CHAPTER—IX

MECHANISATION OF MINES AND WOMEN WELFARE
CHAPTEB IX.

MECHANISATION IN MINES AND WOMEN WORKER

"Progress and development cannot do without half of the World's population and yet the female half of the World's population is still far from taking an active part as it should, in genuine and concerted efforts to make the World better place to live in." (World Health).

According to the present researcher now the time has come to draw up a plan of action to improve the status of women in society and to look after their interest as an individual and not as a dependent entity.
The woman worker in India can proudly claim to have made a remarkable contribution to the economic growth and development of the country and their contribution to the coal industry is no less appreciable. In March, 1973, Coal industry had 29,400 women workers of which 23,100 were in the public sector.

There was a downward trend in the employment of women workers in mines between the years 1963 and 1973. The number came down from 98,000 in 1963 to 76,000 in 1972. In coalmines the number of working women was 37,600 in 1963, it came down to 22,000 in 1972. Their share of employment declined from 8.3% to 5.6%. * 1

After nationalisation of all coalmines, a very significant achievement has been the introduction of modern technology and modern equipment. Introduction of the latest mining technology into larger mine units has been a gradual and continuous process. Although a substantial part of the immediate production is, of course, met from opencast mines. More emphasis on underground mines is needed.

* 1, Seminar on Women Labour in Mines - Dhanbad 27th - 28th October - 1975.
In the short run, coal will probably remain the easiest energy substitute for oil, more for countries like India which has abundant reserves. According to an ILO study, by the year 2000, coal is expected to supply 20 percent of global energy needs. In the circumstances, in Governments development programmes for this decade highest priority is to be accorded to the rapid mechanisation of coal running operations. It is true that mechanisation itself has a few accompanying problems, though at first glance, manual mining would seem to be far more hazardous, but the study points out that, despite new techniques that have made pits safer, coal mining remains a dangerous occupation. Intensive mechanisation in certain advanced countries has led to more ignitions of fire damp, combustible mine gas which causes underground explosion.

India's government also sought assistance for the mechanisation of coal industry from the country like the U.K., France and West Germany. In addition, the Government has already signed agreements with the Soviet Union and Poland.
Under the agreement with the Soviet Union, Soviet engineers will assist the Indian Coal Industry with design and survey work, supply mining equipment and materials and also arrange for the training of Indian personnel in the Soviet Union. Jhanjra Coal mine in the Asansol colliery belt is now programming with the assistance of Soviet engineers. This underground mine will be designed to have an annual capacity of 2,800,000 tonnes per year.

Mechanisation has resulted in a clear downward trend in fatal accident rates in most countries; fires are being detected early enough to bring about a drop in serious burn injuries. Ground collapse has also been reduced in frequency by introducing powered supports and improved techniques in roof bolting. As a result, ground collapse is no longer the major case of accidents. It has been replaced now by haulage and transport.
In India when mining was in private hands for a number of reasons, little investment was made in providing technology. After nationalisation, matters have improved somewhat over the last couple of years. Coal is a labour-intensive industry and due to this change over to heavy mechanisation the unemployment situation has become explosive apparently leading to a social upheaval. A balanced mechanisation can solve this problem, through balanced mechanisation, China is producing coal three times more than India.

With the advance of technology, the operations of machines reduce the physical strength of workers and make them fit for the environment with more care and comfort. There is absolutely no reason why womenfolk cannot be employed in skillful operational areas where they may have equal opportunity to compete with the male counterparts. To the present researcher, it is a misjudgment about the ability and competence of womenfolk in carrying out operation on surface or opencast other than carrying coal on their heads.
It is pretty sure that women folk can also co-negotiate surface machinery if properly trained. Unfortunately, no scheme to impart training to women workers in mines is in the offing so far either from the side of the Industry or the State.

Now-a-days, social prejudices have no place in the super-speed industrial progress of the modern era. There is also no reason why women should not get the opportunity of proper training in coal-mining industry. Times have changed and the women have overcome the biological limitations for competing with men. If so, why should we not have a fresh look at the Mines Act?

A criticism is levelled that the additional cost of the protective legislation had a restrictive influence on the employment position of the women in the coalmines. But it can be said that employment of women in the coalmines is not only affected by the restrictive influence of the different protective legislation but also by the technological advancement in coal industry. It remains a fact technology advance is also responsible for the contraction of the women labour force.
Women workers are, at present, employed in limited fields of loading unloading and in some other unskilled surface jobs. They are also, at present, exempted from the provisions of Mines Vocational Training Rule on the ground that women workers in Mines mostly work in category No. 1, 2 and 3. As such, no women workers have been imparted training in their vocations.

Employment of women workers in Mines and their vocational Training i-

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<tr>
<th>Column-I</th>
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<td>Categories of Workers</td>
<td>Conditions subject to which exemption is granted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Persons employed in loading minerals or send into wagons or trucks.</td>
<td>Exemption from Rule 9, will be operative for a period of 2 years i.e. upto 31.12.75.</td>
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<td>(2) Persons employed in the pit head baths, dispensaries and canteens.</td>
<td>Full exemption from the various provisions of Mines Vocational training Rules, 1966.</td>
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<td>(3) Unskilled general mazdoors including female workers and sweepers employed on the surface.</td>
<td>Full exemption from the various provisions of the Mines Vocational Training Rules, 1966, provided that such workers are not engaged in handling machinery explosives or other inflammable material or employed in handling tubs or working in sand-stowing bunker, sub-station workshop and safety lamp cabin.</td>
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As the vocational training in mines is now fairly
organised the above relaxation can now perhaps be
modified and the industry may impart training to women
workers in the following trades.
(1) Creche Nurses/Attendants.
(2) Mineral loading into wagons/conveyors.
(3) Attendants
(4) Stone cutters
(5) Carrying loads in opencast mines etc.
suitable women candidates may be developed and trained
in advanced skills like: Fan attendant, Switch Board
attendant, Screening plant operators, Attendance Clerks,
Banksman etc.

The economic situation after the first world war
brought about a change in attitude on the part of the
society and the theory that women's capacity and physical
strength limited her range of occupation was no longer
taken as true.
Social prejudices has no longer any place in this dynamic and superspeed world. "Equality, development and peace", has been the motto of the international women's year. A dynamic line of action should be taken for the welfare of the women workers in view of their important contributions to the development not only of the mineral economy but economy perse. The aim and principles of welfare should be to bring the women workers to their desired position as women "entwine and weave heavenly roses in our earthly life" (Schiller).