Chapter 7

Everyday life of the Coalminers

The present chapter aims at furnishing an overall understanding about the society and the culture of the mining town of Jharia. The industrial towns had little attraction for the villagers, except that they were driven there by economic pressures and dire necessity. When a villager comes to the city or an industrial town to seek work he/she has to face changes of enormous magnitude. In the village he is known to everyone and has a sense of belonging to his little community. In the city nobody knows him except the friends or relatives to whom he goes to for help in finding a job. A sense of loss resonates in a work group especially where the families are absent. Any study of the social habits of the colliery workers therefore necessarily has to address this aspect of alienation.

Keeping this in the backdrop the paper now looks at the everyday lives led by the miners in industrial town of Jharia. There is a big shift from their rural to urban lifestyles. It becomes important to document the manner in which the workers identify themselves with the mining town and therefore lead their day to day lives. Who are these miners? Where have they come from? What have they brought with themselves? How did they identify themselves with a new place? What kinds of conflict they have with the original inhabitants of the new mining town? Over the years what kinds of developments have taken place in their lifestyles? What have been the trends in development and evolutionary pattern of lifestyle? Some discussion on the above questions has been dealt with in the previous chapters. In this chapter the focus is mainly on the social and the cultural lives of the coalminers. The socio cultural domain is being seen in terms of their family life, marriage, kinship, community and its practices, the spoken language within the community and the language which is publicly spoken. The religious ceremonies, their ritual beliefs, and their concept of work and leisure are also being examined.

The mines in Jharia were located in remote, formerly jungle areas inhabited by tribal and semi-tribal populations and 'low-caste' Hindus. They were engaged in a somewhat crude form of agriculture and were also partly dependent on gathering from the forests. In the
初始几年，几乎整个矿业劳动力队伍由部落和低种姓、农工组 成。从最早期采矿的那天起，劳动者就来自两个煤炭产区附近或邻近地区的村庄。截至1921年，矿工队伍中绝大多数是当地人或最远的短途移民。

### 7.1 Migrants their Language and Social Ties

在Dhanbad区，语言主要来自三种不同的语系。

一种是Munda语系，包括Ho、Mundari、Santhali、Kharia、Kora、Karwa和Bhumij。另一种是Dravidian语系，包括Telugu、Tamil和其他Dravidian语言。第三种是印度-雅利安语系，包括Hindi、Bengali、Punjabi、Gujarati、Oriya、Urdu、Nepali、Marwari等。由于城市人口的国际化，有些人在工业区说一些欧洲语言，如英语。Hindi是该区的主要语言。Bengali人约占总人口的25.4%，Santhali约6.8%。其他印度-雅利安语系的方言在该地区影响不大。Punjabis是难民，人数不多。Gujarati人也是如此。

“Khortha”是当地人使用的流行方言，含有大量Hindi混合成分。Bengali人在那里世代居住，使用这种方言。在Shahabad和Balida地区，Hindi说者也理解这种方言，而Bhojpuri成为他们的母语。

即使是后来从遥远的Uttar Pradesh、Madhya Pradesh和Bihar地区招来的劳动力，也主要来自农村。这种模式直到那个时期结束时都没有发生显著变化。1944年劳工调查委员会指出：

The essential aspects of the composition of the labour force in coalmines in India have remained the same during the last half a
century or so, namely that the labour employed in the different coalfields mostly belongs to the surrounding villages and districts of the province in which the coal mines are situated.

The first flush of immigrants from the relatively distant areas, roughly between 1905-1906, did not significantly alter the balance between units of family-labour, and those that maintained their families back home in the village. Since 1910, the number of single male workers migrating into the coalfields began to grow (Seth 1940: 176). The single female miners, largely widows and ‘deserted’ single women, also came to occupy a small proportion of the total working masses by the 1920s and the 1930s (Seth, 1940: 128-65).

Five forms of familial ties were observed amongst the colliers: there was the typical ‘monogamous’ household constituted by the husband, wife, child and some other kin; the cohabitational union of a male and a female miner, possibly, children of either of the two; a single woman miner (either a widow or deserted) with or without a child; single male collier having the rest of his family members back in the bastees; and a single male collier in a cohabitational union with other single women, with or without child. The importance of ‘male protection’ in the lives of working women was also an important aspect of the social life in the mining town.

Notions of mutual responsibility were important to the reproduction of familial ties and the relationship between men and women workers in the coalfields. Statements by women colliers attest to the significance of such notions of mutual obligations. Asked if they would like to work on the surface ground while their men folk went below the surface, women colliers in few mines were emphatic:

No, no: we should like to be together, otherwise we shall always be in fear and anxiety thinking what might happen to them. When we work together, we have no anxiety, for if we die, we die together (Roy April 1923: 511-13)

---

66 From the district of Hazaribagh, Gaya, Sahabad, Saran, Monghyr and Burdwan.
The social organization of the indigenous community would consist of the interrelations between particular types of groups, namely those groups which make social life possible. In order to meet basic needs such as food and shelter and social needs such as companionship, recreation, religious activities, play etc. men developed a channel or mechanism to fulfill these needs which may be called social organizations. All the community life involved methods of grouping and grading people for an effective carrying out of the various types of activities demanded by the common existence (Firth 1961: 41).

The social life of the natives of Jharia was intertwined around harmonious relationships with the living as well as dead and there is a continuous process of reciprocation. The ceremonies and festivals of this area were the occasions when the social bonds were commended.

Dealing with the small world of the tribal belt of Jharkhand 'Jharia', one might be asked whether one is confronted with a hierarchical society of the type as defined in the caste system. Initial observation would seem to indicate that this is the case, because some twenty castes, linked and differentiated to constitute an in egalitarian and interdependent whole, encompass almost all individuals of the local society. Brahmins enjoy uncontested supremacy without other 'dominant castes', thus termed by virtue of their pre-eminence in the possession of patrimonies, seriously disputing their position. The tribals are seen to draw up the castes according to an order which is commonly held to be the criterion of civilization. The 'great' among men ensure the preservation of this order by means of rites which privileged their access to the sacred texts. The 'small' serve the great and extend to them symbolic differences. Drinking, eating, marriage, all forms of conduct recognized as fundamental, are regulated by a corpus of strict precepts whose objective is to preserve the status of each rank and to perpetuate the relations between the groups so as to ensure the cohesion of the whole.

7.2 Family and marriage

It is just not the caste, but the family which constitutes the fundamental elements of socialization; even if the former engenders a very strong sense of loyalty, it is the family which is accorded the most positive sentiments and loyalty. The family is perceived as the
basic link in the vertical chain of ancestral relationships and as the narrowest of the horizontal circles of birth-linked groups in society. There are different types of families with different lifestyles, habits and values, after centuries of cohabitation. Large households, characteristic of the bhadrak are valued, but the large majority of the people live in small or semi-small households, variably associated with their related counterparts. Indeed it could be assumed that there are as many types of families as jatis, a very striking diversity (even with regards to rules of intermarriage etc) existing behind the unifying mask of family ideology. The rules of endogamy permit this extraordinary diversification and assertion of family types. There exist some features that characterize many of the families and determine to a large extent the social regulations as a whole, and the workers and their work in particular. The majority of the family units are small households in which the common life and shared economic interests are intense.

