CHAPTER VI

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The satisfactory output of work of labour force is mainly dependent upon their level of living rather than on the wage level. In India, many industries have developed in urban area also; so the urban people have their own profession and jobs in the very urban area and they have no fascination to join the industrial fields which are situated outside the urban area. So in mining area, a vast majority of the labour force has been derived from the village side. When the villagers come to the city they have to face many hazardous and complicated situation and the impact of these situations on the labour force express itself through emotional imbalance. They have to face many contradictory environment and customs. So a Social imbalance also evolved from this contradictory situation.
Sometimes, they came without their family and this absence of family life, consequently, has a resultant effect on their social and emotional balance.

The problem of developed countries and developing countries are different in many respects. In developed country, there are improved public health services and medical services. Positive health of each individual and a fairly good nutrition for the whole population is secured.

In coal industry, the women-worker have made a remarkable contribution to the economic growth and development of the country; their contribution to the coal industry is no less appreciable. In Indian coalmining operation, the participation of women is as old as mining itself.

Most of the women workers in coalmines belong to the scheduled castes, to the scheduled tribes, to the Backward communities and the rest who worked as creche-nurses, typists etc. belong to the higher castes.
With regard to the educational level, only 6.17% of the workers were literate/educated and they belonged to the categories of creche nurses, clerks, telephone operators; only 46% of workers send their children to the school while the others do not do so.

The reasons of migration of the women worker to the coalmining industry are mainly economic.

Coal-life histories evince that a woman worker's day generally commences at 4 or 5 a.m. usually, by 6 a.m. she finishes her household duties and then goes to the workplace. On her return from the workplace she has, again, to attend to domestic duties and is completely fatigued.

There has often been criticism regarding lack of morality among women workers in the collieries. But this criticism is to be viewed against the peculiar usages and customs prevailing in the communities from which the women workers come. The habit of pan (betel) chewing, smoking and "hukkas" (hubble-bubble) is very common amongst them; some women workers drink as well. The cheap intoxicating liquors of various kinds i.e. Hariya, Marlu, made of fermentation of cooked but stale rice, and Indian liquor, which men and women enjoy together with equal gusto, guide their lives.
Women workers' contribution to the wealth of the nation is by no means small. In coalfield area women workers are forced to be away from home almost the whole day. She has to carry her own food to the workplace. Those who have young babies, have to carry them along. Not all the managements provide creche. Sometimes, she has to leave the child with her relatives. She often leaves the child with its elder siblings, male/female, provided they are not school-going. For this, it is also not possible for her to give any attention to the school-going child. It will not be an exaggeration to say the in the coal-fields of India, womanhood is being dishonoured, widowhood is being exploited and girlhood is being totally smothered. The miserable plight of women workers can be, chiefly if not solely, attributed to their inadequate income though the equal wages principle has been accepted in all industries. In coalfield areas women workers are employed generally on a piece-rate basis.

If we want to understand the living condition we have to discuss some of their social habits and customs.
(1) **Hobbies** - Chewing tobacco, enjoying Hukka, fishing, playing cards, seeing pictures are the most important hobbies of the coalminers. After doing a strenuous job, they sit together and gossip about their day to day problems. They have no useful habit at all. Coal Mine Welfare Organisation arranged various recreational facilities to change the life of the coal-miners, but the entire colliery workers have not yet been under the purview of these facilities. Among the women-folk, the older age group spend their leisure hours on domestic work, even free film shows in the collieries cannot attract them. The women worker in the younger age group have a definite fascination for film shows and other recreational activities. Women should not be deprived of recreation facilities. The training in domestic economy, various crafts should be important to them so as to retain their attraction for their work.

(2) **Leisure and Social Participation** - Leisure means freedom provided by the cessation of activities, that means, the time free from work or duties. Recreation is a very essential factor in an industrial Society, Family recreation and a community recreation bring an individual
face to face with others and then a person becomes more plastic and adaptive in temperament. As a member of society, Workers have to perform certain duties to meet the social demands. They have certain obligation, too. He has to take part in his community activities in which he lives. Development of character, latent capacities and good health are all connected with recreation. According to Levy, recreation is a basic element in the social structure. "One of the most obvious eufunctional aspects of recreational activities", says he "is the release from the tensions and strains of every day life that they afford". According to the sociologist Dumazedier, there are two divisions of leisure activities (1) educational-leisure (2) recreational leisure. The co-ordination between the employment of leisure-time and the development of adult education constitutes the main means of recreating the sense of life and reality.*

The condition of colliery workers is very miserable in this respect. They cannot get anytime to remain absent from their duties to perform or to attend any social function in the normal working days and I think it is a cause for the high rate of absenteeism in the colliery belt.

