hours of work for the miners fixed the weekly hours of work for both underground and workers on surface at 54.³⁹ The daily hours of work were fixed as nine underground and ten on the surface. The spread over permitted was 9 and 12 hours for underground and surface workers respectively. A perusal of the average hours worked per week by different categories of workers shows that surface workers worked for a greater length of time than those in open working or underground. This may have been possibly due to the easier working conditions on the surface. The Annual Report of 1942 for example gives the figures of 50 and 49 hours respectively as hours worked by skilled and unskilled labour on surface in the Jharia coalfields. However, in the same category of workers underground the hours worked were 47 per week.⁴⁰ In fact in a large number of mines the hours of work underground were eight only inspite of the permissible limit of 9 hours every day.

39. Annual Report of the 'CIM' 1943 p. 15

40. Annual Report of the 'CIM' Appendix 1 Table 2.

TABLE 2.4

THE HOURS OF WORK PER SHIFT IN DIFFERENT CENTRES FOR UNDERGROUND,
OPEN WORKINGS, AND SURFACE WORKERS⁴¹

Centre	No. of Mines to which informa- tion relates	Underground			Surface			Open Workings		
		8 Hrs.	9 hrs.	6 Hrs	8 hrs.	9 Hrs.	10 hrs.	8 hrs.	9 Hrs.	10 hrs.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Jharia	101	28	56	3	60	31	7	9	-	13
Raniganj	68	31	32	-	49	18	1	4	-	3
Central Provinces	15	9	6	-	6	5	4	-	-	-
Punjab	8	6	2	-	-	6	2	-	-	-
Assam	6	-	6	-	-	1	5	-	-	-
Total	198	74	102	3	115	61	19	13	Nil	16

-45-

41. Deshpande Report, 1946, p. 47

From the table it is clear that in the Jharia Coalfields underground workers did work for the prescribed length of time in the larger proportion of coal mines situated in the coalfields whereas in the smaller coalfields this feature was markedly absent.

With regard to hours of work of women too the actual weekly hours were much shorter than the legal hours varying from 25 to 49 under ground 38 to 49 in open workings and from 27 to 51 on the surface.⁴² In Jharia and Raniganj coalfields where a lot of women were employed, the weekly hours were not above 45 underground 50 in the open workings and 50 on the surface as seen in the following table.⁴³

Coalfield Weekly hours of women workers in 1936

	Underground	Openworkings	Surface
Jharia	44	45	50
Raniganj	45	43	49

Before the introduction of daily limit of hours it was the miners' custom to come with his family from the village and to go underground for a period which might extend to one, two or more days returning to the surface and to the village when he had earned as much as he

42. Industrial Labour in India, I.L.O. Publication 1938, p. 222

43. Ibid, p. 223

desired at the moment.⁴⁴ Thus it became necessary to regulate the timings of the workers since long hours of work are frequently associated with industrial accidents and unnecessary fatigue leading to lower efficiency and reduced output.

Introduction of shift system in any establishment is a common feature as it enables the management to have the maximum use of installed plants machinery and buildings. In the mines too, multiple as well as single shifts were worked. In case of mines working three shifts the first shift began at 7 the second at 3 and the third at 11 P.M. According to Government of India, in the mines under the management of the railway collieries, 14 mines with 17,763 miners worked 3 shifts, 2 with 1562 men 2 & 3 shifts, 4 with 1,193 men 2 shifts and 2 with 219 men worked only 2 shifts in 1937.⁴⁵

The number of hours worked depended on the nature of the labour employed. In case of contract workers the tendency on the part of overmen and contractors was to make the labourers work for as long as they were present. There was no provision for overtime work though in a few railway collieries overtime work was

44. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 117

45. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, p. 73

paid for at $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the normal rate. Despite realising the difficulties faced by the management in procuring labour, the need for increasing production and the habit of work, the Report of 1946 saw the necessity to comply with the purposes of law and it seems desirable, the Report says 'that the position should be regularised by taking certain measures in this regard'.⁴⁶

As regards leaves and holidays, stipulations hardly existed to ensure that the workers, coal loaders, cutters and other classes of workers could enjoy benefits such as holidays with pay. The collieries however generally remained closed on Durga Pooja, Kali Pooja, Holi. In the majority of the collieries surveyed in the Jharia coalfield Sunday was a weekly holiday.⁴⁷

Thus a study of the working conditions as prevalent in the mines proves that the overriding concern of the mine and managers was with means whereby the labour could be utilised for maximum amount of coal extraction.

ACCIDENTS: A study of the accidents in the mines will show that a lot of accidents could have been avoided by proper maintenance and use of suitable equipments relating to haulage rail and tram^{li} lines, and by a more vigorous and efficient exercise of supervisory

46. Deshpande, Op. Cit, p. 48

47. Ibid p.49

authority as embodied in the mine managers & foremen. For instance the Report of 1945 mentions that there had been an increase in the accidents due to tubs being allowed to run uncontrolled. ⁴⁸ Suitable types of inter locked stop blocks and runaway switches to be used at the tops of all haulage inclines, would prevent tubs running uncontrolled from the tops of the haulage incline due to the negligence of persons employed in operating such appliances. But such safety devices were hardly found in the mining areas. Similarly there were accidents due to break down in material and 'if suitable material is used in the construction of coupling chains hooks and draw bars accidents under these heads will decrease'.⁴⁹ Riding on sets both authorised and unauthorised which led to fatal as well as serious accidents could be kept in check and brought down by continued vigilance on part of supervising staff. The largest number of accidents took place in underground workings. Since safety in mines is largely dependent on maintenance of proper discipline the managerial authority was ultimately responsible for lives being lost in accidents.

Related to accidents was the provision of maintenance of first aid boxes but the provision of law in regard

48. Annual Report of the 'CIM' 1945 p.18

49. Annual Report of the 'CIM' 1946 p.13

to this matter was flagrantly violated though the Act clearly laid down that 'At every mine in respect of which the local government may by notification in the local official gazette declare this Section (Section 18 of the Indian Mines Act) to apply supply of ambulances or stretchers and of splints bandages and other medical requirements as may be prescribed shall be kept ready at hand in a convenient place and in good and serviceable order."

It would thus be appropriate to conclude that the conditions as obtaining in mines were not such as would make for a contented labour force and instead of greater attention paid to ensure safety of workers because of the nature of mining activity and the great risk of life it involved the mining activity was geared primarily towards cheap extraction of coal.

SECTION (B)

WELFARE MEASURES IN COAL MINES

Workers in coal mines are exposed to hard work and unfriendly living and harsh social conditions. The Deshpande Enquiry Report has dealt in detail with the welfare work carried on in the colliery areas of Bihar and other mining settlement for the establishment of a contented and efficient labour force. In the succeeding paragraphs provisions relating to educational and recreational facilities, canteens and creches for children of women workers and other facilities for improving the health and welfare of the work force will be discussed.

The setting up of Jharia Mines Board of Health in 1922 under the Bihar and Orissa Mining Settlement Act, marked the beginning of ameliorative measures undertaken in respect of sanitation and health of colliery labour.⁵⁰ The Board had eleven members including four representatives of mineowners, one representing the royalty receivers, two nominated non-officials and four nominated officials.⁵¹ The Report of 1940 pointed out that the interests of labour were ostensibly to be represented by a nominated non-official but it pointed to the need for larger representation of labour.

50. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, Op. cit. p.190

51. Ibid.

This would result in a more vigorous and sustained effort being made to improve conditions on the coalfields which nobody who had witnessed them would deny the need of.⁵²

The activities of the Mines Board of Health included among other things supervision of housing of labour, sanitation within the mining settlements, supervision of medical relief arrangements, prevention and control of epidemics in collieries, maternity and child welfare work and supervision and suggestion for improvement of anti-malarial measures.

One of the important areas of public health, in which the Board was expected to involve itself, was the control of epidemics. It was obligatory on the Board to make arrangements for disinfection isolation medical relief in the event of any such outbreak.⁵³ Mass Inoculation for the prevention of spread of cholera and small pox was launched in such situations. The following tabular statement shows the number of small pox and cholera inoculations in the fields.⁵⁴

52. Ibid, p.191.

53. Deshpande, Report of 1946 Op. cit, p.90

54. Ibid.

TABLE 2.6

STATEMENT SHOWING THE NUMBER OF CHOLERA INOCULATIONS AND SMALL POX VACCINATIONS CARRIED OUT IN 1943 AND 1944 BY THE BOARD OF HEALTH IN JHARIA AND RANIGANJ FIELDS.