In a joint family, the worker, his wife, his parents, and children all live together in one house and that gives very little time for the couples to interact, no room for interaction between the child and the parents. If both the parents are working, then the child is reared by the grandparents. The position of each member in the family is regulated by the birth order and seniority. A hierarchy is maintained in the family where the father or the elder brother makes the household decisions. Women are at once peripheral and yet central to this world.

The dominant ideology among the higher castes views women not only as indispensable to the survival of the families, but also as a threat to their cohesion, because they come from elsewhere. Women are not accorded a separate identity, but are considered to be an ‘extension’ of and subservient to their husbands, this being much less observed among the lower ranks or caste. Women of upper caste all endeavor to resemble Sita and Savitri, the perfect spouses as depicted in the Hindu epics, characterized by their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their husbands and their sons. Their participation in social life occurs primarily at the level of the home. In higher castes, in which the ideology of lineage is the most ruthless, the woman is customarily never addressed by her name rather she is addressed as ‘daughter of’, ‘mother of’, ‘sister of’. The justification of a woman’s life lies in marriage and child bearing. Child-wives or adolescents (twelve to thirteen years),
brought into unknown families of unknown husbands through arranged marriages, are at
the lowest rung of the family hierarchies until they have given birth to their first male
child. Their situation then gradually improves along with their position in the family
hierarchy. The mother in law, who is an important personage, dominates over the children
and the other women of the house, and possesses a formidable ascendency over her sons. It
is she who first transmits to the latter contempt for women, her rivals. Women play an
essential role in transmission of ideology, for example, through the tales told to children,
folk-tales which exalt the family and justify the hierarchy (Heuze 1996: 62).

For the dominant high caste people, marriage remains within the castes, the higher caste
refusing to lower their standing by mixing with inferiors. Similarly, the higher castes
avoid eating with those of lower castes and statuses as they are sensitive to the concept of
‘pollution’ represented by people of lower caste.

Khatunia: Bhaiyya, you must have your food with u before you go.
You have cycled such long distance.
Sehdev: I’ll be late, my bhabhi warned me to be back in time.
Khatunia: I don’t know all that but I will not let you go without
partaking food. Then she suddenly became thoughtful. Bhaiya, you
won’t mind eating our food, I hope, she said diffidently.
Sehdev: Why do you say that?
Khatunia: People of our village eschew eating with us, we are
muslims!
(Gaddi 2002: 83)

For the tribals, marrying outside their caste is never a big problem. Tribal women tend to
think they are more liberated from the patriarchal norms of the society than the non tribal
poor women.
Belmundi Majhain in her interview reveals that when her first husband died she remained
as a widow for twenty years before she got married again. In their caste no-one bothers
about these things, women can get remarried; it does not matter even if she has children.

_A calf will surely follow the cow, that's what we say. We make sure that
the groom's family will look after the calf, otherwise the cow will not go_
with them. She rationalizes that the marriage is done for the sake of the children.

There are many tribal women whose husbands have left them, or died in underground mining accidents or have been widowed, or the women have left their husbands. The accident in Chasnalla colliery in December, 1975 caused the greatest loss of life in an Indian mining accident. Some 373 women were widowed. In spite of the high profile the Chasnalla disaster acquired, the widows were not helped in any significant way to cope with their tragedy. Similar other accidents took place at the colliery and the management never probed into the matter; rather the workers were blamed for their carelessness and ignorance. The widows of the victims remarry or tend to have multiple relationships. They can get married out of caste too; it is not a matter of shame.

Look at Basanti's brother he brought out a Beldarin and kept her, her uncle brought out a Domin and kept her, and Basanti herself walked off with a Chamar. Basanti is presently with her third husband, she left the first one because he was younger than her, the second one died and now she stays with the third one. The bridegroom's family did have some opposition from their side in the beginning, but everyone's forgotten about it now.

She goes on to talk about another person called Bircha and his sister, who was having an affair with Rajinder Singh (Trade Union member). Rajinder Singh was the follower of Janta Mazdoor Sangh. He started doing obscene acts and was warned about it. Some party people got him drunk and took him to the fire area, stabbed him and threw him in a well. Nothing happened to Bircha's sister though because of this she got married later on without any problems. If any woman has an affair before marriage, we don't bother. When prospective in-laws come to negotiate a marriage, they don't let them sit and gossip with the neighbors, then they won't hear anything against the girl. If they find out after the marriage, it doesn't matter.
A 'good wife', in most of the families that colliery working women are a part of, has a hard-working, tough and resilient personality that can manage the household somehow, leaving the men folk free to enjoy life.

Baisakhi brought up her children, mostly alone; Girja her whole clan; Mukkimunni her daughter; Malti and Gendia their brothers' families; Devkumari and Mongia their children and drunken husbands.... it goes on and on. All these women had husbands, but still managed their households and children - mostly single handedly. It's little wonder that they developed such strength of character. They had to be strong for they could not rely upon men to support them.

The rigidity which the institution of the marriage imposes, on the tribals and the non-tribals, is quite different. The narratives below explain the institution of marriage and the decision making capacity within the household.

"I was married too early, really, but can you oppose the elders? People used to get married early in those days, the earlier the better. Suppose there are old grandparents in the house, no-one knows when they will die, so they like to see their grandchildren married.

After my marriage, Motilal (my husband) came to stay here. Both of us were studying. My grandfather said, 'Let her stay here until she completes her study at least.' So he came to stay here. Two years later, I was in ninth class, when Montu was born. I must have been sixteen or seventeen by then, in 1974.

I didn't know anything about having babies. In the beginning whatever my grandmother told me, I did. I threw away my own milk, and gave Montu goat's milk. When Laxmi was born there was some argument about this. I had read in some paper that mother's milk was best for the baby, so I thought, why should I throw it away? And then we are not allowed to eat properly after childbirth, but I was so hungry I asked the midwife to cook something for me.
After Gouri was born I said, 'We have three children now, how many more do we want?' Actually I thought two was enough. I'd been taking medicines to stop getting pregnant, but once I'd gone to the village to attend a marriage, the pills ran out... So Gouri was born. Later that year Tata's organised a sterilisation camp in Jamadoba. I told my husband, 'Three is enough, no need of more.' He said, 'How can I say whether you need more or not.' I said, 'That's strange! Why don't you know?' He said, 'I don't know. You can do whatever you feel like.' I told him that I was going to go for the operation, and told him to come after his duty to bring me home. I didn't tell anyone else in the house where I was going.

