Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis one seeks to study the Gender and Labour movement in the mining town of Jharia coalfield. Jharia coalfield has been a part of Bengal province until 1911, Bihar and Orissa province until 1936, Bihar province until the colonial rule which ended in 1947 and since independence until 2000. Now Jharia falls under the state of Jharkhand.

This thesis tends to sketch the background of the mining town of Jharia from 1895 until the contemporary period. In this thesis one seeks to highlight the mining workers' day to day lives in one of the old Industrial town of Jharkhand from a gendered perspective. The attempt of the study is to see the participation of women workers in the labour movement in Jharia coalmines. The role of women in the coalmines, was heavily influenced by a doctrine of economic pragmatism. In other words women’s cheap labour was profitable for the economic growth of the coalmines.

An 'economic' strike was often considered the classic form of solidaristic working-class protest. As a result, the investigations of origin, conduct and consequences of strikes usually focused on the 'common' issues of the working class as a whole, excluding other issues, such as those of gender, which might be potentially divisive of a 'Solidary working class'. If issues of gender were considered at all, they were limited to questions of whether women contributed to the success of strikes or whether their different and separate interests led them to weaken working-class movement. By contrast, when feminist scholars first began to address 'women's role' in strikes, they concentrated on the conflict of interest between men and women workers (Sen 1996: 213). Marxist and feminist scholars were, of course, divided on whether gender or class provided the primary basis of social cohesion and schism. The relation between gender and class is not, after all, a mechanically aggregative one, as though gender dimension can be added on to class or vice versa. Rather, gender and class relation are embedded in and constructed through one another, through production and reproduction, work and family, and their interplay can be examined through the prism of working people's protests.

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In Indian labour historiography, there is no gender-versus-class debate because gender has been marginal to studies of class. The Bengal Jute mills case runs true to type in ignoring the role of women in labour movements (Sen 1999: 213). The silence is comprehensive, even Trade Union activists, then and now, figured that there were too few women in the industry to justify any special effort to mobilize them. For most of the period under study, women however did constitute about fifteen to sixteen per cent of the workforce. Women, merely because they constituted a smaller proportion in ‘modern’ industries and in the city populations, have been written out of the history of the working class. The specify interests of women workers in the mines are either subsumed within the collectivity of working class, or they are ignored altogether. Another important point which Samita Sen raises about the Jute mill industry is that working class has rarely spoken on their own behalf in historical records. This is quite similar with the coalmines. At particular historical moments, they have found numerous and heterogeneous spokespersons. Historians have depended on the state, the capitalists, the Philanthropists, Trade Unions to write their histories. In the case of women, the moments are fragmentary, the spokesperson fewer, their voices remote and judgmental. One can therefore see that their great struggle has not been documented or talked about much. In this work I have tried to portray the women workers struggle at the coalmines of Jharia.

Keeping this as the backdrop, one seeks to sketch the lives of coalmines workers, their activities, their identities which are mediated by tribes, class, caste and gender. The attempt of the thesis is to look at the women workers presence in any kind of resistance and protest, at work in the coalmines, the women miners’ portrayal of their struggle, how they dealt with the macho male work culture and negotiated with the dangers at work. The way in which social construction of gender constituted Jharia’s working class has had long-term and enduring implications. It’s important to understand these implications by highlighting how the social construction of gender shaped the lives and work of women wage labourers. It’s also interesting to look at the women’s role and position at home and their identity construction at work, their commitment to the mining town and their job.
This study attempts to understand the labour movement in the Jharia coalmines with its overt focus on its gendered nature. Jharia is located in Jharkhand (formally Bihar). Jharkhand is predominantly a tribal state which came into being as recent as November 2000. However Jharia coalmines date back more than one hundred and twenty five years. The two facts are not entirely unrelated. In some sense the history of Jharia coalmines is also linked to the history of the tribes of that region which would become evident from this study.

Records including oral histories, have revealed that women had in these early coalmines, laboured together with men. They did so throughout the world (Gier and Mercier 2006). The roles of women and men vary and women’s participation as producers and as active participants in the Labour Movement in Jharkhand often remained invisible. An adequate understanding of women as labour requires a study of the role, place and space of women at home and the extension of this to the work and community sphere. How far have efforts moved in this direction, would be a central issue in any examination of gender in the context of labour.
Jharia is the fifteenth largest town in the state of Jharkhand and is a major coalfield in the state of Jharkhand, eastern India. Jharia plays a very important role in the economy and development of the Dhanbad City. The coalfield lies in the Damodar River Valley, and covers about 110 square miles (280 square km), and produces bituminous coal suitable for coke. Most of India’s coal comes from Jharia. Jharia coalmines are India’s most important storehouse of prime coke coal used in blast furnaces. It consists of 23 large underground and nine large open cast mines.

The accurate coalfield, measuring about 40 km. in length and 12 km. in width occupies an area of nearly 450 sq. km. of which Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) operates a leasehold of about 258 sq. km. (57 percent of the coalfield). Tata Iron and Steel Co. (TISCO) and the Indian Iron and Steel Co. (IISCO) hold another 32 sq. km., with industrial

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1 In Open Cast Mining the over button or the layer above the coal is broken with the help of machines and then the coal is extracted.
forest and agricultural areas comprising the remainder (Prasad 1989, Bharat 1991 and Sinha 1989). Towns, villages, and settlements are numerous throughout the coalfield.