COALFIELD	CHOLERA INOCULATIONS				SMALL POX VACCINATIONS	
	IN VILLAGES		IN COLLIERIES		IN VILLAGES	IN COLLIERIES
	1943	1944	1943	1944	1943	1944
Jharia	27,310	8,565	6,012	8,718	26,862	47,381
Raniganj	129,349	203,967	49,980	-	83,849	163,987

A close perusal of the Annual reports compiled by the Chief Inspector of Mines shows that the Jharia Mines Board was performing its duties in respect of propaganda work in colliery areas preventive measures and the like. The anti malaria scheme of the Board for conducting surveys and giving technical advice to the collieries for remedial measures was continued between 1940-43.⁵⁵ However, in 1943 the Department of Labour, Government of India took over the responsibility of malaria control in important colliery areas from about the middle of the year. A military unit was placed in charge. The scheme was financed by Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund.

55. Annual Report the 'CIM', 1944, p.125

According to the Deshpande Report during 1945 it was reported that incidence of malaria both in Raniganj and Jharia fields had diminished considerably.⁵⁶ Yet a survey undertaken by the members of the Enquiry Committee pointed to a high incidence of malaria cases in the Jharia and Asansol mining settlements during the years 1939 to 1945.⁵⁷

TABLE 2.7

STATEMENT SHOWING INCIDENCE OF MALARIA AMONG COLLIERY WORKERS WORKING IN JHARIA COALFIELDS (1939 TO 1945)

YEAR	NUMBER/MALARIA CASES	PERCENTAGE OF MALARIA CASES TO TOTAL LABOUR/FORCE
1939	32,859	—
1940	20,699	24.7
1941	18,323	21.1
1942	17,093	20.4
1943	36,724	45.3
1944	52,740	41.9
1945	35,746	30.1

That the numbers affected by malaria was very high in the colliery areas is very clear from the table. The

56. Deshpande, Op. cit., p.91

57. Ibid.

disease took a heavy toll during certain seasons of the year and it assumed epidemic proportions during the months of September and October. Active measures were undertaken to bring the disease under control by the Government of India. The Annual recurring grant during 1947-48 from the coal mines labour welfare fund was Rs.12,50,000/- (exclusive of capital outlay on account of cost of construction of various anti-malaria buildings in the different coalfields)⁵⁸. The Jharia Mines Board of Health thus took steps, to ensure that the population in colliery areas was provided with adequate facilities to combat epidemics. The Jharia Water Board functioning in the mining area since 1915 was entrusted with the responsibility of supplying water to the colliery areas. The collieries had to pay a cess of nine paise per ton of coal despatched and could thus receive free supply of water of one thousand gallons per rupee of cess paid.⁵⁹ An examination of the Annual Reports of the Inspector of Mines shows that there was a steady increase in supply of water to collieries by the Water Board over the years and this must have certainly secured better standard of life for the workers in colliery areas since pit water was unsuitable for consumption in these areas.

58. Indian Labour Yearbook 47-48, p.185

59. Bihar Labour Enquiry committee Report, Op. cit, p.195.

The supply of water increased from 47,580,000 gallons in colliery areas of Jharia in 1940 to 452,255,000 gallons in 1947.⁶⁰

The Jharia Mines Board of Health was also engaged in activities relating to maternity and child welfare. There were 11 centres solely concerned with the promotion and furtherance of activities dealing with matters relating to maternity and child welfare in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Jharia Mines Board of Health in 1941.⁶¹

According to the 1943 Report of the Inspector of Mines expectant mothers infants and toddlers received attention at these centres in respect of health, general cleanliness and personal hygiene. The maternity and child welfare activities were extended to many more collieries in 1947. New circles were started at Bhowrah, Bhulanbararee and Tisra and 12 new clinics came into existence so that in 1947 there were 6 circles with 23 clinics as against 3 circles with 11 clinics in the previous year. Furthermore a number of adjacent collieries were grouped with old clinics. The scheme in 1947 thus embraced 65 large and small collieries about 17 villages and Jharia Katras and Kenduadiah Bazars.⁶² Considering

60. Annual Report of the 'CIM', 1940 p.47

61. Annual Report of the 'CIM', 1941, p.31

62. Annual Report of the 'CIM', 1947, p.31.

that there were over 420 collieries in Jharia the coverage of the scheme was grossly inadequate.

The Jharia Mines Board had among its many of duties to provide for and regulate of housing of residents, whether permanent or temporary. Thus the byelaws laid down specifications regarding housing standards for instance, minimum size of rooms, verandah, white washing, sanitary arrangements and ventilation.⁶³ A standard house according to the byelaw should consist of a room seven feet high, eight feet wide and a floor space of 40 sq. ft. In order to prevent over-crowding it further provided that each adult should have floor space of 33 sq. ft. and space of 333 ft. and a child under 12 should have half the space.⁶⁴ These standards however were laid down fifteen years ago according to the Report of 1940 which opnes, that in the light of the observation of the Director Public Health Bihar that 500 cubic ft. of air space for an adult person cannot be considered sufficient, the bye laws of the Board needed revision. Among the recommendations of the Enquiry Committee were included the desirability of introducing new standards in case of new housing, the need for the Board to be more effective in exercising its power to ensure that there was no overcrowding, the necessity to ensure that nonstandard

63. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1940, p.194.

64. Ibid.

houses, were not occupied, and to supervise implementation of necessary sanitary arrangements since it was felt by the members that the Board was not exercising its powers in this respect for the welfare of the workers.⁶⁵

A large percentage of colliery labour was accommodated in dhowrahs when the members of the Enquiry Committee undertook surveys. 90 percent of the 860 families, visited were to found to be living in dhowrahs.⁶⁶ The dhowrahs provided by the employers were of several types such as country roof Raniganj tile roof, arched roof, plastered flat roof and tin roof dhowrahs. These accounted for 45 per cent, 11 percent, 39 percent, 2.2 percent and 1.5 percent respectively of the houses provided by the employees. In Giridih collieries building material was provided to the workers for construction of houses. According to the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report 85 percent of the families were living in one room, 10 percent in two rooms and 3 per cent in three room and 2 per cent in 4 room houses.

Thus, the Jharia Mines Board of Health was the central coordinating as well as the implementing organisation for promotion of welfare of miners and its activities made a beginning in the establishment of conditions under which colliery labour could hope to lead a decent human existence.

65. Ibid

66. Ibid p.191

Statutory provision also existed for the appointment of doctors to attend to the injured and sick persons. However, it was found that only part time doctors were available in collieries even though it was stipulated that every colliery employing 30 or more persons is required to have a full time doctor.⁶⁷ There were small dispensaries attached to collieries but the standard varied widely from a small box kept in some odd corner of room containing a few drugs to a fairly well equipped dispensary with surgical instruments. There were some well equipped hospitals with wards for inpatients in bigger collieries in Jharia the largest being Tata colliery at Jamadoba.⁶⁸ There was no obligation on collieries to maintain hospitals. There were 18 hospitals maintained by the colliery owners when the Bihar Labour Enquiry committee undertook its survey in 1938.⁶⁹ These were:

NAME OF THE HOSPITAL	NO. OF BEDS
1) Mudidih Colliery Hospital	12
2) Loyabad Colliery Hospital	15
3) Kustore Colliery Hospital	12
4) Jamadoba Colliery Hospital	10
5) Lodna Colliery Hospital	4
6) Jealgora Baree Hospital	8
7) Bhowrah Colliery Hospital	4

67. Deshpande, Report of 1946 Op. cit., p.96

68. Ibid

69. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1940, p.193

The others were in the nature of emergency wards. In Railway collieries too there were fairly well equipped hospitals with wards for inpatients. The Hospital in Giridih had 65 beds and was in charge of a surgeon assisted by four Assistant Surgeons⁷⁰. Deshpande in his report has also commented on the fact that workers on Railway collieries were getting "hospital minded" though earlier they tended to be superstitious. They could be persuaded to take advantage of the facilities provided to them. The conclusion reached by Deshpande regarding medical facilities for the mines was that it was entirely inadequate with the exception of some larger collieries in the different fields.⁷¹

As far as securing the benefits of education for the miners was concerned very little was done for supplying educational facilities in the coalfields. There were a few District Municipal and local Board schools but the educational facilities were altogether negligible.

Among the requirements for the well being of workers included the arrangement for proper bathing facilities at pithead and the establishment of creches for the convenience of women working in mines. The miners tended to develop sores of the palms and knees while cutting coal and these sores

70. Deshpande, Op. cit, 96.

71. Deshpande, Op. cit, 97

became festering wounds because of the grime and dirt accompanying the work in the coal mine.⁷²

So it was very necessary for the miner to clean himself thoroughly at the end of the day's work. This facility was not found in Indian coalfields except some mines like the Tata Coal Mine at Digwadih. Workers normally used open hydrants on the surface drawing out mine water or bathed in adjoining tanks. Similarly in case of creches there was not a single one in Jharia nor were any creches available to women workers on Railway Collieries.⁷³ The Central Govt. passed an ordinance (No. XVII of 1945) which provided for maintenance of suitable rooms to be reserved for the use of children under the age of six years (belonging to women ordinarily employed in mines), This provision for establishing creches in mines was implemented gradually in the later years.