So I left Gouri in the morning. When I got there, there was a long queue. When it was one o'clock I asked the doctor, 'Please give me a car, I want to go home. I'll be back soon.' So I went home, dressed and fed the baby, then brought her back with me to the hospital. I asked the people in the hospital to look after her when the operation took place. They said 'Don't worry we will.' They said they'd give her milk if she was hungry too. When the time came for signature they said, 'Where is your husband?' I told them he was on duty. Then they said, 'Then how can it be done? He has to sign.' I told them, 'Why can't I sign myself. I'm the one having the operation.' Anyway, the operation was done. When I regained my senses I saw it was seven o'clock in the evening. Other women all had their families with them and were leaving one by one. I wondered as to how I was to get back home in this condition especially with a small baby? So I asked the doctor if he could arrange an ambulance for me. On the way home I asked the driver to stop, I was very hungry, so I bought some bread from a shop. When I got home I ate that bread with some milk and went to sleep. Next day it was work as usual, as if nothing had happened.
Decision making at home and work

I heard about Seetal Manjhain from Asha Hembram, so I visited her place. Seetal's daughter-in-law was at home. She was a nineteen year old girl, with two children already and was all skin and bones. She quickly served me extra-sweet tea and extra spicy snacks and talked endlessly. The house was no longer spotlessly clean (as I was told by Asha, that her house is well kept), for now it was cluttered with countless broken, cheap plastic toys, remnants of the mornings cooking, dirty pots and pans, bits of biscuits and layers of coaldust. "I hate this place, we're going back to the village. This is no place for a child to grow up in," she told me. Seetal's son, was much like his father. He sported fancy clothing, a slick hairstyle, and was the local expert at breakdancing. But he had no job, and they were all financially dependent on Seetal and her husband.

Seetal arrived at last. She had been to the colliery office to sort out someone's problem. "Now that Girja has left us, I have to do everything." Then she began to berate, something that made me feel at home. "So, after such a long time, eh! How come you remembered us today? (I visited Seetal's place in November 2006, and was meeting her after 2 years in December 2008) You'd forgotten all about us for so many months..." She was older now, and a grandmother, but she was still smart. Smarter than her daughter-in-law with her hair uncombed and crumpled sari. Seetal's salary showed. She was a earning around Rs. 8,000 a month for making mud clay pellets which were being used for blasting below ground. This is considered an easier and lighter job than wagon loading, but did not seem happy with it. "Give me wagon loading any day," she told the researcher, "I never got pains in my hands before, and we earned so much more..." When asked whether she would retire and give her job to her son, She replied "No, not yet. After a few more years."-A familiar line through out the coalfield. Women always intend to give their sons their jobs. But it is always later.
Meanwhile Mukkimunni entered the room too. There were only two of the original gang of women left at the time that I heard about Asha Hembram, the CITU leader.

Jhunia passed away long ago, probably of T.B. Then Girja had a massive heart attack two years ago and died. And then recently Jassoda passed away too. It is Mukkimunni and my turn now (Seetal....talking about their revolutionary friends).

I asked about Girja's family, wondering how they were all managing with the loss of the head of the household. Girja had always wanted her daughter to take her job on her death, but of course this was not allowed. Girja's son-in-law was given a job. Still, according to Seetal, it is Girja's daughter that is running the household, the men turn over their wages to her for her to manage. "She's the sensible one, so they are all right."

I asked about Jassoda, "Well you know her son, Seetal tells me, "he's a good-for-nothing. He picked up all his mother's Provident Fund and pension and has been spending it ever since. It'll soon be finished since he doesn't work. Actually Jassoda wanted her money to be divided between her son and daughter, but the managers and union leaders here said, 'No, after a daughter's marriage it is her in-laws' responsibility to support her.' So they gave everything to her son. I and Mukki felt very bad about it, but they wouldn't listen to us."

These narratives point at the patriarchal rules of a nationalized industry that on the other hand, publicly professe gender equality, yet prevented Girja and Jassoda from ensuring that their daughters could enjoy some of the same freedoms that they had. This is questionable 'progress' and development indeed.

In spite of their loyalty towards the Trade Union and their political activities it's difficult for them to suppress their dissatisfaction. "Look", Seetal informs me, "we drove the goondas out of this colliery over twenty years ago. Workers died to rid this place of the Goonda Raj. And now what do we see? Workers are again going to their party! This is our weakness... The other day the union called us for a demonstration in Dhanbad. Only me and twenty women went from this colliery; not a single man!
None of our leaders! They said they have jobs and will lose their salary, but do I not also have a job?" Yet it is unthinkable for Seetal and Mukki to openly challenge their union's leaders. None of the unions of the coalfield, and some more than others, are really democratic organisations. The strongest, loudest, most confident person assumes a leadership role and becomes a leader. Workers when disillusioned with him, simply leave the union, or stay away and become apathetic.

Women colliery workers want to hold onto their jobs, want their daughters and daughters-in-law to take their place in the coal mines as they once did, and they want to continue to fight to keep their hard won rights. But the existing social climate in the coalmines prevents them from doing, so. After meeting such vibrant and enthusiastic ladies, there was a growing realisation that an era was about to end. Seetal and Mukki will battle on for a few more years of course, but then there seems to be no other women of their ilk ready to take over from them.

Yet in spite of the odds against women in the organised coal mining industry, amidst all the chaotic, misguided and ill-thought-out dreams of the colliery women, ideas of gender equality have taken root. For most, this notion is not a modern day creation, but is a part of their collective pasts. As the century draws to an end, ideas are vying against each other: men fighting to 'protect' women, managers arguing that coalmines are not suitable places for 'ladies' to work in etc.

Some of the women are widows, but many are not. What was striking was the interference of men whenever one visited the field. When men were present during the interview, they made an attempt to interfere. Initially this did not strike one as unusual, but with time and experience it became clear that men, on the whole, do not allow women the space to narrate their views. In the higher caste Bihari and Bengali households of the coalfield, this is most definitely the case. But even in working class households where the man is the 'breadwinner' and his wife a 'housewife' conversations could only be held if men were not at home. "What will she know about anything, I can tell you better, you'd better ask me," is a familiar argument men use.
Asha Hembram, represents BCKU (Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union) and believes that there is no place for women in any unions whether it is BCKU, CITU, JMS, RCMS, Dhanbad Colliery Karamchari Sangh or AITUC. Women miners are been used to the party’s benefit; they are asked to join the party’s rallies in huge numbers just to show their representations but at the grassroots level their issues are not been addressed, they are not even aware of the agendas for the rally and strikes.

Party’s internal politics leads to overlooking of main issues of the workers. With the coming of the machinery women are affected the most, they are replaced by machines. Women miners have been removed and their sons being employed under “Female VRS”. “Before nationalization workers were “Andolan Mukhi” now they have become “Swarth Mukhi” (Asha Hembram, CITU representative). She says:

My mother and grandmother worked here. We women have built up this industry and now they want to throw us on the scrap heap. Another woman adds, "Now they already have big, machines, so they want to get rid of us. Can't we do anything else? Were we born with baskets on our heads?"

And they are right; women have built up the coal industry in India. There was a time when women workers were so crucial to production that coal could not have been dispatched had they not carried and loaded it (Dharampurijee, from Janta mazdoor Sangh). During the first two decades of the 20th century, women constitutes about 40 per cent of the workforce in the coalmines (Barnes 2006). At that time the business of extracting coal was a much simpler affair. There were quarries and inclines which utilized little more than picks, shovels and baskets by way of equipment. Mines were opened and closed down depending on the erratic demand, and the time of year. During the rainy season the mines were flooded, workers returned to their fields to transplant paddy. When the water subsided, and villagers had finished their agricultural work, they drifted back to the collieries and business started again (Asha Hembram, Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union).