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* 1. Datta Gupta Bera - Quoted in "Contemporary social problems in India". Calcutta- 1964.

Marriage: Early marriage is a very common feature in the mining area. It is also the index of social backwardness of the workers. The problem of malnutrition from poverty and ignorance in large majority of women is commonly prevalent in coal mine area. And it also influences their height, weight, the weight of infants, infections, diseases which are very common amongst them. Early marriage in the midst of poverty results under nourishment that lead to the deterioration in the development of the worker's physique, especially of the women. There is always a tendency of re-marriage in the lower-caste group, specially, among the male members. There has been also instances of marriage in the presence of the first wife.

Festivals and Prejudices: There are many important and popular festivals which are observed and enjoyed by the coalmine workers, such as Dashera, Diwali, Chhath, Ramnavami, Holi and " Makar Sankranti ". On these occasions, generally, " Melas " (fairs) are always organised and the workers enjoy that " Mela " very much. The festivals of the Mohamedan are also observed by the Hindu coal-mine workers. Different religions are represented among these workers. They seem to have immense faith in God " deities " and " spirits " . They worship some particular trees and stones also.
Festival is so important to them that workers do not hesitate to incur debts for this purpose.

Unhealthy Habits: Drinking, gambling etc. are widespread habits among coal miners irrespective of men and women and it is known that a large part of their earnings are spent on this method of recreation. The women workers admit that, occasionally, they indulge in this habit to get relief from the monotony of life or after strenuous day's work. They always do not get balanced diet at all, so they cannot do hard work what the mining industry needs. Sometimes, they compare this stimulant with milk. They give the importance of the quick reactions of the body, they do not know the actual bad effect of this liquor. They take this liquor in empty stomach. The quality of their liquor, like Handia (rice-beer) Mahua - beer is very cheap. They also take "spirit" drink, poch even drink. The colliery labourers coming from Bujan, from Santal Parganas, and from Mambhum, generally, prefer these types of drinks. The Bilashpur; and the labourers coming from Orissa are not as addicted to alcohol as the other workers.

I think the labourers of the mine industry, specially, get addicted to Alcohol just to escape from an unbearable life situation. Another undesirable habit is gambling.
This pattern of recreation is widespread among them. They always play this on a stake. These social habits and customs have a consequent effect which have given birth to the problem of absenteeism. It can be considered both as a social as well as an economic problem.

**Absenteeism**: Absenteeism has a very bad effect on coal production. It reduces the workers income and also give a rude shock to management. According to the managerial view, absenteeism creates organisational problem and results in production losses to the mines.

Reasons of non-attendance by the labour force are many - family problems, social and religious ceremonies, sickness, poor living conditions, housing problem, inadequate welfare facilities, fatigue, seasonal cultivations, festivals, jatras, indebtedness, alcoholism etc. which are related, directly or indirectly, with individual behaviour, attitudes of employees, employers and environmental factors.

Infectious diseases like small pox, cholera and malaria always break-out in severe form in most of the coalfields due to bad housing and bad sanitary condition, which results in the poor standard of living.
Most of the workers mainly of aboriginal or semi-aboriginal tribes are agriculturists. So generally, it can be seen that absenteeism increases in March when the winter crops are ready and again in July and August during the sowing season and in November and December during the harvest time.

There are two types of absenteeism.

1. Involuntary because of sickness, accidents, leave,
2. Voluntary absenteeism because of other causes. The characteristics mostly associated with absenteeism are
   a. Personal factors (age structure, leave/sick, injury benefits, length of journey to work, marital status and family responsibility)
   b. Organisational factors (shift - work, degree of work pressure, ventilation, temperature, humidity, dust, lighting, water, quality of supervision).

Another factor which might help to explain any upward trend in absenteeism is the changing age structure of the labour force. It is a general belief that older workers absent themselves less frequently but their spells of absence last longer. This is probably because genuine sickness is more frequent among older people.
The payment of leave sickness and industrial injury benefits and L.T.C. once in four-years under the National Coal Wage Agreements I and II, and the conditions attached to them have encouraged coalminers to feign illness and malinger over their disabilities (tendency of workers to avail leave and sick leave before they lapse), thus raising involuntary absence rates. Workers are mainly interested in an entitlement of which they had previously not been able to benefit themselves.

The goal of the absence-control programme is not an unblemished attendance record, but the elimination of inefficiencies created by absenteeism.

In spite of improvement in working conditions, income levels, family health, educational and recreational facilities, water supply, sanitation, housing provisions and accumulation of leave, a certain amount of absence will be inevitable and is even desirable. It is hardly necessary to justify the absence of a sickman on economic ground, but if this is required a reasonable case could be made.
An unwell worker, or one returning to work before having fully recovered from illness, will probably work inefficiently and may introduce the risk of infection into his work-group. It is also relevant to study the characteristics of absence like (1) whether the breaks of sickness, absence tend to coincide with holiday periods and whether sickness is used as a mean of extending holidays (2) whether there is a tendency among piece rated workers to have an odd day off, because they can make up their wages on other days.