Very few collieries had schemes in operation for safeguarding the workers' post-retirement future; it was there only in the group of collieries owned by Tatas in the Jharia Coalfields and the Railway Collieries at Giridih and Bokaro.⁷⁴

72. Ibid, 98.

73. Ibid, p.100

74. Ibid, p.101

Welfare Fund

The Government of India promulgated on 31st January 1944 Ordinance number VII of 1944 to constitute a fund for financing activities which it felt were necessary for securing and promoting the welfare of labour employed in coal mines.⁷⁵ An excise duty of not less than one anna per ton of coal and not more than four annas of coal despatched from collieries would meet the expenses for the same. The cess began to be collected from 1st December, 1944 @ 4 annas per ton. The proceeds of the fund were to be utilised to defray inter alia the cost of measures for the benefit of colliery labour namely provision or improvement of water supply, housing, medical, educational and recreational facilities, provision of transport to and from work and betterment of social conditions in general.⁷⁶ The administration of the fund was left in charge of the government aided by an Advisory Committee comprising equal number of members representing mine owners and workers.⁷⁷ Certain priority areas were delineated in order to meet the immediate and urgent needs of the colliery population and these included malaria control hospitals, improvement of water supply, housing, construction, etc.

75. Annual Report of the 'CIM', 1944, p.32.

76. Ibid

77. Deshpande Report, 1946, Op. cit. p.104

The multifarious activities of the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund have been discussed in the Indian Labour Yearbook 1947-48.⁷⁸ For the purposes of meeting expenditure for construction work in respect of all housing activities in coal mines a housing account was started in 1947-48 and out of the cess of six annas one anna was apportioned to the housing account. A programme of construction of 50,000 houses was drawn up but only 66 houses could be built and 750 more quarters were in progress, the greatest problem in this regard being the difficulty in getting suitable coal free sites. Regional hospitals and child welfare centres at Katras, Tisra in the Jharia coalfield and Chore and Searsole in the Raniganj coalfield were completed. These hospitals did not become functional immediately. Though the provision of pithead bath and creches was made compulsory by the government not much progress could be made owing to difficulty in the supply position of building material.

Welfare activities for women and children were launched with great vigour partly to rehabilitate women who had been displaced due to restriction on employment of women underground and partly to improve the living of miners. A special branch of welfare organisation was started for looking after the welfare of women and children. 14 women's welfare centres were opened in Jharia and Raniganj Coalfields.

78. Indian Labour Yearbook, 1947-48, p.184

Conclusions : Thus the welfare activities undertaken in the mining area (Section B above) were wide ranging but failed to cater to the needs of the bulk of the colliery population. The institution of the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund and the activities of the Mines Board of Health in the sphere of control of epidemics and water supply, marked a beginning. However these measures were not adequate for the entire population of the colliery area. In response to standards invoked by the I.L.O. and international labour conventions, the authorities made impressive statutes and ordinances and byelaws but there was a wide gap between them and the implementation of these measures. As regards improvement in working conditions (Section A) some progress began to be made for it was connected with promotion of productivity and thus connected with profit motive of the mineowners; even in this case, progress was slow and remained at a very low level compared with International or European standards.

CHAPTER III

WAGES

In this chapter, we shall study the wage rates, paid to the various categories of workers in the coal mines and variations due to lack of standardisation of wages. We will particularly examine the wages of the workers, during the War period, when expediency of war was taken to be the only point of consideration; in war period there was an augmentation of industrial production, due to attention solely directed towards aiding the war effort, but as we shall see, it did not at all bring any improvement in the rewards of labour.¹

WAGE RATE PATTERN

A perusal of wage rates would show that the wages paid to the mine workers were low and varied greatly. It was low considering the difficulties and risks of mining operations. Variation was as much as 100% or even 250%. Just before the outbreak of World War II the rates of wages were as shown in table 3.1

1. S.Sen, Working Class of India, p.377

TABLE 3.1

RATES OF WAGES IN JHARIA AND OTHER COALFIELDS OF
BIHAR IN JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, 1938²

Class of workers	Min. Rate	Max. Rate	Usual Rate
1. Coal cutter :			
(a) Machine Coal	0-4-0	0-4-6	-/4/- Per ton
(b) Pick or blasted Coal	0-4-9	0-10-0	-/6/to/7/ ,, ,,
(c) Quarry Coal	0-1-9	0-5-0	-/4/to/-/5/-,, ,,,
2. Underground Trolleyman :			
(a) Contract rate	0-0-4½	0-2-0	6 to 12 pcs/tub
(b) Daily rate	0-6-0	0-10-0	6 to 7 as per day
3. Surface Trolleyman :			
(a) Contract rate	0-0-3	0-2-0	6 to 12 Pcs/tub
(b) Daily rate	0-6-0	0-10-0	6 to 12 as per day
4. Haulage & Pump Khalasis :			
(a) Monthly	12-0-0	30-0-0	12 to 16 as per day
(b) Daily	0-7-0	1-1-0	7 to 10 as per day
5. Wagon loaders (coal)	0-1-0	0-2-6	1½ to 1½ as per day
6. Underground Coolies	0-5-0	0-9-0	6 to 8 as per day
7. Surface Coolies	0-4-0	0-9-0	<i>5½ to 7 as per day</i>
8. Surface female coolies	0-2-6	0-5-6	3½ to 4 as per day

2. Seth, B.R. Labour Indian Coal Industry, 1940

There were numerous reasons for low levels of wages of the workers in the coal mining industry. These included low pitmouth value of coal, shortage of tubs and imperfect organisation among colliery labour. To meet the difficulties arising out of the shortage of tubs, Royal Commission on Labour in its Report called for adequate supply of tubs properly distributed which it felt was 'essential to efficient working.'³ The number of tubs (which was the unit of payment to the miners) varied from mine to mine but the inadequacy of tubs in most of the mines is borne out by the following statement.⁴

TABLE 3.2

Collieries using tubs of 36 cft capacity:

	Number of tubs in use	Number of miners & loaders	Number of miners & loaders per tub
1.	500	750	1.50
2.	250	1024	1.70
3.	250	635	2.54
4.	160	156	0.98
5.	180	1445	2.47
6.	110	50	0.45
7.	120	245	2.04
8.	51	115	2.25

3. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1930, p.121 *1946 p.52.*
 4. Report of the ~~Coal Commission~~ *Coal Commission*

It is clear from the above figures that in some mines the number of tubs in use was clearly far below the requirements for efficient and fair discharge of duties, in light of the fact that miners and loaders far outweighed the availability of tubs. Due to the shortage of tubs the earnings of the workers were adversely affected.

According to the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, the miner would not start his work, unless he had a tub by his side. This affected the circulation of tubs. Secondly overmen or sirdar responsible for distribution of tubs expected dasturi or commission and the report says that 'those who are reluctant to pay may have their tubs delayed long enough to make it worth their while to yield'.⁵ Thirdly more miners were admitted into the mines than necessary. Though stricter supervision was seen as move to counter the shortage of tubs even the members of the Labour Enquiry Committee felt that the only remedy was more tubs.

Lack of uniformity in the size of tubs and the amount of coal loaded into them also led to variation in miners' wages. Tubs of various sizes were used; uniformity would ensure that the miner would not be defrauded of his legitimate earnings.⁶ The Royal Commission on Labour recommended that the mining board should examine the question of securing greater

5. Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1940, p.208

6. Ibid, p.209

uniformity in the size of tubs and of ensuring that remuneration bears a closer relation to output. The collieries were themselves agreed on this, but progress was slow, due to financial and in some instances also physical difficulties arising from the layout of passages.⁷

Existence of corruption where payment was made to miners through sirdar, and the corrupt ways of munshis, whose duty was to record the tubs also deprived the workers of their legitimate shares.