One colliery manager informed Lindsay, coal mining is a tough and dirty job, not a place for ladies." To which Chhota Shanti of Ekra colliery is a better person to respond. "Give me a pick and shovel just now! I'll go below ground and show these managers how I can cut
coal!" (Linsay Barnes, Jan Chetna Manch). Pradeep Suman from Hindustan Times says that the Coal Industry is based on muscle power and therefore there is no orientation for women's issues and no major role for women. In no Trade Union women are in high posts and even if they are, they are guided by the male members. There is no provision in the coalmines for employment of women workers; they are mostly replaced after their husbands' deaths.

Asha Hembram is part of an Organisation, both the trade union (CITU) and the mahila samiti, but she is a loner. She has learnt from her school days to do things alone. In her narrative she also describes how she decided to go along for sterilisation, completely alone. Similarly she went to the CBI office in Dhanbad on her own, an action which led to the dismissal of one of the BCCL's doctors. It is no wonder that so many people, men and women, come to her for help. Workers have endless troubles with colliery staff, letters, notices, memorandums - which they do not understand. And Asha knows how to talk, she is not afraid of managers or officers, and oozes with confidence - very uncharacteristic of women from her background.

She is a leader, and being a leader in the coalfield in the 'nineties means going to sit in the union office, organising processions and programmes every now and then, and getting all sorts of odd jobs done for colliery workers. Most of the women in the mahila samiti, Asha speaks of, are not colliery workers but middle class and educated. They take up issues on behalf of working women, which is no small task in itself. But this means that the vast majority of women are beyond their ambit.

Like most leaders, Asha loves to talk. Her interview was easily the longest, partly because I knew her through a common friend, we talked well without disturbance. I've had to edit most of the small details of her life. She never experienced the violent struggles that many women had, nor did she face much opposition from her family, she never had to do the tough job of loading wagons. But from the sort of background that she comes from, as a woman and a tribal, to be able to survive as a political leader in the macho-mafia-dominated coalbelt, is an achievement in itself.

The situation in Jharkhand raises several questions about the nature of democracy and 'self-governance'. Traditional structures involving hereditary, non-elected headman or
chiefs appear anachronistic in the contemporary democratic set-up. To the extent that only certain families (usually the founding lineage) have the right to become the munda/pradan etc, the system may appear anachronistic and feudal, especially for women, who have traditionally been excluded from the political power in Jharkhand.

Women may be the breadwinners in their families, they may support their own, and others' children, they may earn and spend their own wages, they may move around unhindered with heads held high, but in the world beyond, those holding patriarchal values are uncomfortable with their independence.

The coalfield communities are not dominated by the lower castes and tribals any longer. Over the years, workers and others from afar have migrated to the coalfield - to work, manage, trade and exploit. With them they have brought an alien system of values that does not respect women as manual workers. 'Real' men are workers who support 'real' women as 'housewives'. These values are also those of most male trade union leaders and activists. When management and unions sit together, neither really accepts the rights of women to work.

7.4 Change over the years and the day to day life

As with regards to religious beliefs, manners and customs, the people follow the pattern prevailing in the contiguous districts in west Bengal and Hazaribagh in Bihar. There is not much difference in dialect within the same linguistic group but the rural population is distinctly divided in mother tongue on the basis of Hindus, Muslims, etc., on the one hand, and Adivasis and Scheduled castes on the other. Among the villagers, there is today visible drift towards towns and the mining and industrial area. The social life of the villagers remains mostly as simple as before. Old traditions and beliefs prevail due to conservative nature of the population particularly in the rural areas. The idea of a joint family system among the Hindus is rapidly diminishing even in the villages.

For the working class people, employment in the industries on a vast scale as in this mining district of Dhanbad has helped to bring about a great economic change on account of their increase in earnings. A miner's family consisting of himself, his wife and adult
sons who are all wages-earners, usually raises its earnings to approximately Rs.5000-10000 a month; the salary for an unskilled mine worker has been raised to the level of about Rs. 2000-5000 a month by the colliery award. This spectacular rise in a working class family's monthly income is reflected in the habits of the family members, the females and children particularly, who are not only well dressed but also are adorned with a few ornaments, wrist watches and possess few other articles like those of middle class families. There has been a visible improvement in their health due to their ability to have adequate and healthy meals. This applies only to the higher grade workers in mines and industrial workers but not to people in the lower strata who make a decent income by their caste occupations and other kinds of work in the coalmines; they lead a simple lifestyle and do not spending on things which are beyond their basic needs.

The consumption of 'liquor' is also a prominent aspect of the mining classes and one of the main means of recreation. The steep increase in the liquor consumption of the mining community is a part of their survival strategy: a mode of confronting their stressful and tiring experience in the context of immiserisation and everyday humiliation.

I hold on to drinking. How can I give up drinking? It induces one to come out with the truth. It makes one bold to tell the truth. If I give up drinking I will become a piece of coal – black coal….kicking a piece of coal lying on his way (Kalachand in Gaddi 2002: 36).

The habit of drinking is widespread among the coalminers and it adversely affects their efficiency and thereby their earning capacity and standard of living. ‘Drunkenness is also an important cause of the miner’s absenteeism on his irregularity in work’ (RCL, 1931:121, Seth 1940: 247, interview with the manager at boragarh mines 25-12-2009)

The culture of drinking was, however, neither uniform and homogeneous, nor did it develop in a linear fashion. Within the locality, there was a variety of liquors of different social values. There was distillery liquor, country liquor, country beer of rice, toddy of palm and date palm juice. The consumption of distilled liquor was viewed as a matter of higher status and prestige. Country liquor came after distilled liquor in the social hierarchy.
It was a fermented form of Mahua. The handia (rice-beer) and Mahua, and toddy (made from palm and date-palm) were the most common intoxicating drinks among the people.67

As with regards to home life, it may be noted that changes are seen in the pattern of houses and household particulars in the urban areas. The traditional house with a few rooms, narrow verandah, and a courtyard with a well, a kitchen, lavatory and a cowshed, is now better planned, although the floor space has become less. The use of cement is common and the low mud and brick houses with lime are being replaced by cemented concrete smaller houses. Owing to the great demand for residential houses, the system of flat has been superimposed on houses which were not built for that purpose and not much privacy is allowed. In towns, the part of the house which remains neglected is the bathroom. Even in big residential houses very small bathrooms are to be seen. Housing conditions are rather exacting in every town and for the average family the house rent paid represents a big percentage of income. Although living in flats is gradually coming in practice along with difficulties about sharing of a common entrance, kitchen, bathroom, lavatory, well or tap, there is still no sign of community cooking. Even in a small house, when there are several occupants, everyone has a separate cooking arrangement. Yet this system of sharing houses goes to breakdown many social conventions and caste barriers.

There has not been much change in the pattern of houses in the villages. Richer people who have built cemented concrete houses in the villages are adopting the modes in vogue in towns and adding certain rural features. There is more living space per inmate in houses in the rural area. The tribals, particularly the Santhals live in humble dwellings which are kept exceptionally neat and clean. They also attach certain sanctity to marital relationships and keep their young girls under strict watch so that they may not go astray and commit any vices with non-tribal youths.