The distance an employee must travel to get to work or, more relevantly, the time required for the journey, can effect absence rates. First, an increase in the length of the journey to work implies a greater reliance upon some form of transport, public or private, failures in which will result in his inability to attend. Secondly, an employee who just misses his means of reaching his place of work, may be unable to obtain an alternative means of transport and so what would have been a late arrival is converted into an absence. The development of residential areas, the journey to work cannot be wholly avoided and this imposes a strain upon the labour force which is reflected on the level of non-attendance.
Family problems and responsibilities may also have a bearing on absence.

About two-thirds of manual workers involved in coal-mining work in the unnatural environment of underground operations. These factors impose severe restrictions which are not found in other industries. Meal-breaks are short and meals must be taken at the place of work in incongenial surroundings. Although lighting standards have been improved, for most mine workers the major source of light is the lamp. The physical effort required for the miners, particularly face-workers, is extremely arduous and has to be carried out often in an unpleasant environment.

Some working places are hot and dusty while others are cool and wet. It is seldom pleasant and almost always produces physical discomfort and mental pressures.

The physical heaviness of work in the case of coal face-workers can have a relationship with the amount and incidence of absence while the other dimensions of physical conditions, temperature, ventilation, dust, fumes and water may not have an effect upon absence behaviour. They may otherwise adversely affect efficiency or productivity.
In the U.K. unfavourable working conditions arising out of heat, dust, water surface etc. are compensated by special allowances. * 3

Coal-mining operates in a three shift system. Coal cutters, loaders, haulagemen, timber supporters, pumpmen etc. work on a regular rotating shift system while some categories of labour work permanently on day-shift. Sastical record is not available on the difference in absence behaviour between day-shift, second-shift and night shift workers. " In countries like the U.S.A., the U.K., and also in industries like cement in India, shift premia/allowance is given to compensate for working in unsocial hours in the nights ". * 4 A major factor responsible for the observed differences in absence behaviour was the quality and skill level of supervision, and that successful supervisors will be generous, employee-centred, democratic and non-punitive in approach; democratic supervision is associated with low absence.

There is a popular belief that substantial pay increases encourage absence because enough can be earned in four or five days to enable the fifth or sixth to be taken as a day of leisure.

* 4. Ibid.
At present the average number of days worked in a year by coal face workers may be about 220. It has to be reorganised that, on occasions, workers may have to be away from work for a number of legitimate reasons other than involuntary, and no management would wish a situation in which the workers could not afford to stay away if the need was pressing.

The cost of absences is usually estimated by the number of man-days lost. The extent of loss in production through absenteeism will not necessarily be in proportion to the number of men involved.

A great deal will depend upon the nature of work, and upon the particular positions held by the persons absent. The non-attendance of the workers (coal-face workers) will be most damaging.

It only seems likely that management could do much through providing more positive motivation by improving working conditions, and stimulating workers' interest in their work by organising sufficient working places and enough coal tubs to counter-act the forces giving rise to voluntary absenteeism.
In a country like the U.K., coal mines are fully mechanised and with a five day working week (Saturday and Sunday being rest days). 181 ordinary shifts are worked per man in a year and absenteeism remained at 17 percent between 1971-72 and 1978-79 in spite of average weekly earnings rising from £ 33 to £ 108. Another interesting feature is that when the average weekly earnings further rose to £ 127 in 1979-80, absenteeism dropped to 14.8 percent. *5

The present level of voluntary absenteeism in the Indian Coal Industry appears to have become stabilised and unavoidable and the industry has to live with the problem. 

Indebtedness: Labour force is a detector of nation’s development and destiny. So we can say that the problem of indebtedness has a great impact on the growth and progress of a country. It is an index of poverty. In our country the per capita income is very low. The wages are also not enough for the labourer to make both ends meet. So indebtedness is a natural outcome of our socio-economic life.

The account book which is generally maintained by the money lenders are full of fraud and deception. They, generally, never issue any receipt. They never give any clear picture of the debt and the outstanding balances of the loanees. They also do some unlawful practices, such as, they visit working places in broad daylight. They sometimes take the signature of the debtor in their time promissory notes. The debtors are generally illiterate people, come from rural environment, so they can easily be cheated and deprived. Money lender always threat the coal miner to pay any amount of interest. The rates of interest is exhorbitant and blood-sucking. Very often money lenders take recourse of physical violence to get the interest regularly. It result into a total destruction of socio-economic condition of coal miners. Money-lenders like vultures, as it were, are always circling over the head of the miners.

