CHAPTER — I

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As a Woman scholar in the discipline of Sociology, an inclination towards the study of role and status of Women in different spheres of Society was probably something automatic. This was especially more so, as an impact of the International Women's year, 1975.

Because of my stay in the coalfield area for more than half a decade, it became easy for me to have a hang of the working condition and life-style of the Women workers there.

My husband being posted as an Executive Engineer in the Coalmines areas for about six years, I could get all the opportunities of making acquaintance both with top bosses and ordinary workers in the Coalmine area, formally and informally.

The participation of the Women workers in Coal industry is as old as the Coal industry itself. Men and Women used to work together in all avocations both under the above ground. Progressive labour legislations restricted the working hours of Women workers and also prohibited employment of women worker under ground. At present the women workers in Coal industry are engaged only on surface of Coalmines.
But it is very surprising that the number of working women is now declining in all mining industries, especially in the Coal industry.

After nationalisation, especially in coal industry, the percentage of working women has declined very sharply.

In my present research I have tried to give the inside picture of the socio-economic condition of the women worker in the Coal industry. I have selected Asansol which is also known as Raniganj Coalfield Area as the area of my research.

Raniganj and Coal - these two go together and the name Raniganj coalfield holds a definite position in the history of Coal. Industries in Eastern India got a booster effect with the discovery of coal in Raniganj area. The first Railway track was laid in India to connect Raniganj with Calcutta - the entrepot city.

Accelerating production vis-a-vis demand for Coal gave birth to consumer industries, communication branches like pioneer Railroads and also to urban pattern of growth. To formulate long term/permanent features with Raniganj as production centre, the concerned authorities like Railway, General administration and pioneer Entrepreneurs started shifting from the exact territory of Raniganj and setting with expanded size and potentiality at a nearby place, named Asansol.
The Sub-divisional head-quarters and the Court were shifted from Raniganj to Asansol in 1906.

Gradually, in management and administrative outlook, the area got identified as Asansol area which is more broadly now being known as Asansol-Durgapur Area.

After promulgation of Bengal Mining Settlement Act 1912 the functioning Board captioned as "Mines Board of Health, Asansol." came into being in 1915.

Different authorities, working with Coal or coalfield area have notified the same territory either as "Asansol Area" or "Raniganj Area" according to their own code of practice or convention.

In my study I have been guided by the defined jurisdiction of Asansol Mines Board of Health as more or less, in the year 1977, which extends to an area about 568 Sq. K.M. then covering about 212 units of 116 regrouped mines under Eastern Coalfield LTD. Of course a few mines under Bharat Cooking Coal LTD. and Indian Iron & Steel Co. management located within Asansol Sub-Division came within the scope of my observation and study.

Coal exist in the belt in abundance while it is well below ground level(3000') with attractive economic viability, some ground out crops remain uncared for. My study intended to cover both underground mines and open cast mines.
My present study is covered by one hundred samples. Those had been drawn at random from 4 selected collieries. The name of the collieries are (1) Dhemo Main (2) Jhanjra (3) Begunia (4) Rammagore.

The attitude of women workers were not always very co-operative. Sometimes they were not speak out at all. But through a continued process of waxing and cajoling I would win them over. I have got a very cordial co-operation from the staffs and officials of E.C.L. and also of some Trade Union Leaders who helped me a lot in collecting on different issues.