Another sign of the upgrading of the standards of living is the provision of more furniture in the household both in rural and urban areas. The average family has some furniture in the houses consisting of bedstead, tables and chairs. However, in the villages, tables and

67 The coalminers informed me of these facts during my interviews.

228
chairs are rare. But in the towns there will be found one or two benches, tables, a couple of stools or chairs even in the household of a man of lower income-group. The families of higher income-group have proper furniture for the drawing, dining and other rooms.

There is a huge difference in the daily routine of the inhabitants of towns and villages in the present day as compared to the lives led by the people fifty years back. Some of the factors that have brought about these changes are the spread of western education with all its corollaries, the growth of libraries and places of amusement, the influence of the press, trends in the economic conditions of the people and the improvement in communications. The vernacular press has brought about changes in the mental outlook which has impacted the daily life. There have been state interventions and the state government laws regulations in the mining town of Dhanbad. The much neglected villages have now attracted the attention of the Government and the desertion by the zamindars and the richer people for the towns has been compensated to a certain extent. The system of Gram Panchayat has a great role to play in raising the status of the villages. In many a big villages, a Block Development Officer, a Karmchari, a Mukhiya, a Gram Sewak, a Cooperative Inspector, a Veterinary Assistant, a Medical officer, a Health Assistant, and an Overseer, etc., may be found. This picture is quite different from a decade before, when in the rural area the only static official normally was the police thana (station) officer. With the emphasis on development work, the villages have come to play a new role which will continue in the future.

It may be ironical, that in the entire study one has not dwelled on the growing presence of the Maoist movement in Jharkhand. There are continuities between the local state and the ‘terrorist’ extreme left-wing armed guerrilla Naxalite movement, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), in Jharkhand. These Maoists are completely against the pro capitalist government and are the supporter of the peasantry by implementing the land reform policy and distributing land to the farmers and the downtrodden. The MCC gained grassroots support by having greater control over a ‘market of protection’, and not through a shared ideology. This protection is a ‘double edged commodity’ – it is protection to access the
informal economy of the state but also protection from the possibilities of the protector's activities.

Periodic presence of the Naxals was felt during my long stay in Dhanbad for the field work. The effect of the 'bands' or the 'chakka jam' called by the naxals were tremendous and the people of Dhanbad were quite much effected by it. One was often advised not to be out on the field after four or five in the evening as people take their anguish against the Maoist by kidnapping the suspects, calling fights here and there in the village neighborhoods and also the law and order situation being awful, one had to think about their own safety.

Another factor affecting the village life is that of the fairs and Melas. The Melas and fairs bring to the village communities the commodities which have now become a part and parcel of the village households. Articles like lanterns, torches, bicycles, motorcycles, better types of shoes, various toiletries, and house decorative etc; have a good sale during these times. In spite of better communication facilities that have cut out the distance between the urban markets and the villages, the Melas and fairs continue to hold the fascination of the rural public. The daily life of the people varies according to different statuses and avocations of the castes or classes. Rich people, whether in the urban or in the rural areas, will continue to have a routine different than that of a poor man, a day labourer or an office assistant or a petty shopkeeper. In the urban areas, the common pattern of daily life of people is that the person rises early in the morning and gets ready after his bath and breakfast within an hour. He reads the newspaper and then turns to the call of his profession. By 10 A.M. he is ready after a meal for his place of business. In the afternoon he takes lunch either from a nearby restaurant or his servants carry his lunch to his workplace from his home. The elite class people try to show their upper class by eating in a westernized manner with a spoon. Often their food too consists of westernized meals such as healthy salads, juices and desserts. In the evening the person will probably study, visit friends or a club or some amusement centre or spend the evening with a leader, a school or college teacher, a businessman or a Government servant. A lawyer or a doctor will have to deny himself the pleasures of social amenities sometime after dusk because of the demand of his profession. Usually a businessman stays at the place of his business till
quite late in the night. Sources of amusements, such as cinemas or theatricals, will not be
normally resorted to as a part of daily life. Sundays or other holidays are usually spent in
resting or visiting friends or frequenting amusement centers. The office assistants or the
persons associated with the officers, courts, etc., in the towns have a regular pattern of life
as well. By 9-30 A.M. or so they are to get ready for office and after a quick meal they will
be in the office by 10-30 A.M. In the noon they may take a cup of tea with probably some
snacks. By two in the afternoon, they might eat lunch followed by an evening tea. Dinner
is mostly eaten after 8-30 to 9 P.M at night.

A daily labourer in the towns starts his work early in the morning and returns by about 6
P.M.. His afternoon meal is either taken to the site by his family or he carries some dry
food, like *sattu* or *bhunja* with him. The labourer in the town rarely gets an opportunity to
have a noon-day meal at his house on a working day, if he lives in the nearby area only
then does he get a chance to have lunch with the family. Usually by the evening the
mineworkers come back much tried and prefer to rest for a while. If the man of the house
goes for work then his wife takes care of his food, cleans his clothes and does other
household work. If the woman of the house is an earning member then she has to perform
the dual role of taking care of the household as well; something that is quite strenuous for
her.

The path leading to the coalfields are filled with people. There are *thekedar, mazdoors*
walking in silent groups, with their shovels for the work site slung over their shoulders
and porterage baskets carried on their heads, the maintenance workers at the railway
station clad in khaki uniform coats and shorts, office employees dressed in shirts and
terry-cotton trousers.....The miners and the permanent factory workers are the most
fervent cyclist. The deliverers of toddy (filled in plastic cans), some secondary school
students, the teacher, the male nurse, cloth pedlars, and a number of cultivators are
also among the cyclists. All the women go on foot, regardless of their condition or
intention, as do the vegetable vendors on their way to the market........(Heuze 1996:
157)

Before leaving for work in the morning the workers who cannot afford to cook eat the
leftover food, locally known as *basia*68, early in the morning. They work in the mines the

---

68 The leftover food
entire day and usually have midday meals at work. This meal usually consists of cooked rice and probably some spinach (sag) and roasted tomato chutney. The worker comes back home in the evening, bathes in the public bathroom, has his substantial meal at night and goes to bed. His evening meal consists of cooked rice, probably a little dal and some vegetables. The evening meal is usually taken quite early and by 8 P.M. or so a labourer’s household will cease for the day. The women folk of the house keep themselves busy in cooking food, washing clothes, looking after the children and buying groceries from the local market. Each mohallas has its own market which sells fresh green vegetables in the evening from which the women shop for their daily needs.

The average town wage-earner goes to his place of work after taking some snacks, the quality of which depends on the financial means of a family. If he is a mechanic or a mason or a carpenter or belongs to a slightly higher wage group, the small meal would comprise of probably some wheat chapattis with some vegetables and a cup of tea. Meat, fish or even dal, however, does not find place in the daily menu of an ordinary wage-earner, whether in the town or in the village, whose income ranges between Rs. 95 to Rs. 100 per day.

It is significant to note that this district the industrial laborers returning from their work in the coalfield areas and usually indulge in intoxication. About 95 per cent of them drink alcohol. This can be attributed to the high stress levels caused by their work in the coalmining areas where alcohol is seen as a coping mechanism. This however, is detrimental since drinking and eventually gambling often leads to a financial crisis in the families of these workers. This subsequently entails high interest loans from moneylenders and a debt-cycle ensues.