The mining activities in these coalfields started in 1774 when British came to this region in search of minerals. This had intensified in 1900. The stagnation of the coal industry was mainly due to three reasons. Firstly, since the demand was primarily for internal consumption and the rate of increase in domestic consumption was slow, the industry was adversely affected by it. This can be attributed to the slow rate of growth in industries in the region. Secondly, the transportation of coal by river to Calcutta to the main consumption and distribution centre was difficult. It was slow and hazardous as the operation could only be performed during the monsoon when the rivers were swollen, but also affected the quality of coal. Pilfering was also frequent. Finally the scarcity of labour was a potential constraint on increased production initially (Ghosh 1976: 24).
The opening of East Indian Railways in 1855 up to Raniganj facilitated transportation of coal and led to the doubling of coal consumption in the country. Jute, Cotton and tea industry was also underway and served to increase the industrial demand for coal. The Jharia coalfield was started in 1893 and by 1903 had surpassed Raniganj in production, yielding 60% of the total Indian output or approximately 4 million tons (Seth: 1940, 7). Accessibility of the coal deposits located at a shallow depth promoted production. Yet unlike in Raniganj where both Indian and European enterprises coexisted, Jharia was solely dominated by the Europeans (Ghosh 1976: 26).

With the opening of Jharia coalfield, coal production increased rapidly. Between 1891 and 1901 the output tripled and from 1909 to 1919 it doubled again. Inspite of the increased production, the supply was not sufficient to meet the demands of the increased industrialization. By 1911 the Tata Iron and steel works of Jamshedpur had started functioning near the coal belt. But the largest consumer of coal was the railways which itself consumed approximately one-third of the total output of coal (Gadgil 1973:276). However all the supply channels were strictly monopolized by the British coal companies. This was because the colonial government denied the coal contracts of the Railways to any but European firms.

There are various reasons for choosing Jharia as a field of my study. An important one is its long and rich history. The mines produced around one half of the total output in British India, and almost three fourth of the total output of coal in the province of Bihar and Orissa. Jharia was also one of the chief destinations for labourers who came to East India in search of jobs. The other three important places were Assam tea gardens, the Jute mills in calcutta and the Tata Iron and Steel Company in Jamshedpur.

In the 15th and the 16th centuries it is reported that the whole of Chota Nagpur was an impenetrable forest of saal and other trees (Chaudhary 1964: 46).This jungle provided

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1 Chhota Nagpur is a plateau in eastern India, which covers much of Jharkhand state as well as adjacent parts of Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar and Chhattisgarh. Chota Nagpur is made up of three smaller plateaus, the Ranchi, with an average elevation of 700 meters, Hazaribagh, and Kodarma plateaus. The total area of the Chota Nagpur Plateau is approximately 65,000 km

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many products for the sparse population the land supported; wood for fuel and building, plants and roots for food and the mahua flower for brewing liquor. Tigers, leopards, bears, wolves, hyenas and wild dogs were ‘tolerably numerous’ and various kinds of deer abounded in the Manbhum districts in the 1870’s. The jungle land was being brought under cultivation at the turn of the century. The effect of these developments in the 18th and 19th century led to a very diverse and disparity among most local populations. Jharia and in Manbhum districts were transformed by the turn of the century. There had been further immigration of tribals into this tract from Hazaribagh and Ranchi districts in later period. The trace of the Santhals is ascribed to some later period. The santhals, mahtos and Bouris were the three most dominant communities at the beginning of the century in the Jharia area. It is useful to examine the background of the migrants that Jharia witnessed in the 19th century. Investigation into districts that they hailed from, to understand why they came, who they were and what sorts of attitude they brought along with them possibly will help us understand the sociological dimension of the making of the early Indian labour force in one of the oldest industries of modern India.

3 The Dhanbad district was created in 1956 when the Bihar-West Bengal border was re-organised. The former Manbhum district was divided, most of it, however, fell within the boundaries of Dhanbad district.
Table No. 1.1

Number of Mines Rising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/ Field</th>
<th>Upto 100 MT</th>
<th>300 MT</th>
<th>600 MT</th>
<th>1000 MT</th>
<th>2000 MT</th>
<th>5000 MT</th>
<th>10000 MT</th>
<th>Above 20000 MT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar (Now Jharkhand)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>20000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bokaro</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giridih</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
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<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jainty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karanpura</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palamau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rajmahal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramgarh</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raniganj</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bihar</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Union</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table clearly indicates that the largest number of mines in Bihar coalfields raised 1,001 to 2,500 MT of coal per month. Further, out of 514 coalmines 340 mines are alone situated in Jharia coalfields. In other words, about 63 per cent of the entire Bihar coalfield mines were spread in Jharia coalbelt. Another interesting feature as depicted by the Table is that out of 845 coalmines in the Indian Union about 61 percent were in Bihar alone. Thus the strategic position of coalmining industry in the economy of Bihar (now Jharkhand) is obvious (Srivastava 1970: 18). This also justifies the reason for choosing Jharia as the field of my study.

The largest migrant groups hailed from Gaya and Monghyr (Bihar). Most of these groups migrated as a family, indicating the absence of any land in their villages. The other migrants to the coalfield, those who hailed from further afield, and the higher castes from nearby districts, were much fewer in number, and overwhelmingly male. They came as traders, moneylenders and contractors. No early history of Jharia would be complete without referring to criminal activities of the past, since it is popularly believed that crime, corruption and coal were born at the same time (Barnes 1989: 45).