The effect of indebtedness on miners is extremely deleterious. For indebtedness miners always loses a part of his income, he always suffers from tension, he is always compelled to live in a lower standard of living for the curtailment of his income, miners always suffer from fear for the threats of physical violence.
For these causes he is always losing his ability, his efficiency to work. Ancestral debt also hang upon them like a heavy load. The high incidences of indebtedness is responsible for the existing low standard of living of the worker. This indebtedness also gives birth a serious problem -
- that is the problem of absenteeism.
- the irregular attendance due to frustration.

Though the nationalisation brought about a seachange in coal miners working conditions, they have not yet been freed from the shackles of drinking, gambling and other vices. Almost every day after work the miner is seen making a bee-line to the nearest shop selling the local brew. Many a time, when he is left with little money, he usually visits the illicit distiller.

Besides these evils, the hold of the Mafias over coal-mine labourers remains stronger than ever. Mafia gang puts all possible hurdles in the way of welfare schemes so that labourers remain bonded to the Mafia for loans.
Borrowing seems to be the greatest bane of the miner since he squanders away his hard-earned money in gambling. He has to rush to the traditional money lenders for his daily needs. Once he gets into the clutches of these money lenders which are a part of the Mafia gang, it is well nigh impossible for him to get free. For non-payment of dues, they also threaten to abduct his wife or children. And the Mafia gang are known to keep their words so far as these warnings are concerned.

Strikingly, women workers are to be less susceptible to the clutches of money lenders. According to women workers it is better to carry on with a single meal a day, than to patronize money lenders as they fully exploit the workers and bring about their ruination. They admitted that they could save money out of their earnings and invest the same in land or buildings in their native villages or in other material assets. A major part of the earning is spent by these workers on food and clothing.
The Coal Mines Welfare Organisation initiated a drive to spread the co-operative movement in coalfields and thus to improve the social and economic conditions of the coal-miners and free them from the clutches of the loan sharks of our society.

As the recommendations of the Mehta Committee on co-operative credit had been approved by the Union Government, the co-operative movement would be further stimulated in coalfield area. We can say that the problem of indebtedness of coal-miners having far reaching socio-economic consequence, can only be solved, to a considerable extent, by vigorous co-operative movement in various Coalfields.

Coal India Authority also started a number of co-operatives and it has started a number of adult education centres (Primary Schools) in colliery area.
The medical service has also been improved but not to the desired level. According to a doctor, the miners suffer from "breathing trouble". The Doctor confided that the medical care for the workers was poor because not many doctors could stick to their jobs in the face of threats held out by the miners demanding bogus medical certificates to escape work.

Many engineers, working in the mines, told the researcher that the miner's Union were so strong that it was impossible to extract work from them; there have been a number of cases in which officers have been assaulted by the workers.

Previously even in the government collieries, miners were employed through the contractors and had to remain 16 to 20 hours in a day underground to fill the tub of coal. In the name of housing they had self-made jhuggis of leaves and grass, facilities of drinking water sanitation, light and medical care etc. were unthinkable in those days. They were earning 40 to 50 paise a day then. No bonus, no P.F. no gratuity and no insurance etc.
Particularly after nationalisation, life of the Coal-miners has remarkably changed. Credit goes to the Government and the Congress-Communist co-operation of these days. A miner now in uniform and boots with cap lamp on head or on shovels and dumpers roaring. However, their housing and colony facilities are still inadequate. They have no regular bonus, P.F., gratuity. The Coal Miners Welfare Organisation with crores of rupees is looking after the welfare of miners; to some extent, the living standard of miners has considerably gone up though educational and cultural level is still far below the expectation. The trade unions have done very little in this respect. Working hours are generally regulated.

Coal is labour-intensive industry. Due to the change-over to heavy mechanisation, the unemployment situation has become explosive, apparently, leading to a social upheaval. It has a great effect on the living standard of coal-miners, specially on women coal-miners. After nationalisation, there is an improvement of the working and living conditions of coal-miners who are working under highly hazardous conditions and whose standard of living is extremely low.

Wages of coal-miners have increased after nationalisation. But in the nationalised sector, quite a large number of labourers are still employed by contractors, and in most cases, their wages are much below than those of departmental workers. It has been observed in mining areas all over the world that when living and working conditions are bad, the tendency to squander money on liquor, gambling etc. is high.

Political murders occur frequently in coal mining areas. Gang-leaders of criminals are becoming the trade union leaders. Gang-leaders have become millionaires and a section of workers are becoming party to various types of corruption.

Though not in immediate future, we may hope to have some sort of confederation of all coal Unions in India which will have the way for more and more effective role of the coal-miners and also will help betterment of living standard and the socioeconomic status of the coal-mine labourers.