Economic pressure has left little room for forms of entertainment. Also, though there has been an enormous increase in the population, there has not been much increase in the field of production. The wants of common men have also increased without any commensurate rise in income. A lot of leisure time is spent in idle talks and indulging in local politics. However, songs and music remain to have a great fascination for the rural people. Bhajan and kirtans and devotional songs with music have not lost their popularity. Apart from
them, particular types of songs in particular seasons like Holi, basant panchmi, etc also
gain popularity amongst the people. The Melas and Fairs too are popular with the rural
Population. Usually the Melas and Fairs provide a number of amusement centres such as
nautanki, theatre parties, circuses, cinema shows, etc. These amusement centers in the rural
areas are in great demand and fulfill this need for entertainment amongst the rural
population. Many of the cinema hit numbers could be heard sung by the villagers. Football
matches and wrestling are another fascination of the rural public. In bigger villages as well
as in towns there are also theatrical parties that perform during particular festivals like
Durga Puja or Deepawali.

The towns in the district have somewhat better facilities for amusement and recreation.
Dhanbad district has got a few cinema houses and some sort of exhibition or amusement
centres practically remain there for at least four to five months in the year. Besides, there
are many recreational clubs for social and cultural purposes in the district, viz., Union
Club, Rotary Club, Lindsey Club, Railway Club, Tarun Sangh, all at Dhanbad; Union
Club, Jharia; Lodna Club, Lodna; Bhaga Mining Club, Bhaga; Bhartiya Club,
katrasgarh; band Mazdoor Club, Govindpur; Sijua Mining Club, Sijua; Maithon Club,
Maithon and Panchet Recreation Club, Panchet. The student population has very little
contact with their teachers during the hours beyond the college study. The bulk of the
student population fends for itself in the afternoons and congregates near the tea shops or
the restaurants or visits cinema houses. Football matches and other games are extremely
popular and their craze and interest could have been canalized to organize more of sports,
cultural meetings, etc. The towns do not have adequate playing grounds, parks or centers
of cheap amusements and recreation. Cinemas are the big attraction in the towns for
amusements and recreation. Club life has also developed to a great extent. Card games are
very popular. Unfortunately, there is not much recreation that can be derived from
activities to do with the forests, lakes, springs and beauty spots in this district. Also very
little use is made of the few libraries in the district.

Sex workers are common elements of the social structure of the town of Dhanbad till very
recently. A large number of sex workers live here and many of them own pucca houses in
Lalbazar in Jharia, Godhar in Kerkend, Joraphatak and Matkuria in Dhanbad police-station. The areas are however inhabited by other people, shops etc. as well and are not restricted to sex workers alone. This is noteworthy since in the olden days it was not uncommon for a rich zamindar to openly frequent such women and also go out with them in vehicles in the evenings. The women who were songsters were in great demand and were a common feature in social ceremonies like Tilaks, marriages, etc. There were also singers and dancers among them and it has to be remembered that it is this class of women who were both patronised and despised at the same time.

In this district sex workers were not confined to Dhanbad and Jharia towns alone but also some of other townships and large villages had a number of prostitutes. It was surveyed to find out that about 50 families of prostitutes were in Lalbazar mahalla in Jharia town. As usual their places had to be carefully watched by the police since various types of anti-social elements gather there.

In 1956, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Girls and Women Act was passed by the Central Government. It was enforced in the district of Dhanbad in November, 1960. Since the enactment of this Act these areas have been declared as Red Light Area. Almost all families of prostitutes have left this place. The interested people now visit places like Sitarampur, Lachipur and other areas in the vicinity of Asonsol in Burdwan district.

Another common vice which is also associated with drinking is that of gambling. Gambling is not, however, a dangerous problem in the district. It is understood that gambling is not only confined to the lower strata of the society or the criminal class. It is said that some officials and non-officials also indulge in some form of gambling, etc. It may be mentioned here that during Diwali gambling is very common. Gambling involves various modes of play with dices and cards. Card games are popular in modern society. Games such as bridge, rummy, flush and tin tasia are common in these areas. Games of rummy, flush and tin tasia, mangpatta are common in rural areas too.
Owing to the socio-economic changes of Dhanbad, the pattern of social life too has been impacted considerably. The district of Dhanbad has a bountiful natural resource of hills, forests, minerals, and wild animals. The greater resources of the district are being tapped and the district has now a fair share of roads and railways. People from other tracts with different culture complexes have started to settle in Dhanbad and most of them have settled in the industrial areas of Jharia, Sindri and Dhanbad.

This subsequently has had a huge impact on the home life as well. There is a change in the types of dwellings. The furniture pattern in the dwellings of the family of middle class and higher income groups is also changing. The present day youths are no longer willing to squat on the ground to sit and have their meals. Therefore there is more furniture in the living rooms. These changes stem out of the need for a more comfortable mode of living. Along with the other changes in home life, there is also a change in the pattern of food. More people are turning non-vegetarian and drinking of tea being replaced by consumption of milk, milk shakes, fruit juices and other kinds of soft drinks. Restaurants and hotels are springing up in the towns and villages. There are more people now that have taken to smoking and drinking. There is a perceptible shift of the upper and middle class people to the urban areas.

The sources of amusement and entertainment too have changed. The melas and hats which were the old rustic sources of amusements and the communal dances of the Adivasis are more of an aspect of the past. The melas and hats are now visited by small movies, nautanki dances and demonstrative cinema concerns. Jatras and kirtans are however, still there to keep up the older tradition of instructive amusements. Jagrans, kirtans and Jatras are still common amongst the mine workers as they are seen as a deterrent for accidents in the coalmines. Every mine has its own auspicious day for doing kirtans and jagrans. Funds are collected by the concerned trade union members and the workers in order to perform such shows.
7.5 Festivals and their Religious beliefs

A description of religious practices offers an insight into the precariousness and vulnerability of people’s lives in the area. A number of places of worship (temples) exist here. Each is distinguishable from the other by both its groups of devotees as well as by its practices. However the most important and sacred place where one offers everyday prayers is the home itself. There are many temples of goddess Durga, Kali, Chandi and other deities. Religion plays a very strong role in the people’s everyday life. Belief in external higher forces is very strong. This is often expressed by people praying to deities, offering gifts and donations to the priest. In a certain sense this points at the vulnerable situation that the miners find themselves in where death and injury could happen at any moment of time. Mines are dangerous places to work in, and living in the coalfield is extremely risky. Men die young due to either ill-health caused by their working and living conditions, or in accidents. These accidents are mainly a result of negligence, corruption and the priority that is given to production rather than safety. When a fatal accident occurs the work is suspended for a while, and collective offerings are made; the offerings include particularly the sacrifice of a goat, along with sweets, fruits, pure water or ganga jal. Kali mantra is chanted and the goat meat is distributed amongst all the participants. Workers of the colliery including the managers and union people make financial contributions for conducting such offerings. The safety and fertility cult of miners had one of the roots in religious customs.

It is commonly believed by the local people that because of the people’s faith in these deities and their regular worship and prayers, Jharia could protect itself further from environmental degradation as well. Following the vulnerabilities of the accidents at mines, there are a lot of instances where people’s strong beliefs in prayers and rituals have helped them recover from accidents and save their lives.