SHARE OF WAGES IN PRODUCTION COST

The pitmouth value of coal and the percentage share of wages therein were not uniform in Indian coal mines as appears from the following statement.⁸

Companies	Raisings (costs per ton)			Labour (costs per ton)			% of wages in raising costs per ton
	Rs.	As.	P.	Rs.	As.	P.	
I	2	10	10	1	3	1	44
II	2	10	0	0	13	7	32
III	2	12	7	0	15	6	35
IV	2	10	5	0	13	6	32
V	2	4	11	0	15	7	42
VI	3	0	7	1	12	4	58

7. Ibid.

8. Singh Raghuraj Movement of Industrial Wages in India, p.266

It can be seen in the table that the percentage share of wages in the raising costs per ton varies from 32 to 58 per cent. According to Raghuraj Singh, in the Indian coal industry, it has always been the price obtainable for coal, which has determined the wages of miners rather than wages determining prices. A fall in the price of coal due to economic depression in the past led to declining wages.⁹ In such an industry as coal mining where labour costs are large component of the cost of production of finished products, the diminution in the cost of production may be achieved either (a) by reducing wage rates or (b) by increasing efficiency and per capita output in mines. In the absence of an efficient organisation in the industry, the former course was usually adopted. It easily secured adjustments of costs to falling prices.¹⁰

Imperfect organisation due to special difficulties in organising colliery labour and the low standard of living and expectations of Indian miners coming from the ranks of a vast number of pauperised tribals and peasants, were important reasons for the low level of wages of the miners. According to Raghuraj Singh 'The trade union movement is still in its infancy and whatever loose organisation miners have are such

9. Ibid, p.272.

10. Ibid

as are not able to protect their members against ruthless exploitation by the employees. Voluntary restriction on output with agreed on minimum prices has failed to materialize because the coal trade cannot combine even for obvious mutual benefit, while compulsory restriction of output with authoritatively fixed minimum prices has been rejected by the government".¹¹

IMPACT OF WORLD WAR

What did the war unfold for the workers? During the war period the coal industry was geared towards maximum production and the necessity of securing a contented workforce in view of the growing demand for coal led the government to take steps to ensure that the mining labour was contented.

The abnormally high percentage of migration by workers, in 1943, due to higher wages being paid in the centres of military and railway construction was reflected in the production figures of coal, which showed a drop in 1943¹². The AITUC report on coal crisis points out that while the cost of living soared higher and higher the compensation given to mine workers was only a miserable pittance.¹³ The following table gives an idea :

11. Ibid, p. 275

12. A.I.T.U.C. Papers, NMM File no. 319

13. Ibid

TABLE 3.4

	JHARIA	BOKARO	GIRIDIH
% rise in cost of living in Jan'44 over 1914 level	262%	262%	262%
% rise in cost of living in Jan'44 over 1939 level	233%	233%	233%
Average minimum wages (actual)	5/- for men	5/- for men	9/8/- for women
Amt. of D.A. given	50% over basic wage	3/8/-	7/8/-
% increase of earnings in D.A.	50%	50%	75%
Gap between cost of living & earnings in Jan'44	183%	183%	183%
Amount of wages obtained	25 to 30	25 to 30	25 to 30

Source : AITUC Report on Coal Crisis

Due to a fall in the production of coal the State came forward to pay an active role in the matter of fixation of wages for colliery labour.¹⁴ Two conferences, one in October

14. Guha, B.P. 'Wage Rates in Indian Coal Mining Industry'.

1943 and the other in December 1943 were held with the representatives of the three Associations of Employees for liberalisation of the existing allowances for labourers with a view to arresting the downward trend of production-The scheme revised once in 1944 and then in 1946 was as follows:¹⁵

BASIC STANDARD RATION TO BE GIVEN:

4 srs. for each worker

4 srs. for each adult dependent

2 srs. for each child between 2 and 12 yrs age

SUPPLEMENTARY SCALE OF RATIONED FOODGRAINS included 2 srs of rice for each attendance in the mine over the normal four days. Apart from that to cover a part of cost of grains, owners were asked to make the following cash payments to each worker for each day he attended work:

-/2/- if he has no dependants

-/3/- if he has one adult dependant and a child

-/5/- if he has one adult dependant and children.¹⁵

But as pointed out by the AITUC Reports for the years 1943-44 these allowances failed to ameliorate the conditions of the worker to any substantial extent for he could not buy more than 50% of the total amount of foodgrain offered to him.

15. Deshpande Report of 1946 Op. cit, p.55

The rates of cash wages had also gradually increased but not uniformly. There was no law or wage award to regulate the wages and the employers raised them more or less according to their own volition. The Tripartite labour Conference at Dhanbad in the second week of December 1943 raised the d.a., which was uptill now 27.5% of the basic wage to 50%. As seen by the Trade Union Congress, it was a clever ploy to avoid raising basic wage to a reasonable level on the part of the mine owners. According to the report, the Government bypassed the question of basic wage and d.a. in that:

- (a) No increase in basic wage given
(uptill 1944, the year in which the report came out)
- (b) The owners gave a 50% d.a. over basic wage although the cost of living index stood at 233% over September, 1939 level and the government acquiesced in it.
- (c) The institution of Coal Mine Labour Welfare Fund, it felt was nothing more than bypassing the question of raising the basic wage.¹⁶

In the subsequent paragraphs the wage rates prevalent in the State Railway collieries and privately owned collieries along with the amount of compensation conferred as a result of the concessions in the shape of d.a. and cash and grain concessions will be examined.

16. AITUC Papers, NMM File No. 319

STATE RAILWAY COLLIERIES The State Railway collieries were two each in Giridih, Serampore and Karharbari and 4 in Bokaro (Bermo Kajali Gerandi and Swang colliery) and a few in the Jharia belt. The total number of workers were 40,000. Their wages as revealed in a sample survey in 1943-44 was as follows:¹⁷

Table 3.5

Category	Wage
<u>Underground</u>	
Miner	-/6- to -/7/- per tub
Loader	-/6/- to -/7/- per tub
Stone cutter	-/6/- per day
Watering Cooley	-/6/- to 10/8/- per day
Trolley man	-/8/- per day
Cooley man	-/9/- to -/12/- per day
Sirdar	1/- to 2/- per day
<u>Surface</u>	
Wagon Loader	-/6- to -/8/- per day
Tandal Cooley	-/7- to -/8/6/ per day
Haulage khalasi	-/10/- per day
Siever	-/10/- per day
Firemen	-/8/- to -/10/- per day
<u>Colliery Workshop</u>	
Male Cooly	-/7/6 to -/8/- per day
Female Cooley	-/4/ to -/5/- per day
Helper Boy	-/4/- per day
Drill man	/14/ to 1/- per day
Fitter	-/14/- to 1/8/- per day
Turner	1/14/- to 2/ per day

The basic income of miners (they constitute the

17. A.I.U.T.C. Papers NMM Report on Coal Crisis 1943-44,

major proportion of coalfield labour and are the most crucial factor in the actual mining of coal) was on the average (if he worked 20 days in a month) Rs. 7/8/to 8/12/- per month. However, deductions were also made from this amount by miner, contractors, Sirdars. These deductions taken together constitute atleast 5% of the miners monthly earnings. So the actual basic wage that a miner gets is Rs.7/2/- to 8/6/- per month.

In March 1943 the Railway Board sanctioned for the workers of State Railway collieries a d.a. at the flat rate of Rs.11/- for 26 days of actual working per month. It came to -/6/9/ per day or Rs. 8/7/- per month.

The rationing scheme which covered the entire family gave concessions which are given on the next page.

The other two Tables give the amount of compensation conferred on the miners by the rationing scheme. The family of a miner is taken as consisting of a maximum number of five adults. The extent of compensation has been calculated at un-controlled rates because in coal belts no persons, other than those, covered by partial rationing could get any article at controlled rates.

RATIONING SCHEME FOR THE WORKERS

TABLE 3.6

ARTICLES	PER HEAD OF WORKERS	PER HEAD OF NON-WORKING ADULT DEPENDENT	RATE CHARGED
RICE	4 sr	@1/4 SRS	6 Per sr
GRAM	1 sr	1sr	14/- per sr
DAL	14 ch	14 ch	14/- Per sr
SUGAR	1 ch	1 ch	15/per sr
GUR	3 ch	3 ch	/4/ Per sr
MUSTARD	-		
OIL	8 ch per card	Nil	/9/ per sr
MATCH	6 per card per month	Nil	-/-/9 per match
SOAP	3 per card per month	Nil	-/2/- per soap
SALT	3 1/2 ch	3 1/2 ch	/2/-per sr.

(Note: Wheat, atta and Maida could be taken in place of rice @ -/4/ -/14/6/ and -/6/- per sr respectively. Taking of gram was compulsory.)