Mining has been one of the oldest and biggest industries of India. The Indian Coalmining industry is often invoked in a romantic aspect of the history of industrial expansion of this country. The use of coal as an article of trade, it has been argued by some, was unknown amongst the people of India. In ancient times, wood was abundant and human needs were few. People followed the path of least resistance, and did not bother to dig out coal even if they were aware of its existence. (Guha 1973: 63)

In 1814, the first coal industry was established with the opening of the mine at Raniganj in Bengal. The Bengal Coal Co. Ltd. producers of quality coal since 1843, were the first of the Coal Companies to be formed that still coexist today and their collieries can trace their descent right back to the first coalmines ever to be opened in India. The next successful attempt at coal mining was made about the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century. The year 1893 heralded the opening of Jharia Coalfields. The santhals and other communities from parts of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa migrated to these coalfields to undertake coalmining operations. In the 1850s, the foundation of the two important modern
industries—cotton and jute mills—were laid. The development of railways and the later establishment of jute and cotton industries contributed greatly to the development of the coal industry throughout the latter half of the Nineteenth Century.

Ever since India adopted the new economic policies of liberalization a lot of emphasis has been given to the new service sectors i.e. culture industry, ITES, export commodities such as garments, gems and jewelry, footwear and electronics manufacturing industry. The ‘Old’ industries have retreated from public attention but are the vital sectors of Indian Economy. The importance of old industries like coal, jute, cotton, iron ore and so on cannot be overlooked both from the viewpoint of employment that it provided in the non-agricultural sector and its significance to the economic development of the country. Coal is one of the most important minerals in terms of value in production. Railways continued to depend on coal for long time. The success of our Five-year Plans including the development of other basic industries like iron and steel, power generation, etc. was completely dependent upon the expansion of the coal industry. Organised sector workers though small in percentage comprise of large numbers of people and after the downfall of the Trade Union there is lack of attention towards them and their major issues are not been addressed.

One has briefly described both the basic argument of the thesis as well as a broad description of the area. In the next section, one seeks to look at the manner in which tribe, class and gender inequalities have intersected and expressed itself in the labour movement in Jharkhand.

The focus in this section is on the pre colonial period. Central to this thesis, is the belief that historical perspective is critical in understanding the contemporary situation.

1.2 Labour Movement in Jharkhand: Tribes, Class and Gender Intersections

This section would examine the manner in which class, tribe, caste, ethnic and gender identities have intersected with each other and acquired specific local forms and dynamics within the labour movement in Jharkhand.
The politics of labour expressed in Jharkhand not as the pure movement of a defined class, but as part of a social movement in a determinate situation. The concerns of the labour movement in the 1920's and 30s, were that workers were cognizant of nationalist politics, but in their own way, and with the tendency to invest nationalism with their own specific content. The colonial subjugation of India made sense in light of their experience of European supervisors; questions of democracy were translated into such issues as the right to choose their leaders (including the notorious outsiders) irrespective of the preferences of the established unionists or factory owners; and the emergence of popular ministries became for them an occasion to launch mass struggles for long-standing demands.

The focus would be on the history of the labour movement in Chota Nagpur in the 1920's and 1930's. This area is a demographically distinctive region. This area has the heaviest concentration of metallurgical and mining enterprises since colonial India. The core zones were the belt around the Tata Iron and Steel Company in Jamshedpur (TISCO), and the Jharia coalfields in the Dhanbad subdivision of Manbhum. Several 'associated companies' were engaged in engineering and metallurgical work in Singhbhum, which was also the site of metallic-ore mines. These included the Tinplate Company, the Tatanagar Foundry, the Indian Steel Wire Products Ltd, the Cable Company, and the Indian Copper Corporation at Ghatsila. Jharia and its environs contained the richest seams of superior-grade coal in India. There were also coal and mica mines in neighbouring Hazaribagh. Some 1 to 1.25 lakh workers were employed in the production and despatch of coal, the most crucial energy commodity in the colonial economy, for which the chief customers were the Railways, the merchant Marine, metallurgical industries, and industries running on steam-driven engines, including various mills (Simeon 2001).

An examination of the labour movement during this phase illustrates the nature of nationalist intervention and the interaction of state, managements, unions and workers, in the declining years of colonial power. During the eventful decade of the thirties, the workers of Chota Nagpur, many of them first generation employees underwent a painful learning process, in the course of which employers great and small, began reluctantly to concede a more democratic system of labour relations. Concessions were wrung from the capitalists in the course of bitter and often violent struggles, which took place in a context
complicated by the politics of nationalism and retreating imperialism. Commenting on the authoritarian nature of the managerial regimes then prevailing, Professor Radhakamal Mukherjee, a member of the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee states:

> even the formation of the trade union... provokes intimidation and victimisation on a large scale from the management. Workers want to... secure the rights of collective bargaining. But the agents whom they elect or choose are dubbed outsiders... and treated with indifference and scorn... It is the managements' deliberate policy of non-recognition of unions and persistent refusal to deal with (their) accredited representatives... that is one of the most frequent causes of strikes in India, and a labour union hardly ever gets recognition without the ordeal of a strike (Mukherjee1945:307).