People of various socio-economic backgrounds visit these temples early in the morning to perform the religious duties. They derive a lot of solace and peace through their religious activities. The priest or the gurus are often permanent employees of a temple, they often perform rites and ritual for the high caste merchants (Goswami Brahmin, Bengali Brahmin
for the bhadralok) who reside in industrial towns. They visit their clients three to four times a year, receiving on these occasions money, gifts in kind and the expression of profound respect. The system exhibits certain features of an ancient type of patron and client system (jajmani). The Beoshnabs, who have gurus from their own caste, the mahtos, several chhota log (people of high castes use this derogatory term to refer to other lower castes) and the 'Harijans', as well as the manjhis do not take recourse to the services of high caste gurus. They have others who play a similar role, but without referring to the scriptures (Heuze 1996: 56). Apart from the erudite rituals developed by the Brahmins and kayasthas around the cult of the goddesses Kali and Durga, magical practices with very concrete material aims are widespread at all levels and within the framework of all castes. To bear children or have a bountiful harvest, and to obtain a dowry or to do harm to a neighbor, are some reasons why many would perform pujas, most often with the assistance of a Brahmin or of a beoshnab, and with more or less deep conviction. There are other religious places like gurudwaras, churches and mosques in and around Jharia. The Christians form an insignificant 4 per cent of the population.

Another characteristic feature is the great importance bestowed on 'popular culture' which establishes the existence of horizontal relations among unequals in certain places at particular times. The popular culture has its origins in the 'tribal' conviviality- a collection of games (cards, etc.), songs, dances, assemblies, discussions, and musical gatherings. These take place among the Mahtos, Bauris, Gorhains, Kumhars, Gopas, Bhunyas and Mochis; they constitute the greater part of the population and the major part of what others may call 'chhota log'. Tribal art, dances and music have their exclusiveness and high development. Though tribals are poor but they keep themselves content and cheerful by their community music, dancing and singing. Their musical instruments such as nagara, dholki, jhanjh and mridang are simple but give a vigorous music in tune with their tenor of

---

69 The original inhabitants of the district of Manbhum had a Jain culture. They are mostly vaishnavites at the present day and abstain from animal food and strictly adhere to non-killing. They have a custom like the Jain Marwari to finish their meals before evening. Most of them have taken to cultivation and they call themselves Hindu. It is estimated by some authorities that in 5th and 6th century B.C (dhanbad.nic.in/gazetter_pdf/CHAPTERS (I-V)/3) the whole tract known as the district of Manbhum was suffused by a Jain culture.
life. Dancing is also a magico-religious means for pleasing deities. Music and dancing and singing start with nightfall almost in every gali and continue till late hours. The boys and girls are the usual performers while the mature and the old are observers. The akhara or the dancing floor is a part of their existence. Tribal art finds expression in the artistic painting on their houses, construction of roofs, rhythm and substance of their songs and the movement of the bodies. Clean in mind and body they have a culture which could well be emulated to a great extent by others. Card games and open-air gatherings, at which one drinks toddy, represent additional elements. The Santhals organise an annual hunt once in the month of Baisakh (April) before sowing of crops in the Parasnath, Tundi and Dimunda hills. Dimunda pahar of Tundi.

The King of God and the Parasnath hill is called Morongburn. A successful hunt is always considered as an omen of successful harvest. After the hunt the tribals gather five seers of rice, five seers of chura (fried rice) and twenty pieces of bread which are subscribed and shared amongst them whereas in the common hunt, a deer is shared by them. On Sankranti day the yatra starts by yoking and ploughing the bullocks and with the worship of Morongburu and bows and arrows. The Barku Manjhi asks the village folk to live a good and austere life. An archery competition is held on that day and sweets are distributed to successful contestants. The function ends with dancing and singing. While going to the forest the Adivasi gets himself armed with bows which remain with him even when he is engaged in cutting wood and carrying timber. The children learn to move swiftly through the dense jungles, to track animals silently and to aim their arrows on birds and small animals. One of their pastimes is cock-fighting on market days in which the beaten cock is lost to the winner.

There is a popular culture for women too, but it is restricted to the local level, and generally developed among the lower castes (Heuze 1996: 68). Every cultural activity which is of social importance takes place within the lineage and caste.
Belief in religion and witchcraft is peculiar to all Adibasis and the upper caste people are not free from this. It is not infrequently that murder takes place on the suspicion that a certain disease in a family or village is caused by a certain person believed to be witch. Whether a disease has been caused by the witchcraft or not is detected by the Santhal through a particular process. If he confirms that the cause may be witchcraft, he then pinpoints the man or woman whom he suspects to be a witch. There are some interesting stories in the Santhal mythology which needs mention. The eclipse is believed to have been caused by a God called Dusad catching hold of the sun or the moon. It is said that in a famine struck year, the sun and the moon stood pledged for the mankind for grains lent by God Dusad. The debt has not yet been repaid and every year the God stretches out his hand and catches hold of sun or the moon in order to be paid back the loan of grain for which this God stood surety. It is for this reason that during the eclipse, the Santhals bring out their stores of grains
in the open and make great noise with their kettle drums to propitiate the God Dusad so that he may release the sun or the moon from his clutches.

It would appear somewhat surprising why Christianity or Islam could not make a headway amongst the tribes in this area in spite of equality that they exhibited and the large material advantage that followed from being converted into a Christian. The tendency had always been to be hinduised and there is evidence that the whole tribe had converted themselves into a caste in the lowest rung of the hindu ladder. This is a phenomenon which in our opinion requires some explanation. Tribals would not readily discard their own deities and submit to a social system which would intrude too much upon their tribal organization. That is precisely what the Christian missionaries demand of the tribals. So far as muslims were concerned, no conscious attempts at conversion seem to have been made for the Muslims who were always in a minority. But even if there were such cases, the results would not have differed was it not by fire and sword. The Hindus, by their supreme unconcern about the tribal deities and organization, made no intrusion upon the tribal world order. Therefore, by their own will the tribals have been seen to adopt a deity or two of the hindu pantheon and begin to claim to be under the hindu god while the tribal deities are also retained.
Photograph 7.2 Tulsi plant worshipped in almost every house.

Photograph 7.3 Tulsi plant, handpainted Lord Hanuman worshipped every morning, Hanuman represented the demand of masculine and strenuous nature of coal cutting and loading works.
Gradually they fall off and are relegated to the lower order and females are finally in some cases practically abandoned.

The cultural aspect of the village life can be ascertained from the festivities that are observed in the locality. Though there are Maghaya and Bengal variety of all higher Hindu castes, the influence of the Holi festival is much less felt and Durga Puja is the main Hindu festival even amongst those who call themselves Maghaya. This is the one occasion in the year which is looked upon expectantly more than Holi, which elsewhere in the west had a greater prominence than the Durga Puja. The use of crackers is so copious that a boy or a man from any other part of India or Bengal will be surprised at the great noise created by the crackers during this Puja rather during the festival of Deepawali. This is peculiar to Dhanbad and Manbhum and not to be found in any other district of Bengal and Bihar. Besides Durga Puja, the other main Hindu festival to be observed in the villages is the Bhakta parab at the end of the year and the beginning of the new year. This is mainly a worship of the god Shiva and almost all the villagers join in it. In some places hook swinging is practices mostly by those who do not profess Hinduism but have pledged to swing in order to propitiate the deity for some material gain. It has been made humane in recent times. The swings do not insert the hook in the shin of their back but tie down a band around the waist or the back and the hook is inserted on that. In the month of Bhadra when sowing has been done or nearing completion, oblation is offered to Indra- the presiding God of Rains.