ARTICLES	TOTAL AMOUNTS OF GRAIN & OTHER ARTICLES GIVEN TO A FAMILY OF 5 ADULTS PER MONTH	TOTAL PRICE CHARGED BY THE MANAGEMENT	OPEN MARKET RATES
RICE	50 sr.	9/5/3	2 ½ per sr.
GRAM	20 sr.	5/-	-/4/- per sr.
DAL	17 sr.	4/12/6	-/7/- per sr.
SUGAR	1 sr 4 ch	-/6/3	-/4/- per sr.
GUR	3 sr. 12ch	-/5/-	-/4/1 per sr.
M.OIL	2 srs	1/2/1	1/8/- per sr.
MATCH	6	-/4/6/	1/1 per match
SOAP	3	-/6/-	-/4/- per soap
SALT	4 sr 6 ch	-/8/9	3/ per sr.

22/12/3

TOTAL PRICE FOR THE AMOUNT IN OPEN MARKET

RICE	22/6/3
GRAM	5/-
DAL	7/7/-
SUGAR	8/9/-
GUR	-/5/-
M.OIL	-/3/-
MATCH	-/6/-
SOAP	-/2/-
SALT	-/3/9

After going through the tables we can get an idea of the total amount of compensation obtained by a miner in the State Railway Collieries in relation to the prevailing cost of living. The total earnings obtained in Giridih is Rs. 8/7/- in wages plus Rs. 18/8/6 in the shape of d.a. and food and other articles or Rs. 26/15/6 per month. In Bokaro it is Rs. 3/8/- plus Rs. 18/8/6 or 22/0/6 per month. This represented an increase of 225% over September 1939 level of earning for Giridih, 175% in Bokaro. Nevertheless the AITUC Report held that the gap between the cost of living and value of compensation was 25% in Giridih and 75% in Bokaro.

MONEY WAGES AND FOOD RATIONS

Another aspect worth examining is the cash earning of miner per month and comparing with prices of grain and other articles offered to him with his total earnings. It comes to about Rs. 16/13/- in Giridih and 10/18/- in Bokaro while the total prices of offered are 22/12/3 per month. This means that with the existing level of cash earnings he could buy only 60% and 45% of the total articles offered to him in Giridih and Bokaro respectively.¹⁸

In the vast majority of collieries concentrated in Jharia belt the condition of workers' after the Dhandad conference was as follows:-

18. AITUC Papers NMM 'Report on Coal crisis' File No.319.

Though no increase in basic wage was given a flat rate of 50% was agreed on amounting to -/3/- 10 - /4/- per day or Rs. 3/12/- to Rs.5/- per month.

The scale of ration given was as follows :

Category of Worker	Basic Standard Ration per week		Rice Rates		Free ration for eachday of attendance
	Rice	Dal	Atta		
A. Manual worker without family	4 srs	1 sr		6sr per rupee	½ sr
B. Manual worker with dependent wife	8 sr	2srs	-do-	-do-	-do-
c. Manual worker with dependent wife and 2 children.	12 srs	3 sr	-do-	-do-	-do-

The continued rise in the cost of living in the post war period caused a series of strikes. The agitation took a serious form in the year 1945 and the Indian Mining Association in consultation with organisation of miners announced a scheme of d.a. to meet the high cost of living.¹⁹ The setting up of Conciliation Boards in the wake of continued demand for a higher wage in the coalfield was important and its recommendations covered the piece rated coal cutter, trolleymen, and wagon loaders and raised the

19. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM Report on Coal Crisis File No. 319
1943-44

d.a. to 150 percent in all cases where the monthly wages worked out to be less than Rs. 30-0-0 per month.²⁰ The new rates for a coal cutter, filling one tub of 36^{cf} per man shift was to be basic @/120 plus D.A. @ Rs. 1/2/-, the total being 1/14/-. Besides the Board recommended continuance of grain and cash concessions; the average value of which was estimated at 6 as. This gave the coal cutter Rs. 2/4/- per day as compared to less than 9/- per day in 1938 a rise of more than 400 percent. In addition to the tub rate wages were to be paid for lead, lift and pushing of the tubs. For the time rated workers a minimum wage of - /8/- was recommended leading to a rise of approximately 370 per cent. Two types of bonuses were introduced. The Jharia Regional Coal Council in a memorandum on the Conciliation Board Award, pointed out the shortcomings of the Award like its failure to standardise wage rates and d.a.. It recommended a certain percentage of increments on pre war rates and also that these increments be given only to 3 categories of workers.²¹ The Board also recommended the constitution of a compulsory provident fund scheme but made no recommendations regarding the rate of contribution.

Thus an analysis of the wage structure in the coal mining industry during the war period shows that the

20. Malhotra T.R. 'Wages in the Indian Coal Mining Industry'

Indian Journal of Economics. June 61 p. 1185.

21. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 323

prevailing rates of wages were insufficient to meet the needs of the workers and even the schemes introduced by the government were inadequately implemented. No relief was therefore felt by the worker from the increased cost of living during the war years.

CHAPTER IV

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND COLLIERY LABOUR

SECTION (A)

In this chapter we shall survey the background to the trade union movement, its origin among colliery workers in the 1920's, beginning of strike action in the 1930's and finally the developments during the World War II. On the later period we have used the unpublished papers of the AITUC and interviews with labour leaders. The outbreak of the War and the worsening economic conditions which it brought with it for the workers saw a spurt in the growth of union activities. However, not much advance could be made in awakening the consciousness among the coal miners in this period due to their backwardness in social economic spheres.¹ This impeded the growth in strength of movement from within, and greater reliance had hence to be placed on Trade Union Leadership. An active and vigorous role was, however, played by the Communist dominated Unions during 1942-45 at a time when almost all trade union leaders excepting those belonging to the Communist Party and Radical Party were clamped behind the prison bars.² The leadership of the All India Trade Union Congress was also in the hands of the Communists at this point of time. In

-
1. Interview with Shri Lalit Burman, Vice President of United Coal Workers Union March, 1991.
 2. Aaj dated 11th February, 1988.

examining the unionising activities in coal fields in the pre-war period, we are hampered by lack of sources. During the period of the war the vigour and development in colliery areas, of organisation of workers and their involvement in issues concerning various aspects like wages, arbitrary suspensions and dismissals of workers and organisation of strikes in the postwar period will be discussed.

BACKGROUND

The formation of the All India Trade Union Congress should be viewed in the background of the influence of the October Socialist Revolution, 'which could not but objectively influence the Indian scene where the people were locked in life and death battles against imperialism'³ The economic miseries imposed on the working class by the price rise, low wages, long hours of work also led to a general awakening among them. However the main impetus to the founding of the All India Trade Union Congress was to secure a nominating body for representation at the International Labour Conference at Geneva⁴.

The birth of A.I.T.U.C. marked the joining of Indian working class with the national bourgeoisie on a united platform for struggle. Thus the A.I.T.U.C. became a part of

3. Sen, Sukomal Working Class of India p. 130

4. Dutt R.P. India Today p. 408

the wider political movement. The emergence of Marxian world outlook in the mid 1920's with its emphasis on the political struggle of the workers' stood in sharp contrast to the reformist outlook of the leaders of the Trade Union Congress. Its leadership was in the hands of 'outsiders and helpers from other class elements who came forward to assist labour whose assistance was in fact indispensable. However they came without understanding the aims and needs of the labour movement.'⁵ The official endeavours of the Congress mainly concentrated on principles of class peace, moral and social improvement in the workers, and voiced demands for labour legislation and welfare provisions. The growth of communist influence from 1925 onwards, and their active involvement in the organisation of strikes in various industrial concerns highlighted the sharp class struggle of the period altered the existing condition 'and threw up the militant and left element as the dominant force in the leadership of the movement'⁶

The split of 1929 in the A.I.T.U.C. was a manifestation of the growing ideological rift between the constitutionalists and the leftists. The ostensible reason for the split of 1929, was the issue of boycott of the Royal Commission on Labour and representation at Geneva conference.⁷ However,

5. Ibid

6. Sen Sukomal op. cit. P. 285

7. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File no. I.

the roots of the split lay in the rapid radicalisation of the Indian working class as manifested in the strike actions between 1926-28. The statement of BShiva Rao, a constitutionalist leader of A.I.T.U.C., issued in 1928 clearly brings out this sentiment.

"The time has come when the Trade Union Movement in India should throw out of its organisation mischief makers. A warning is all the more necessary because there are certain individuals who go about preaching the gospel of strikes."⁸

In fact the split reflected the differing ideological moorings of the rightists and the leftists. The reformists within the Indian Labour Movement had been evincing their interest in constitutional work, co-operation with various commissions and committees than on genuinely building up a workers' movement. The revolutionary programme of the communists on the other hand "envisaged the need to incorporate the economic demands and political aspirations of the oppressed and exploiting masses in the struggle for freedom.... "By freedom or complete independence the Trade Union Congress understands severance from British empire, transfer of political power to producing masses and reconstruction of Indian Society in such a way as will open the path of progress and prosperity."⁹

8. Sen sukomal Op. cit., p. 129

9. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. I May 1935

Thus, the moderates who voiced demands for labour legislation and welfare provisions could not but view with alarm the strikes in the 1926-29 phase which aimed to bring about the destruction of the imperialist cum capitalist order.¹⁰ The moderates therefore walked out of the Trade Union Congress and set up the Indian Trade Union Federation at the time when there was crisis in the capitalist economy, and the working class had to face its full onslaught with little hope of redressal of their plight since organisational disunity prevailed.

