CHAPTER XI

SUMMING UP
Coal Industry is an enclave industry in the rural background. Coal Industry is a hinterland industry, situated in rural area, so a vast majority of the labour force has been derived from the village side. In India, the participation of women in coalmining industry is as old as the mining itself.

Most of the women workers, especially "Kamins" in the coalmining industry belonged to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes and to other backward classes.
In the early days of mining in India there was no bar for women to be employed underground in mines. The conditions of the working places were quite miserable. The attitude of the mine authorities was also inhuman and unsympathetic.

The employment of women workers underground, after 1st July, 1929 had been limited to a percentage of total underground labour force. On 7th February, 1946 female workers had been completely prohibited from underground employment in any Mine of the country.

At present women workers are engaged only on the surface of coal mines as wagon-loaders, surface trammers cleaners, pallet-makers, also as sweepers. Even in these surface jobs, a sharp fall in the percentage of women in Coal Industry can be seen, especially after nationalisation.

There are no skilled women labour in Coal industry. The "Vocational Training" in mining industry is now fairly organised. But women workers are excluded from the provision of mines Vocational training Rules and are now mostly employed on the unskilled job of loading and handling minerals.
To the present researcher, it is a mystery about the competence of women that they can not conduct other operations on surface or open-cast workings, except carrying loads or handling minerals.

Lack of proper education and training is the main obstacle which restricts women for getting job at higher levels. In urban areas there had been rapid growth in women's education. But rural women are still handicapped in this respect.

Being a social creature, a human being always derives motivation from social surroundings and social conditions. So it can be said that social welfare of individuals is closely related to all the social situation under which individuals are living. It is abundantly clear that prolonged developmental efforts aimed at providing better facilities in the sphere of health, education and social security will have a real impact on women workers for yielding good results.
For the protection and welfare of women workers special provisions are there in almost all labour laws which are to be enforced & implemented by all organised industrial sectors.

In the present study the researcher wanted to make an indepth study of the implementation of such protective legislations and their fruitfulness in case of women workers especially, in coalmining industry.

In mining industry the protective legislation relate to maternity restriction, lifting of weight, prohibition of night and underground work, equal remuneration and provisions of separate welfare facilities like toilets, pit-head baths, creches etc. The Acts relating to these purposes are Mines Act 1952, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, The State Insurance Act 1948, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
On the other hand, almost all the 140 Conventions and the 148 Recommendations of ILO's International Labour Code are concerned with women workers as to men workers. ILO's International Labour Code covers a wide area including, for example, social security, occupational safety and health, hours of work, vocational guidance and training, employment policy and freedom of association.

A few conventions and recommendations are exclusively for women. These are of two types - promotional and protective. The promotional measures are aimed at overcoming economic and social discrimination against women worker; the protective standards are concerned with the special protection for their biological and special function of maternity.

According to Mines Act 1952, it is obligatory on the part of the employer to provide separately for female workers, sufficient number of latrines.
Most of the employers are not thoughtful enough to provide for the separate arrangements of urinals for women workers. But it is a basic need. Even where this arrangement has been provided, the maintenance of latrines did not conform to the prescribed standard and urinals are not up to the mark. Though the condition regarding this arrangement of separate latrine and urinals is gradually improving still much is to be desired.

Under the pit-head Bath Rules 1959 each coalmine is obliged to provide separate pit-head baths for women workers. Such facility is existing in a few coalmines. But the arrangement of water supply is not sufficient and the arrangement of pit-head baths are not satisfactory. They have to wash in the open-tank or water-pit. The provision of washing facilities separately for men and women should be made statutory in the mining area.
In the Mine Act 1952 the provisions regarding maximum weight lifting is too general. The weight which women worker has to carry goes up to even 35 KG. According to women workers they are not facing any difficulty in carrying such weight. But there should be a provision in the Act for assigning only light tasks to women workers during the period of pregnancy.

According to the Mines Act, 1952 all creches should have sufficient accommodation and should be adequately lighted, ventilated and should have clean sanitary condition. Each creche should be under the charge of a trained woman. Creche are to be supplied with sufficient quantity of milk, towel, soap, oil etc. It should be properly equipped with some items like, first-aid medicines, cots, feeding bottles, toys, cooking utensils.

But the present researcher in the area of her study found to her dismay that in Asansol area, most of the creches are ill-equipped, even some creches have been closed.
Sometimes, employers do not provide creche facility as the working mothers do not bring their children to the creche. But the real fact is somewhat different. 60% of the working women experienced their difficulty in making arrangement for looking after their small kids during their working hours also it is difficult for them, if they live quite far off, to carry children along.