The struggles for democratic industrial relations and against intensification of labour were central to the history of the labour movement in Chota Nagpur, and had their own political expressions and consequences. In the context of a national movement committed to displacing the colonial bureaucracy, the insubordination of the working class at certain moments resonated with, and at others diverged from that of the Indian elite, who needed to maintain the principle of managerial authority even as they challenged the authority of the British; to stabilize their rule over labour even as they sought to replace the ruling class (Mazumdar and Datta: 889). If we consider the major periods of labour unrest in 1920 to 1922, 1927 to 1931, and 1937 to 1939, we can discern three recurrent concerns in their agitation, viz., the demand that the management respect their choice of leaders; that it refrain from the use of direct or indirect intimidation; and that working conditions be altered. Underlying all these was the rejection of colonial, capitalist and racial domination. Their understanding of these phenomena may have been partial. In addition, they had to contend with the often invisible forms of manipulation and connivance between leaders, officials and managements. However, a survey of their resistance shows that the workers as a class, from their most backward elements such as miners, rezas and contract workers, to the skilled metallurgical operatives, possessed democratic expectations which had been
influenced by the political climate of the times, and to which they contributed by the very
fact of their combination.

From as early as 1920, there is evidence that the workers of the region linked class
subjugation to questions of race discrimination and colonial rule. Throughout these years
workers demanded improved working conditions, employment security and control over
the work-process. The high-point of their movement was in 1928, and coincided with
strikes in the Railways and the Bombay textile mills. The 1928 strike highlighted
important issues of worker's initiatives, union formation, political interventions and the
stance of government. Its reverberations continued till the mid-thirties. In TISCO's early
years, the rawness of the workforce, the war boom, and the rise in real wages had
conduced to managerial despotism. The American T.W. Tutwiler, General Manager from
1916 to 1925, had tolerated "no nonsense about modern concepts of democracy within
industry". To him, the right to hire and fire workers was a "god-given right" (Elwin: 43).
This right was delegated to "abusive and corrupt" supervisors and foremen, who wielded
"too much power in... appointment, promotion, and discharge". Most senior executives
were Americans, and "the impatience with working conditions lay at the root of the
crisis of the 1920s. From 1923 to 1927, annual production per man rose from 117 to 218
tons, and the accident rate from 3.98 per hundred workers to 7.454. Management usually
blamed workers for accidents, and provided minimal compensation, even after the passage
of the Workmen's Compensation Act in 1923 5. Upto 1924, the continuous process workers
worked a 56-hour week (eight hours daily, seven days a week), with no weekly holiday,
and could be made to do four hours overtime. They got a day off in a fortnight only after
1924. General shift workers worked nine hours daily, seven days a week, with a two-hour
break. Rezas did night work until 1920, and started receiving maternity benefits only in
1929. Daily rated workers had no paid leave till 1945 (Datta:123, Sen: 97 ). Exposure to
extreme heat and gas, sudden changes of temperature and noise levels, made workers
prone to pneumonia, tuberculosis, cataract, cancer, hernia, rheumatism, migraine, and

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4 The District Gazetteer for Singhbhum (1913), reported 5672 as the population of Sakchi village in 1911.
The other figures are from the censuses.

5 TISCO paid promptly in the case of fatal accidents, but were known to delay other cases, through
lengthy discussions about culpability, the extent of compensation, etc.: File 5/V/28. DC's DO dtd
20/7/28
silicosis of the lungs (McLaughlin 1950: 1). Poor living conditions must have made the lowest paid workers susceptible to these afflictions. This may have been linked to the high rates of accidents and turnovers as well.

On 24 February 1920, there was a lightning strike led by TISCO's foundry workers. Emboldened by the nationalist upsurge and a railway strike in Kharagpur, the strikers approached Byomkesh Chakravarty and Surendranath Haldar of Calcutta, who helped found the Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA). The agreement they brokered was repudiated by the workers, who demanded accident compensation, better treatment of subordinates, a service code and strike-pay. Government officials were active mediators. On 13 March, workers attended pickets armed with sticks. Clashes and firing two days later resulted in 5 deaths and 23 injuries, amidst slogans such as Death to the sahibs. Racial bitterness was exacerbated by the fact that the firing had been ordered by Mr Sawday, TISCO's European Town Administrator, vested with magisterial authority. He was attacked by a man armed with an iron bar, and the crowd had continued to advance upon the police, despite the shooting. On 20 March Sir Dorabji Tata conceded wage increases and leave, but refused strike pay, fixed pay-scales and recognition to the JLA. The struggle continued over the following months, despite the flotation of the Tata Workers' Welfare Committee "fostered by the Company", to compete with the JLA - a tactic repeated often over the next decade.

It was this spirit of independence among the men that determined the new political styles of interaction between the labour movement and the nationalists over the following years. By the end of 1920, white-collar workers such as the Time Office staff were petitioning the Association for grievances related to inadequate wages and high-handed treatment; and the JLA was protesting the "gratuitous insult" to its President, S.N. Haldar, in being disallowed entry into the Works. It also submitted a petition to a British Labour MP in December that year⁶. JLA leaders were active in the non-cooperation movement, and the union gained a standing. Further unrest took place in 1922. The Tatas now came under pressure by