The second split in A.I.T.U.C. took place in 1931 when there was a controversy regarding the independent political role of the working class. The Communist section which held this view formed the Red Trade Union Congress.¹¹ These splits weakened the working class movement in the country.

COLLIERY WORKERS' UNIONISATION

The organisation of workers in the colliery areas in the wake of greater intensification of political struggles and the enthusiastic response of the working class in other industrial centres remained very slow. Therefore the factors which impeded this development should be discussed in detail. The fact that unionisation among workers' in colliery areas

10. Karmik 'Strikes in India' p. 173

11. Dutt Op. cit. p. 424.

was extremely weak is clear from the A.I.T.U.C. Report of 1943-44, according to which in Jharia, which is the most important coal belt, trade union work extended only to 3% of the mines covering 17% of the workers.¹²

The coalfields of Bihar located in Jharia, Karanpura, Bokaro, Giridih and Ramgarh became important as they began providing employment to a large number of people in this area.¹³ Thus, the importance of mobilizing the colliery labour and arousing political consciousness among them is underscored by the fact, that if awakened they could greatly strengthen the ever increasing might of forces representing nationalist resistance against imperialist domination. There were, however, a number of difficulties in organising workers' in the coal mines. The British owners and managers of all big companies did not tolerate any kind of interference with their authority by any outside element. Any attempt at organising labour was ruthlessly suppressed with the help of police, if necessary, or by militia or musclemen maintained by the management itself as chaprasis, guards or contractors.¹⁴

Organising any movement among the almost wholly illiterate class of workers who were scattered over a wide mining area was a stupendous task for the leaders. The Jharia

12. A.I.T.U.C. Papers, NMM File No. 319

13. Report on an Enquiry into the conditions of Labour in the Coal Mines, 1946 p. 6

14. Aaj dated 11 Feb. 1988

Coalfields, having 424 collieries in 1944, is spread over an area of 175 sq. miles and Karanpura coal fields cover an area of 400 sq. miles.¹⁵

Attempts were nevertheless made for rousing the consciousness of the workers and developing national spirit among them. Swami Viswanand, a social worker, was actively involved in this task of exhorting the workers to revolt against the oppression and exploitation.¹⁶

The formation of the Indian Colliery Employees Association in 1920 marked the beginning of Trade Union Organisation among colliery labourers. The primary objective of the union was to protect the workers' from the onslaught of the employers and particularly to organise the defence of Sri Shivakali Bose, an employee of Tata's Sijua Colliery who was criminally prosecuted for beating the manager within the office premises for his anti Indian tirades. The union had Shri B. Sen, Bar-at-law as its President, Sri K.M. Sengupta, Advocate, as its General Secretary and Shri Shivakali Bose as Secretary.¹⁷

The Indian Miners' Association set up in 1926 was the second union to be formed in the colliery region. Mr. P.C. Bose was the President of this union.

The third union, a union for the workers of Messrs Tata Iron

15. Report of 1946 op. cit. p. 7

16. Aaj dated 11 Feb. 1988

17. Ibid.

& Steel Company Limited was the Tata Collieries Labour Association which came up in 1930 with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose as its President.¹⁸

The holding of the annual sessions of A.I.T.U.C. in 1921 and 1928 respectively gave rise to greater awareness and growth of political feelings among the miners. At the second Annual Conference of A.I.T.U.C. under the Presidentship of Sir John Baptista, the mine owners became so panicky that they approached the Viceroy with the request, not to allow the conference to be held within 200 miles of Bengal & Bihar coalfields.¹⁹ While not agreeing to ban the holding of the conference, the Viceroy sent sufficient security force for protection of law and order. Though threatened by the mine owners, the employees spurred on by the organisers of the labour movement attended the conference in thousands. Towards the end of the conference the owners declared a substantial wage increase as a result of which the miners' wages almost doubled.²⁰

STRIKE ACTION IN 1930'S

There were a number of big strikes in collieries in the 1930's, notable among them was the one which broke out in the Amlabad colliery in 1930.²¹ The Satyagraha movement launched

18. Guha B.P. Wage structure in the Indian coal industry
p. 96

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid p. 97

by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 did not leave the colliery workers unaffected²². The movement grew in strength in the coal mining region especially because ownership of many important collieries was vested in the British hands. The coal miners had already a grievance against their British employers because of poor pay and other benefits.

The formation of Congress Ministries in 1937 coincided with the establishment of new unions in many collieries according to Mukutdhari Singh, one of the early leaders of coal mining area. The driving force behind this was the appointment of the Labour Enquiry Committee by the Congress Ministry. The appointment of the committee raised hopes in the minds of the workers that something effective would be done for ameliorating their lot. It thus became possible to organise their unions and approach the mine owners for improving their wages and other conditions.²³

Strikes were organised in this period and they aimed at redressing grievances relating to wages. There were strikes in three railway collieries in 1938.²⁴ One organisation called Chota Nagpur Mazdoor Sangh raised the demand for D.A. It had the enthusiastic support of the miners and on the basis of that support it succeeded in securing an agreement with I.M.A.

22. Ibid.

23. Karnik Op. cit., p. 296

24. Ibid.

to raise the wages by 10 percent.²⁵ 4000 workers struck work on 27th December at Kustore colliery Dhanbad as a protest against the discharge of three pump khalasis, who approached the manager on behalf of the workers' for an increase in wages. An increase in wages was demanded in account of the rise in the cost of living as a precondition for calling off the strike. The strike was called off when the Management agreed to recongise the workers' union and pay wages at 1937 rates which were a little more then the prevailing rates. The discharged workers were reinstated.²⁶ A lot of strikes were organised in the Jharia Coalfields the workers of Jealgora and South Belliary collieries Kenduadih Power House Bhagh colliery Bhowrah Colliery Power House and Coke Plant and Amlabad colliery struck work on 8th April, 1940 for an increase in wages ranging from 14 to 37 1/2 per cent .²⁷ However the strike at these places collapsed and workers' resumed work unconditionally.²⁸ The outbreak of strikes during this period shows that workers in the colliery areas had started becoming conscious of their rights and seemed less averse to unionizing activities. In the next section the role of the communist dominated union who were very closely involved with labour unionizing actitivies in the period especially after the ban on Communist Party of India

25. Ibid.

26. Weekly review of Labour Situation No. 72/1940

27. Weekly review of Labour Situation No. 22/1940.

28. Ibid.

was lifted once its changed its stand vis-a-vis the war will be discussed.

SECTION (B)

THE WAR AND COLLIERY UNIONISM

The outbreak of the war in 1939 and the involvement of India in it made both the Communist party (uptill June 1941) and the Congress oppose the imperialist war. The invasion of Soviet Russia by Germany and the formation of United National Alliance for resisting fascist aggression however brought about a basic change in the character of the War. The 'Imperialist War' was transformed into 'Peoples' War' and the Communist Party began to raise the slogan of whole hearted co-operation with the 'Peoples' War'²⁹. The Party advocated the building of a United National Front in India including the unity of the Congress, the Muslim League and all other political sections on a common platform of resistance to fascism. It simultaneously pressed the demand for national government with the united support of all sections. Thus it called upon the people to strengthen national defence against fascist aggression.

The labour movement was in the throes of crisis. After the split of 1931 as seen earlier the Trade Union Movement had weakened considerably. Yet strike struggles continued in the

29. Sen Op, cit, p.376

period of the 30's and in 1938 the Trade Union Congress once again became the uniting body of Indian Trade Unionism, when the Indian Federation of Trade Union affiliated itself to A.I.T.U.C³⁰. In 1939 when India was unilaterally involved in World War II by the British, there was another wave of schisms in the labour movement. The Nationalists in A.I.T.U.C. opposed the War effort. M.N. Roy and his supporters stood by the British. They founded a rival labour movement called the Indian Federation of Labour. The Communists advocating unconditional support to the War called on the working class to fight for a charter of National Demands to make national defence effective.³¹ Keeping in mind the needs of national defence strikes were not to be resorted to.