Villagers collect subscription and set an umbrella near about the fields. Dancing and merrymaking go on. Prasad is distributed. A Brahmin usually officiates as the priest in these festivities. It is distinctly a Hindu festival and has no tribal touch in it though the tribals partake in it with equal zest as the Hindus. The Mansa is worshipped near about the same time. Mansa is a contribution to the Hindu Pantheon by the Bauris and Bagdis. Though essentially a festivity of this class, yet higher caste Hindus participate, and it is usual for even a high caste Brahmin to contribute liberally
towards this festival. The goddess Mansa is worshipped in some cases by a Brahmin priest but where such a priest is not available the Bauris themselves perform the Pujas. In Kartik, Dewali and Kalipuja are observed by all the Hindus and later in the winter the Santhals observe Sohrai which is very much akin to Dewali with the exception that a Santhal makes it a point to take Pitha (rice cake) on the occasion. Dewali may not correspond to the Hindu Dewali at all times. On the last day of the month of Pous a dip in a river is taken and feasting goes on. The festivity is known locally as pithaparab and differs from the Til-Sankranti in many respects. Til-Sankranti is observed throughout this state but differently. The usual custom is to take Khichri or Chura and Dahi from the harvest. In Bengal, as in this part, preparation of pitha or cakes and sweets of various kinds are a main feature of this festival. The idea is to be jubilant about the fact that the crops have been harvested and affluence has been gained for a few months.

It is noteworthy that even those who call themselves the Maghaya variety of a caste follow this Bengal way of observing the Sankranti rather than the Bihari way of observing it. The Holi or Dol is a short festival and does not extend more than two days whereas in other parts of Bihar it is probably the main festival which extends over four to five days even after which the festivities do not seem to abate. As usual all over India coloured water is used but the use of mud, dirt and filth which is common in certain parts of India is not to be found in this district.

The Basanti puja is also performed in many affluent villages in the district, at some places by wealthy persons in the village and at other by subscription raised by the villagers. Though Ramnavami fast is undertaken by many it has not the same implications as it does in Bihar. The Ramnavami processions which have become a common feature in every district of Bihar nowadays are not to be found in this district except in towns such as Dhanbad and Jharia where the Bihari elements are strong. Instead Basanti puja is celebrated on all the four days in a similar manner as the Durga Puja, though with much less grandeur. Besides these Hindu festivals there are others which cannot be said to be strictly Hindu. Hence Bhadu is worshipped by the
The tradition says that Bhadu was the daughter of the Panchet Raj who died as a maid for the good of the tenantry. She came to be idolised and later worshipped especially by the Bagdis and the Bauris. An image of the deceased daughter, sometime of a huge size, is made and offerings are made to her. In the villages there is also Sima Puja or offering made to Rangahari deity by the Hindu villagers. A fowl is procured by the subscription from the villagers and is sacrificed to the Rangahari deity at the boundary of two villages. This is said to save the village from the attacks of malevolent spirits. The worship of Bhut or 'Spirit' is resorted to not only by the tribals but also by low caste Hindus and even Goalas. Thus Baghat is worshipped by the Bauris and all other low caste Hindus. For the local Goalas it is important to make offerings to it in order to protect their cattle from the depredation of the wild beasts. In all these non-Hindu offerings, the Laya has the prominence and this Laya may be of any caste- Mallik, Bauri or even a Turi. So far as amusements are concerned, cock fights provide entertainment to all villagers who keep cocks. Fighting cocks are armed with steel nails or even a blade of knife tied to their feet. This results in death or severe injuries to one of the cocks and the owner of the victor takes away the vanquished cock.

From the above accounts it is clear that large elements of tribal customs have crept into the village life. Many of the offerings and Pujas have strong tribal elements in them. The tribal practice of worship of spirit has been infused into Hindu castes and this has been largely due to the fact that some of the Hindu castes have enriched their fold by surreptitious absorption of tribals by marriage. The worship of Baghat amongst the Goalas can be accounted for on some such hypothesis. The impact of modern civilization on this kind of outlook has produced curious results. The first casualty of modernization is probably the caste system in some aspect. Though the Brahmin in his village tries to adhere to the caste rule and untouchability and affects an air of superiority, he no longer feels the same distinction, nor does he observe the rules with same strictness laid down by the orthodoxy of his caste. It is not uncommon to hear from Brahmin coming into work as cooks, that it is impossible to maintain that rigidity in the modern set up.
For instance, a man coming in from the village for litigation would have no scruples
dining in a hotel by the side of a man whose caste he does not care to enquire about.
In such cases his touch does not pollute his food. Much of the edge of his scruple is
thus blunted and when he goes to the village after several journeys from the town he
is no longer affected by the essential utility of no-touchism. He can no longer adhere
to it with the same strictness, and as many members of the same family are exposed
to the outside world, they imbibe the same, till the principle of no-touchism in the
caste begins to lose its hold on the community. It will thus appear that so far as the
clue of commensality is concerned, it has given way not only amongst the higher
castes but also amongst the lower ones. The Santhals who were intensely proud of
their own caste and would not take food from any other, have in the modern set up
also been finding it difficult and no longer care much about this aspect. Inter-caste
marriages have not come to be looked at in a favourable way.

The festivals of the tribals are entirely connected with their agriculture and natural
operations. In all the festivals a small quantity of rice beer, locally called ‘handia’, is
used by their priest, and every festival is enjoyed with dancing, singing and music.
The ‘Bandana Parab’ is one of the big festivals which is observed in the month of
poos corresponding to January each year. The priest, performs the puja in the Burha
Burhi Than (sacred place ) and then the senior priest performs the puja and thereafter
all the villagers perform it. Ghosts are worshipped, hens, cocks, boars, pigs and goats
are sacrificed and the function ends with community dancing . It is also an occasion
for heavy drinking. The villagers worship Zahirasthan which is the sacred grove
where the gods live. No one can cut the trees of this grove. They also perform Kali
Puja , Durga Puja, Rash Purnima and Mansa Puja . Some of them have clearly been
taken in due to the impact of Hinduism. The festival of Sarhul marks the bursting of
the trees into new leaf and the beginning of Spring, while the Karma festival marks
the completion of the transplantation of the paddy. The Jitia festival is held for the
benefit of the children only.
This chapter on the everyday life of the miners throws light on the socio-cultural lifestyle of the people in the mining town of Dhanbad. The public and the private life of the people helps one to understand their basic social and religious values which in a way binds the society and gives them an opportunity to live in diverse background. The penetration of the migrants culture in the tribal belt of Jharkhand enriches the cultural beauty of the place even though there is always a sense of ethnic conflict between the tribals and the non tribals. The everyday life helps one to understand the people's attitude towards life, work and enables them to form an identity at work. This in a way explains the marginalization of women workers in the labour movement of Jharkhand.