⁶ TFL. Letter to Secretary, JLA, by Time Office Staff, dtd 32/10/20; copy of JLA resolution passed on 27/11/20; and address of welcome to Colonel Josiah Wedgewood
nationalist leaders to recognise the union, and TISCO's need for Swarajist support on the tariff question made conciliation possible. In 1924, Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das agreed to support their case on condition that the JLA be recognised. In a meeting attended by Nehru, C.F. Andrews, N.M. Joshi, and Das, R.D. Tata was stubborn in his rejection of 'outsiders'. Andrews pointed out that an employee could become an 'outsider' overnight, (as was the case with Gurudutt Sethi, a supervisor who had been dismissed after the lightning strike of 1922). Reacting to Tata's language, the leaders told him that they were all 'outsiders' and 'agitators'. TISCO continued to withhold recognition for some months on account of Sethi's presence as Secretary, even though the General Manager hardly saw the irony of his own request that Andrews be the JLA President. Pointing out that the Government of India GOI had accepted the necessity of outsiders in leadership positions in trades-unions and had incorporated this in a new Trade Union Bill, Andrews threatened to resign with a public statement of his reasons for doing so. TISCO, he said, was bound to accept the JLA with Sethi on its rolls or as an outsider. In 1924, the JLA made a point of this in its first political statement:

we refuse to forego our elementary right of electing any one as our office-bearer and secondly the election of outside office-bearers is absolutely necessary to prevent the office-bearers of the Association being intimidated by threats of dismissal". This was only one example of the growing democratic awareness of the labour movement.

It would be useful at this point to reflect upon the diverse determinants and forms of workers' interests. They involved a learning process for different agents and actors (officials, nationalist leaders as well as ordinary workers), and were related to highly complex issues including race, class, national pride, sexual harassment and regional or ethnic identity. The heavily over-determined nature of unfolding events ensured that the labour movement ran a tortuous political course, and the urgent need to transform working conditions underlay all its expressions. Thematically considered, these expressions may be summarised as follows:

a) The politics of representation and the question of agency

7 Appeal to the Members of the Indian Legislature: JLA pamphlet, 1924, p. 5.
b) The politics of identity – national, gender-based and ethnic

c) Resistance to intimidation

The first incorporated all matters related to leadership, outsiders and electoral procedures within unions. They included the perceived right of workers to be considered as partners in the production process, and not mere servants of the management. The second theme concerns the process by which workers negotiated links between traditional co-ordinates of identity and gender on the one hand, and questions of class and nation on the other. Here we find that the presumption of the gradual dissolution of conventional identities and their replacement by an abstract ‘working class’ identity, is unsustainable. Seeing no disjunction between the two, workers would often use regional and ethnic identities to build class identity – this is what happened in the 1928-31 period. They were also acutely conscious of their status as Indian workers within a colonial state whose population was undergoing a mass campaign for Independence. Liberation from imperialism meant democracy, the freedom to organise and struggle for better working conditions.

It could also transpire that if female workers (rezas) or Adivasis felt harrassed as women or as tribals, they could transgress the norms of class unity and union loyalty to assert themselves – as evident in the Tatanagar Foundry strike of 1939. Finally the workers’ desire to resist intimidation runs right through our period – it ought to be noted that workers might resent the intimidation of socialist politicians and union leaders just as much as that of the managements.

The discussion so far might lead the reader to believe that workers were always inclined to develop movements along the lines of straightforward class unity. Chota Nagpur’s emergence as the cauldron of mining and heavy industry had been accompanied by an overly subordinate status for its native population insofar as employment was concerned. In the coalfields, Adivasis accounted for nearly 49 percent of the ‘actual workers’ taken as a whole and together with the ‘Depressed Classes’ (or so-called ‘untouchables’) accounted for 87 per cent of those who cut coal. Till the 1921 census, a fifth of the coal hewers were women, as were nearly half of the coolies, loading and carrying coal above and below
They formed 38 per cent of *Adivasi* workers and 55 per cent of *Adivasi* coolies. Nearly 90 per cent of the coolies were 'low-caste'. The overall picture was one of a "coolie" proletariat amongst whom women were present in large numbers (Mohapatra: 1992). The lives of the *rezas* in the mines and on the fringes of factory production were encapsulated within several layers of subalternity. To begin with, they were colonial subjects. As workers they were subject to the general disabilities suffered by the workforce of the region as a whole. As women they were relegated to jobs such as loading, slag-picking and cleaning boilers and were paid less than their male counterparts for doing similar work. They also invariably belonged to the socially stigmatized tribal and low-caste groups, a status which made them easy targets for sexual abuse emanating from up-country male immigrants to the industrial region (Sengupta: 1982).

A protest by women workers in late 1934 is significant for the pre-history of the Foundry strike. In a memorial to the provincial authorities about the abusive conduct of *goondas* and *dalals* (hoodlums and company spies) at the workplace, an activist named P.P. Patnaik wrote:

> They (*rezas*) complain that since they all resigned their membership in the Worker's Insurance Society... their immediate superiors... have always been violently scolding them with very obscene language throughout the whole time they work and for this they have been exceedingly disappointed and depressed in their minds...

The overbearing behaviour of superiors at the workplace was a standing complaint of workers in Chota Nagpur throughout the twenties and thirties, and repeatedly appeared as a motivating factor for protest actions. For the female component of the workforce, however supervisory abuse was only the tip of the iceberg. Many of the offending foremen were Punjabis, and judging by what we know about the composition of the workforce, most of the *rezas* must have been *Adivasis* and low-caste women. The abusive admonitions of the supervisors in this case were especially contemptuous and hurtful. It was Patnaik who