The influence of Communist Party in the Trade Union movement grew. This trend was present in the coal mining areas too and of the Unions functioning in the mining areas of Bihar in the period 1942-45 more than 15 Unions affiliated to A.I.T.U.C. operated under leftist influence.³² Some of these Unions were.

1. Coal Workers' Union, Giridih (East Indian Railways)
2. Jharia Coal Workers' Union Manbhum

30. Dutt Op, cit, p.426

31. Dutt Ibid p.433

32. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 325,

3. Tata Colliery Labour Association Manbhum
4. Karkatta Collieries Labour Union Ranchi
5. Sendra Colliery Workers' Union Bansjora
6. Coalfield Employees Union Jharia.³³

The activities of these unions were wide ranging but their demands, (like that of the Jharia Coalfield Mazdoor Sangh) echoed the policy of the party for instance increasing national resistance, extending production, a 25% raise in wages, 50% d.a. for workers, adequate bonus provision of cheap grain shops etc.³⁴ The underlying current throughout the policy (of the Communists) was to drive in the understanding that the workers were the most essential component in the production process.

The Unions were very vocal in pressing the demand for enhancement in miners' wages. The Coal Workers' Union Jharia in its charter of demands pointed out that two considerations in fixing miners' wages should be kept in view. One was to satisfy the basic needs of the workers as human beings determined on social considerations. The other was to satisfy the vital needs of the Coal industry with a view to stabilising and increasing the output of coal.³⁵Rs. 36/- per month it felt

33. Ibid

34. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 323 1943.

35. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 319 1943

would be adequate as basic wage for an ordinary unskilled worker in order to obtain the minimum human standard of living and industrial efficiency. Among other demands related to wages, the Union sought payment by time for the miners so that problems associated with payment by piece could be overcome, though it conceded that payment by piece may be necessary in order to induce the miners to cut an adequate amount of coal.³⁶ The Union wanted at least three quarters of the miners' wage and d.a. to be paid by time, which would save them from illegal exactions 'which are taken by the rapacious mining sirdars.'³⁷ Thus the nature of issues taken up by the Unions indicate that basic thrust of their the activities was geared towards maximising the scale of benefits which the workers got so that they could contribute whole heartedly to the War effort.

These Unions were also active in pointing out various malpractices and shortcomings in the existing benefits granted by the government especially those formulated in the War years to induce colliery labour to stay on, by making conditions of living more tolerable for them. The Executive Committee of the of the Jharia Colliery Mazdoor Sangh for instance highlighted the conditions of the workers in its meeting in 1943, which among other things, stressed that the

36. Ibid

37. Ibid

existing benefits relating to supply of food grains at concessional rates was insufficient.³⁸ The Committee pointed out that regarding ration 3½ seers to 5 seers per rupee per week per male was being supplied to the workers' and even workers' with wife and children were given rice worth Rs. 1/8/- per week which was insufficient even for one person. Such a situation prevailed at a time when the average income of unskilled labour (who are the main prop of the labouring section) was Rs. 2/4/- per week.

Therefore the Committee observed that the workers were forced to buy a portion of their foodstuffs in market at the black market rate. In a letter by the Tata Colliery Labour Association to the Assistant Labour Welfare Officer inadequate supply of foodstuffs is shown to be the most vital problem in the colliery areas³⁹ Since the maximum amount of rice given on cutting 8 tubs was 7½ seers and since 1 seer was required every day, the provision fell short for the workers' themselves what to speak of their dependents. The worker thus had to starve himself for 2-3 days and he either absented from work or suffered loss in wages since he could not cut any coal. The Association stressed that coupon systems should be introduced whereby provision for workers' dependents would be

38. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 319 1943.

39. ~~Colliery~~ Papers NMM File No. 319 1943- *Ibid*

provided for. The Association also suggested that ration should be supplied on the basis of attendance not tub.

The Bihar Provincial Trade Union Congress in 1944 also drew attention to the malpractices in the implementation of schemes conceived and executed to increase the efficiency of labour.⁴⁰ It related the downward trend shown in the production of coal to the condition of labourers. That gross injustice was being practised could be seen from the fact that on working for five days the worker was entitled to full ration but if he worked for one day less he got ration for 4 days only.

Thus the Unions in the coalfields closely identified themselves with the workers' grievances and their membership steadily increased. The membership of Tata Collieries Labour Association for instance increased from 856 in 1942 to 1600 in 1944.⁴¹ The membership of other important Unions' stood as follows in 1947.⁴²

40. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 54 1944

41. Annual Report of the 'CIM' 1942, 44 pp.131,133.

42. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 358

TABLE - 4.1

NAME AND SIZE OF UNIONS IN COLLIERY AREAS

Name of the Union	No. of members
Coal Workers' Union Giridih	9123
Jharia Coal Workers' Union (Chatta Hand Bazar Kusunda) Dist. Manbhum Bihar.	614
Tata Collieries Labour Association	1750
Karkatta Collieries Labour Union	550
Basdeopore Colliery Workers' Union	450
Sendra Colliery Workers' Union	726
Standard Colliery Workers' Union	851
Loyabad Workers Union	1912
Eastern Coal Company Mazdoor Union	1041
Bhowrah Coke Plant Workers' Union	210

Cases of dismissals and suspension of workers were also taken up by the Unions Coal Workers' Union Giridih took up a number of such cases as is evident from the letter of its General Secretary to N.M. Joshi Secretary General of the A.I.T.U.C..⁴³ Some samples of cases of suspension and dismissals in the State railway collieries in Giridih from March 1944 to September 1944 are given below.

43. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 320

On 24.5 1944 seventeen loading kamins were summarily turned out of their work in Serampore Colliery by Bharat Thikadar. The management allowed the matter to drift.

On 27.3.1944 Hardayal Barhi was suspended by the colliery manager Karharbari without any charge sheet. He subsequently got back to work on Union representation. However no payment was made to him for the days he remained illegally suspended.

Due to Unions intervention arbitrary dismissals diminished somewhat but as observed in a note appended to the letter referred to above, illegal dismissals were uniformly resorted to nearly all over the colliery mainly by the raising contractor but also by the management. The suggestion given by the General Secretary was that a penal clause should be added to the Essential Service Ordinance to make it more effective and additional source of redress should be allowed in the court of law.⁴⁴ The Tata Colliery Labour Association also highlighted the fact that charge sheet were issued before punishment was given irrespective of the nature of explanation submitted by the workers'.⁴⁵ It made the suggestion that the authorities should consult the opinion of labour representatives before inflicting any punishment on workers' merely on the basis of charge sheet, and no action should be taken pending the reply from the worker.

44. Ibid

45. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 319 1943

The Unions were also involved in securing the rights of the workers' and ensuring that statutory provisions were not flouted but served in the interests of the labouring classes which they were meant to do. Certain irregularities as regards payment of Maternity Benefit existed.⁴⁶ In Giridih Colliery women worked till eighth month to qualify for benefits. Otherwise the option was left to Deputy Overmen in the pits which led to malpractices.

Aggrieved women miners in the Giridih Railway Colliery of Karharbari claiming Maternity Benefit approached Coal Workers, Union office.⁴⁷ These workers' had approached the manager but he refused the forms for being filled up. The letter from the Union office shows that at least two of these women were suspended by the management through the miners' sirdars because of their advanced state of pregnancy. The Union office submitted a list of ten women to the Labour Department for the disposal of their claims. Chapal Bhattacharya, Secretary of the Union felt that it was the management's fault that the women miners' were deprived of their rights under the Maternity Benefit Act since the management at most times was ignorant of its provisions. Hence the letter to the Labour Welfare Adviser ends with the request that "all women workers of the colliery who have borne

46. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 320 1944

47. ~~MINERS' UNION~~ Papers NMM File No. 320 1944 168.

children are paid retrospectively from the date of the operation of the Act".⁴⁸

We may thus conclude that the activities of the Unions from the end of the 1930's were oriented towards securing a fair deal for the workers by interceding on their behalf and trying to alleviate their burdens. The Union members were alert to the violation of the provisions of the Mines' Act. In a letter written to General Secretary A.I.T.U.C. the Secretary of the Coal Workers' Union Giridih has drawn attention to violation of norms relating to stipulated hours of work in case of trolley men of Juktibad who were made to work for more than nine hours.⁴⁹ In Serampore Colliery longer hours than nine were enforced in violation of the long established practice of limiting one hour for reaching the place of work from pit head and going back.