The Kane Rules also prescribed that at every mine the employers should provide adequate and suitable rest shelters near the working place. But most of the rest shelters are below the prescribed standards. In fact, the condition of Rest shelters are very deplorable.

The protection of health and wages during maternity period is very essential both for the welfare of the women and society. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides for payment of maternity benefit to women workers at the rate of average daily wage for the period of her actual absence before and after confinement. At present, a trend of fewer and fewer such claims is perceptible. Reasons are, however, many.
Maternity Benefit Act is unfavourable to casual and temporary labour. A woman worker is not entitled to the benefit of the Maternity Benefit Act unless she works for a period of not less than 160 days in the twelve months immediately proceeding the expected delivery. There are many women who are working for five or six years in the coalmine but the employer always deny them the facilities of the Maternity Benefit Act as there is a break in their services. The medical bonus is also very meagre.

Women workers in coalmine areas are generally illiterate, they have come from the rural environment. They generally feel shy in consulting male doctors about their complicated female diseases. There should be provision for a part-time Lady Doctor in Mines, employing more than 50 women workers. For regular and prompt treatment medical camps should be held in the residential areas of the workers. The provision of regular medical check-up should be provided as most of the women workers are always suffering from anaemia and malnutrition.
According to some social scientists, maternity benefits are not very important in the country like India as the unemployment problem is grave in this country. Importance should be given to men, who are the head of the family when the employment opportunities are so poor and limited. But the logic should be the other way round. The decision of the employment should be based on the efficiency or productivity of labour and not on the basis of gender. Ten percent of the families of the third world, including India, are female headed; so employment of women is very much essential. Most of the families, especially in rural areas, can have one or two square meals a day as both the men and women of the families are employed. Barring out women from employment would mean starvation and hunger. So employment of women is essential not only for women's growth but also for the economic development of society. Hence, it can be argued that provision of maternity benefits for women workers is absolutely necessary in India. It is not an unimportant matter, as alleged.
Sometimes it is also argued that women are more expensive than men workers. In India, child-rearing is the responsibility of the mother only. But both men and women should shoulder equal responsibility for the upbringing of the child. If it is our social system that mother is the only responsible individual for upbringing the child in its early years, then they can never be deprived of in the field of employment and that women workers should be protected through appropriate legal measures.

Regarding Housing we can say that the condition of housing is relatively better in coal industry than in any other rural industries. But there is no provision of housing for unmarried women worker. They should be provided with a hostel-type accommodation.

The provision of transport facilities seems to be necessary for those women workers who are residing more than 2 K.M. away from the working place. But such facilities are a rarity in the coalmining area under study.
In coalmines, the higher proportion of working women is in the older age group. The proportion of workers in the young age group is rather low. It is also an indicator of the low rate of recruitment.

The prospect of women employment in the coal industry has been severely affected by those protective legislation. To evade expenditure on welfare measures, employers are not giving the necessary preference to women in matters of employment, although these financial liabilities are almost negligible. The large establishments are following various methods to reduce women workers. As for example, Coal India LTD evolved a scheme of voluntary retirement - women workers retiring voluntarily are being provided with various cash incentives.

This shows that, despite various laws and regulations, the condition of the working women in rural areas has not improved satisfactorily.
That is, things which are secure in law, are very often fragile in practice. Enactment of laws would not change things. Mere declaration is not enough. Execution and implementation are necessary. The change of the attitude of the society about its customs, traditions and thinking is necessary as well.

Life of women is not confined to child bearing, child-rearing and domestic drudgery. "Women's place is in the home", this attitude has to be changed. Women are also able to participate in the entire life of the community - this home truth should be brought home to all and sundry.

It is regrettable that the benefit of the International Women's year has not yet reached the women of the rural area who are completely illiterate and belong to the backward community. Even now they are completely unaware of all what has happened in the International Women year/women's Decade.
International women year could not touch a fringe of their problem. So we may have to adopt practical plans for the welfare of the women worker, particularly for the rural area.

It is true that after nationalisation of the coal industry, a lot of money was spent, a large number of "model" plans were made but to what extent has it helped and benefited the working women?

To solve all the problems of the women worker is not a year's job; sustained efforts are necessary in a more planned and concerted way. The attitude of the society towards the women folk should be changed. All evils cannot be eradicated by one single agency. Necessary efforts should be made from all levels of the society. The progress may be slow but to bring about such a change every one of the society has to feel that there is a need for such a change.