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8 Subsidiary Table 12, in COI, 1921, vol 7 (1), chapter 12.
drafted the memorial, but he must have been prevailed upon to do so by the offended women, whose feelings he described as disappointment and depression (Simeon: 2001). The above account clearly show how closely questions of ethnic and tribal identity, 'outsider' and 'insider' issues were interwoven into the labour movement. While analysing the background of the Jharkhand question Nirmal Sengupta deals with the concept of 'Diku' at length implying "outsider exploiter" as the main cause of the Jharkhand movement in Bihar and three other neighbouring state of Bengal, Orissa and M.P. The 'insider' or the original inhabitant propounded a radical ideology of change and promised to obtain a Jharkhand State by ousting 'Lota, sota and jhota' (Marwaris, Biharis and punjabis) and the ABCDs (people from Arrah, Ballia, Chapra, and Darbhanga) from the industrial area of Dhanbad and tribal region (Tiwari 1995: 317). In the earlier section of this chapter one has referred to the manner in which the aspect of race was integral to the development of both the labour and nationalist movement. Also as mentioned, earlier in this chapter ethnic and caste diversity existed among the migrants who came to work in the mines. It is also important to highlight the fact that the class and ethnic question itself was interlinked. For instance in the colonial period one noticed that supervisors were often white. Likewise the chances of the supervisor in independent India to be an 'outsider' and preferably higher caste would be high.

Late in the 1930's the mood of Chota Nagpur's workers was drastically affected by the quasi-democratic space provided under the extended suffrage of the Government of India Act of 1935. The advent of democratic politics also deepened the awareness of ethnic and regional identities within the labour movement. For example territorial disputes over Singhbhum and Manbhum had plagued relations between Bihari, Oriya and Bengali Congressmen for over a decade⁹. The politics of an ethnic identity for the districts of southern Bihar dated from the beginning of the century. The latest of a series of tribal rebellions had been led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the century, leaving reverberations in Adivasi consciousness during the national movement, with popular folk songs linking Gandhi and Birsa (K.S. Singh 1985: 194). The Chota Nagpur Improvement Society

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⁹ As early as 1925, the Utkal (Orissa) Congress organisation claimed Singhbhum as part of its jurisdiction: All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML, File 2 of 1925.
formed in 1916 by the Anglican Bishop of Ranchi represented a reformist tribal middle class. In 1918 it began propagating tribal identity, and re-named itself the Chota Nagpur Unnati Samaj in 1920. In 1938, the Samaj helped form the Adibasi Mahasabha. The question of an Adivasi identity had become a live issue among the tribal workers of Chota Nagpur by the mid 1930's. As the issue became mixed up with the ambitions of the Bengali and Oriya politicians the debates became ugly. In November 1938 the provincial Congress mouthpiece Searchlight denounced "the enemies of Bihar who have been conspiring against her territorial integrity by promoting the utterly spurious agitation for the separation of Chota Nagpur"\(^{10}\).

Maneck Homi began raising the 'aborigine' question in the second phase of his career, after his release from jail in late 1935. He was adapting to the constitutional developments of 1935, and the growing ethnic awareness of the tribal population. One such occasion was a lightning strike in 1937 by coolies and rezas, over discriminatory bonus in the Indian Steel and Wire Products Company (ISWP) owned by Sardar Bahadur Indra Singh (Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee: 1938), who employed some German covenanted staff. The rezas were especially militant in this strike, during which the owner employed Sikhs and other Punjabis to crush it. On August 9 the union presented a list of demands which concerned increments, piece rates, dismissals and bonus. The rezas demanded maternity benefits and a rest-room for women. The second grievance on the list was that "no chance of promotion is given to aboriginals, preference being given to Oriyas, Bengalis, and Punjabis"\(^{11}\).

The strike ended in a stalemate, with Abdul Bari (who had just made his advent in Jamshedpur), helping to defuse the situation in favour of the management. The owner had Congress links and Bari and the regional Congress were keen to erode Homi's influence. Thereafter Homi lost ground and branches of his new union, the JLF-1936 began performing a conciliatory function in the region's labour movement. The Adivasis now entered (passively, thus far) his campaign to resist the Bari-Congress hegemony over

\(^{10}\) Searchlight, 5/11/38. Editorial entitled 'Must Strike With Rapidity'.

That ethnic grievance in Chota Nagpur's labour movement was already politically charged became evident on May 18, when Rajendra Prasad raised the matter of alleged discrimination against 'aboriginals' in promotions at TISCO.

When a strike broke out in the Tatanagar Foundry owned by Jagannath Agarwala and N.N. Rakshit, it was against a backdrop of a shift in the leadership the previous year from Homi's union to that of Bari, and a concerted effort by management to change the ethnic composition of their workforce. By this time there were 2528 workers in the Foundry - 1736 Adivasis, 530 Oriyas and 262 'others'; a 31 per cent increase in the first two categories since 1938. Nearly 90 per cent were from Bihar and Orissa as compared to 74 per cent previously. (Although figures for the female component of the workforce in this new phase are not available, we may safely assume that this was comparable to the 35 to 40 per cent norm in similar labour-intensive occupations) (Simeon D: 2001).

It is noteworthy that violence and intimidation, much of it directed against the rezas, and some of it very likely animated by hostility towards low-caste employees, had characterized the behaviour of the strikers from the very outset of the crisis. Four sweepers had written to the management on September 21 complaining about threats and obstruction. In late October groups of rezas had been assaulted - which prompted a written submission to the administration by hundreds of loyal workers. The visible divisions among the employees permitted the Works Manager to claim that the troubles had been instigated and "no real labour issues (were) at stake".