POST-WAR STRIKE WAVE

The Trade Unions reacted strongly to the repression unleashed by the Government in the colliery areas for rendering help to the employing class. During the strike wave from September to December 1946 strikes took place in about two dozen collieries involving about 20,000 workers'.⁵⁰

48. Ibid

49. A.I.T.U.C. Papers NMM File No. 320 1944

50 A.I.U.T.C Papers, NMM File No. 323

This was a part of a general phenomenon in the Indian Labour Movement—freed from restrictions of the Defence of India act on labour agitation and fuelled by discontent due to inflation, there was an outbreak of strikes. A lot of collieries were involved in these strikes like The East India Coal Company Jealgora, Diamond Tisra, Khas Joyrampur, Dhansar, East Bassuria, Nayadee Alkusah, Bansjora, Dhar-iajoba etc. These strikes were confined to smaller collieries though some medium and big sized collieries viz East India Jealgora and Godur were also affected. During the strikes the miners displayed a militant mood, held meetings and demonstrated by defying Section 144 and leading workers faced arrest on charges of leading illegal strikes.

These strikes were organised around demands like higher wages on account of high cost of living, during the post war period quality of food stuffs given at concessional rates to workers etc. The strike in the State Railway Collieries Giridh was organised by the Coal Workers Union and the statement of the organising secretary of the Union includes the demands which the workers wanted to be met.⁵¹ These included (i) rate of Rs 1/- per tub (1/2 ton) for coal miners (ii) grades of Rs. 34/- to Rs. 50/-, Rs. 40/- to Rs. 60/- and Rs. 50/- Rs. 100/- per month for unskilled, semiskilled and skilled workers respectively (iii) Rs. 16/- per month as d.a (iv) Elimination

51 A.I.U.T.C. Papers, NMM File no. 10 1945-46

of contract system (v) Recognition of the Coal Workers Union by the Railway Board.

The above points make it very clear that the Unions under leftist influence were very vigorously pursuing those activities which were aimed at furthering the interest of the miners. The workers of Radical Democratic Party of Shri M. N. Roy tried to keep up the trade Union movement but failed to do much. Due to official patronage given to the Indian Federation of Labour its activities in the field of labour mobilization and organisation hardly merit attention. After 1945 under the leadership of Prof. Abdul Bari a number of unions were formed and strikes were organised⁵².

He launched a vigorous campaign for improving the miserable conditions of the colliery workers and called upon them to rise in revolt. As emphasised by Shri S.N. Dasgupta (General Secretary of Indian National Mine Workers Federation) conditions after the war were deplorable, more so because after the war, the concessions given during the war time were withdrawn.⁵³ Prof. Bari managed to enthuse the workers but the movement in the colliery areas received a setback when he was killed in 1947.

According to Mr. Lalit Burman of the A.I.T.U.C., the Trade Unions under the Red Flag were suppressed and assault was unleashed on the leadership in 1947. The district administra-

52. Guha Op. cit., p.98

53. Aaj dated Feb. 11, '88

tion was in the grip of big monopolists. Workers went on strike in the Loyabad Collieries and Loyabad Coke Plant due to repressive action taken against the labour leaders. They went to stop the Loyabad Power House (main power house supplying power to a large section of collieries). The authorities resorted to firing on the workers, in which a large number were killed and the leadership of the strike was arrested.⁵⁴ It was only with the coming of independence that the attitude of the government softened.

After independence Trade Union Leaders like Mr. Kanhai Pal and Mr. S.R. Sen started taking active part in organising labour in the colliery areas.

Labour & Leadership : One feature that requires some attention is the reliance of the colliery labour on Union Leadership. It has been stated elsewhere that due to their economic social and cultural backwardness, the growth of consciousness among the workers was impeded. This made them entirely dependent on the leadership which at times was in the hands of unscrupulous elements.⁵⁵ This was also due to the 'Dila Denge' concept put in the mind of the workers as was evident in the talk with Mr. Burman. This notion is prevalent in the workers mind that he just has to pay the subscription, leaving the rest on the leadership. It has been a serious cause

54. Interview with Sri Lalit Burman Vice President United Coal Workers' Union. March, 1991.

55. Ibid

of lack of growth of consciousness and has been deliberately inculcated to keep the miners' away from active unionism.

Conclusion : After independence the most crucial feature of the coal industry has been the emergence of the 'Mafia', affecting directly the activities and proper functioning of the trade unions. The Mafia groups in the era of 1970's tried to sabotage the union activities in various ways viz. use of muscle power, armed intervention and establish their hegemony in the Trade Unions. The Trade Union Movement however has been peaceful in the last few years.

Another development in the sphere of Unionism has been the mushrooming of various craft unions within the industry which is inhibiting the growth of strong unions capable of handling the genuine demands and grievances of the labouring classes.

CONCLUSION

We have in course of the study of the coal mining industry examined the growth of the industry and its importance in the economy of Bihar, in terms of providing both employment to large numbers, and even contributing a large percentage to the total output produced annually by the industry (Chapter-I Section 'A').

The growth of the industry was greatly facilitated by the extension of railways. The major coalfields of Jharia, Karanpur and Raniganj by the 1920's began producing coal in large quantities. This industry was dependent on cheap labour drawn from surrounding villages and districts of the Province in which the coal mines are situated (Chapter I Section 'B'). The heterogeneity of the labour force was a distinctive feature of the workforce employed in this sector. In the course of the Chapters the various legislative, welfare and other ameliorative measures to make the workplace environment and life of workers secure and safe have been examined.

Chapter II on Working Conditions and the one on Wages (Chapter III) show that during the War years, the plight of the workers worsened and in order to meet the increased demand for coal, while exploitation of cheap labour continued unabated, hardly any steps were taken,

for instance, to bring the wages at par with the rise in the cost of living. The schemes for providing rationed foodgrains and cash bonus to workers were not vigorously implemented and there was a large gap between what was laid down in statutes and what the workers' ultimately got.

We have also shown in Chapter IV that the workers' organisation in colliery areas in pre-war years were very few in number, but grew during the war years as a result of the enthusiasm and interest evinced by the communists in organising labour in the interest of strengthening national defence. Issues which very closely touched the workers well being were taken up by the various unions and the causes espoused by these unions included those relating to wages, voicing resentment against the high handed attitude of the management in dismissing workers and the contravention of legal provisions designed to secure an efficient and productive labour force.

The study has thus highlighted the additional burdens imposed on the colliery labour during the war years and the attempts made for their betterment though these did not in any substantial degree improve the workers' conditions.

Bibliography

Section - I

Government Reports :

1. / Report of the Coalfields Committee 1920.
2. / Report of the Indian Coal Mining Committee 1937.
3. / Report of the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee Vol., I 1940. Vol., II (Parts A and B) 1941, Patna.
4. / Report of Labour Investigation Committee, 1946, Delhi.
5. / Report on an enquiry into the conditions of labour in the Coal mining industry of India 1946, Delhi.
6. / Report of the Indian Coalfields Committee, 1946, Delhi.
7. / Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines in India 1938-1947
8. / Indian Coal Statistics

Section - II

Private Papers :

All India Trade Union Congress Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum Delhi.

Section - III

- Ahmad Mukhtar Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India (Bombay, Longmans, Green, 1935)
- Chakravarthy, Rethinking Working Class History Bengal, 1890-1940 (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989)
- Dipesh
- Chakraborty, "Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in a Dual Economy, British India (1880- 1920)" Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol., IV No. 3 (1978)
- Lalita
- Chandra, Bipan, Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India, (New Delhi, P.P.H. 1986)
- Dutt. R.P. India Today (Calcutta, Manisha 1986)
- I.L.O. Industrial Labour in India (Geneva I.L.O. 1938)
- Karnik, V.B. Strikes In India (Bombay, Manaktalas 1967)
- Indian Trade Unions A Survey (Bombay, Popular Prakashan 1978)
- Kuczyaski Jurgen, The Rise of the Working Class, (London World University Library, 1967)

- Lakshman, P.P. Congress and Labour Movement in India (Allahabad, All India Congress Committee 1947)
- Loknathan P.S. "Industrial Disputes and Legislation" Indian Journal of Economics Vol., 20 No. 4 (1940)
- Morris, Morris David The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India - A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947 (Bombay O U P 1965)
- Palekar, Sreekant A. "Real Wages in India 1939-50 " Economic and Political Weekly, January 1957
"Real Wages and Profits in India 1939-50 " Indian Economic Review, Vol 3 No. 4 (1957)
- Sastri N.S.R. A Statistical Study of India Industrial Developments
- Sen Sukomal, Working Class of India : History of Emergence and Movement, 1830-1970 (Calcutta K.P.)
- Singh, Raghuraj Movement of Industrial Wages in India (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1955)
- Srivastava V.L. Socio Economic Survey of Workers in Coal Mines of India (Calcutta 1940)

Thompson E.P.

Making of the English working class

(London, Penguin 1971)

Trivedi H.M.

Labour and Factory Legislation in

India, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan)

1256