In October 1937, seven Congress provincial ministries resigned and the political situation changed dramatically. By November 4, there were 1400 persons at work of whom a thousand were Adivasis. The events described demonstrate once more that the politics of labour was not a simple matter of class unity. They also show that the issues which concerned working people stretched from the economics of daily life to sentiments related to ethnicity and gender. It was, after all, their status as workers that converted

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"aboriginals" into "Adivasi workers". This too, was a political gesture on their part, and not merely a product of the ambitions of politicians establishing themselves on the grounds of identity (Simeon: 2001)

One will be returning to the later developments in the Labour Movement in the next chapters. At this point, one would shift gear to present a broad review of literature pertinent to the study of Women and Labour movement in the coalmines. This necessarily entails looking at different kinds of literature which have been there on the object of enquiry.

1.3 Review of Literature

This study as mentioned earlier is about Women workers in Jharia coalfield. This necessitates entails some familiarity with studies both on gender and labour. Therefore review of literature will necessarily have to look at the broad trends in gender and labour studies. The review below therefore looks at these dimensions but also focuses on the current phase of globalization which has thrown up new issues and challenges to the understanding of gender and labour.

1.3.1 Sociological understanding of women’s work and status

The inadequacy of gender analysis within classical sociology has given way to various approaches analyzing women, their work and status. Critiquing the existing sociological knowledge by pointing out the fact that the knowledge about human behavior is in fact the knowledge of male behavior, feminist sociologists argue for a feminist methodology in the field of sociology. The basic epistemological principles underlying this are addressing the significance of gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life including research, the centrality of consciousness raising, challenging the norm of objectivity that assumes the separation of subject and object and empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institution (Cook and Margret Fonow, 1986)
Women’s wage labour under capitalism has been developed systematically in sociology. According to Grint (1991), there are various theoretical approaches in analyzing women and work such as (a) classical perspectives of women and work where Weber considers the patriarchal domination as normal in the view of male physical and intellectual superiority, (b) gender as irrelevant- in which family is the unit of analysis which provides a theoretical justification for exclusion of gender; (c) gender as secondary or derived from class subordination, (d) Patriarchal derived subordination- which undermines the role of class, (e) symbiotically derived subordination- where gender inequality is derived from capitalistic patriarchy, (f) dualistic subordination where gender inequality is related with interaction of autonomous spheres of capitalism and patriarchy and (h) contingent subordination- in which gender inequality is derived from heterogeneous factors like gender, ethnicity and class but connections and influences are contingently interpreted and tension ridden (Thresia : 2000).

Under capitalist production and social relation, the division of labour at home is closely linked with the division of labour at work place and the conditions under which women enter the labour market (Moore 1988). Marxist analysis of women workers as the ‘reserve army’ under capitalism is closely linked with the lower payment of women in the job market due to the capitalist assumption that women are primarily economically dependent on men and therefore women can be paid less. The gender ideologies implicit in household organization and labour market segmentation play a crucial role in women’s domestic labour and her access to the labour market (Walby1994). The category of women’s domestic, as well as reproductive work and subsistence production is largely ignored (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988).

Debate on role of women’s domestic labour and its value has initiated serious discussions in and outside feminist movements. Domestic work remains “unproductive” in economic terms since it does not have any direct relation with capital and does not directly produce any surplus value; which are the two criteria for productive labour. Traditional Marxist theory has been criticized by the feminist scholarship for its failure to provide a theoretical explanation towards the political economy of unpaid domestic labour since the central concern of Marxist theories are confined to the wage labour and its relation to capital. In
the debate of domestic labour's relation to the capital, Marxist feminists concede with Seccombe's (1991) argument that, domestic labour is a necessary component of labour in the maintenance and reproduction of labour power. But he has been extensively critiqued by them for the theoretical inadequacies and ahistoricity of his propositions. According to his critics, Seccombe did not pay attention to how the role of domestic labour was modified and retained since the emergence of capitalism, and obscured the unequal power positions in the family which derives out of the economic dependence of the wife (Gardiner 1991; Coulson, Magas and Wainwright 1991). Women’s unpaid labour in the household directly enhances capital accumulation by producing surplus value through the reproduction of labour power. Thus the logic of undermining women’s work in the domestic sphere and their underpayment in the labour market highlights the hidden agenda of capitalist accumulation (Thresia 2000).

The global political and economic changes initiated under the auspices of structural adjustment programme during mid 1980s have affected the lives of women in contradictory ways across the world. These strategies which include the cut backs in public expenditure, enhancing privatization, promotion of export oriented production, and deregulation of welfare measures adversely affected women (Wiegersma 1997; Ghosh 1994). The liberalization policies resulted in high levels of informalisation of women’s work and increasing feminization of economic activities in the third world countries.

In the Jharia coalmines, women workers at the bottom of the social hierarchy have to bear the brunt of the negative effects of the globalization process such as increased workload, lower pay, more insecure jobs, contractualization and more stress (Barnes 2006).

1.3.2 Women in Development Studies

According to Ester Boserup, women’s rights and autonomy have certainly not progressed in a linear fashion throughout history. Like the rise and fall of empires, women’s roles have altered according to the predominant cultures or beliefs which have constructed women’s lives to suit their purpose. The impact of higher education on women’s occupations reveals continued discrimination by sex. Ester attributes the “polarization and hierarchization” of men’s and women’s work roles to the maldistribution of technology
between them. On the other hand she also notes how the age-sex-race-class hierarchies play out differently on different groups of women and often reward some occupations while increasing discrimination against others. (1970:140).

According to Karin Kapadia, the policies of economic liberalization harm women, especially low caste and poor women who constitute the majority of Indian women. These intensifying economic pressures are likely to be a central reason for the recent unexpected spread of the practices of female infanticide and female neglect in low-caste groups in India, among whom, hitherto, women enjoyed significantly higher social status than among higher castes and among whom such practices have earlier been unknown.

The interlocking impacts of capitalist development and modernization processes both sustain sex-based disparities in access to human development opportunities (even though these disparities are beginning to narrow) and, importantly, create new disparities by taking away women’s already existing capacities, capabilities and rights. Thus instead of a strengthening of women’s position and rights, these interdependent processes contribute to an erosion of women’s rights and social status (Kapadia 2002: 33).

The resurgence of women’s movement across the world since 1960s has documented how the inequalities persist against women across class, race, and ethnicity especially in the Post Second World War development scenario. The field of women and development has generated an array of theoretical perspectives such as that women in development (WID) linked with modernization theory, women and development (WAD) which emerges as a critique of modernization theory and which draws from dependency theory. Yet another perspective is that of gender and development (GAD) associated with socialist feminist thinking. Since the late 1960’s an increasing number of studies have shown that, the new international development programmes based on transfer of technology, capital and training from the developed nations to peripheries did not produce the expected effect. Rather, it fostered the underdevelopment of these economies. The gender biases and neglect of women in development planning and its deleterious impact on the lives of women in Sub-Saharan African, Latin American and South Asian countries have been widely document (Boserup 1970; Whitehead 1994; Mazur and Mhloyi 1994; Wignaraja1991)
Women’s economic contribution to development has become an important issue at the national and international levels since the UN decade for women. It has been argued that conceptualization of development is based on western rationality and scientific thought which undermines the cultural values and traditional structures of each society where it is implemented (Charlton, 1997). Western capitalist and patriarchal notions of development define development as economic growth which is marked by the transformation of subsistence economy with simple technology into a market economy with complex technological foundation geared towards commodity production. This has an adverse impact on women’s lives and they are the passive recipients of “gender focused development”. The women, for whom "gender-focused" development is targeted, exist in societies that are skewed in favour of men.

Research in social sciences disciplines has tried to address the problem of failure of development programmes to incorporate women into their fold through various approaches. In this regard, during the UN decade of development, many distinct lines of argument were put forward to understand the impact of international development on women and find ways to improve their situation. Advocates of feminization of technology such as Bergom-Larsson (cited in Bourque and Warren, 1990) argue that masculine values underly and determine the concept and application of development resulting in the reinforcement of values accentuating hierarchy, competition, depersonalization, material accumulation and economic and political expansionism. Therefore, redirection of technology needs to be more focused on human growth with values of decentralization, self reliance, self sufficiency and caring rather than economic growth.

Hane suggests that working alongside men and producing as much gave women in Japanese mines a strong sense of equal worth even though they received lower pay (Hane, 1982). A similar sense is characteristic of women underground miners in the US- a modern development since the 1970’s (Burke, 2006). Mechanization and later pit closure, rather than outrage, took women from underground work in major mines in Japan, France, Belgium, India and elsewhere, and paradoxically it is mechanization that now allows American women miners to participate in work at the coal face. Following the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and a sexual discrimination suit in 1977, coal companies in
Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Virginia began, very reluctantly, to employ women as underground workers. Under the slogan ‘Women miners can dig it too!’ these women have survived opposition and harassment from bosses and male miners to become an acknowledged part of the workforce (Disney, 1981)

According to Suzanne E Tallichet, mostly due to the antidiscrimination litigation of the late 1970’s an appreciable number of women workers in west have joined the underground coal mining workforce. However as the institutional barriers to their entry were greatly reduced, those affecting their integration into that workforce were hardly eliminated. When members of a previously excluded group, such as women, gain entry into a workplace where managers felt initially pressured into hiring them, job level sex segregation typically results (Harlan and o’Farrell 1982: Reskin 1988). Thus Coal mining men continue to dominate the channels of upward mobility and to retain the better jobs, while women are disproportionately found in jobs that are lower-paying, feature less autonomy and status, and allow fewer chances for promotion due to both the organizational and cultural practices of the workplace. (Kingsolver, 1998).

According to Irene Tinker in the early 1980s, the word “'women' in development” suddenly became “gender.” As a political scientist, she feels that this was, first of all, a definite attempt to undercut the political control of the women’s movement. One will never have a gender movement. She thinks there are two reasons for this. One is that there was a very strong influence in those days by the socialist feminists, primarily in Europe, who were still convinced that the most important organizing factor was class, not gender. One does not want to talk about women because they are members of all the classes, which is true, and therefore they can’t organize across classes. And there are still some people who may argue that. But she thinks that there is more commonality among women that go across class than there is within the classes, because in every class women are still not exactly equal. But the socialists used the term gender and it seemed to resonate, in her mind, with a lot of the men in the economic development community who were uncomfortable either with the term sex or women and were also uncomfortable with the growing women’s movement. Tinker thinks the term gender was an attempt to undercut the political power of the women’s movement.
Women's studies have challenged the conventional notion of 'male bread winner' and highlighted women's substantial contributions to the maintenance of family, their relative powerlessness and comparatively lower status in education, nutrition and health. Intra-household inequalities both in terms of enjoying social power and in allocation of resources shows that women are always in the fagend (Krishnaraj and Chanana, 1989; Moore, 1988; Agarwal, 1994). The hierarchical nature of relations between men and women is reflected in the subordinated status in many aspects of women's lives in family and society. Naila Kabeer points out that while men entered the policy process as household heads and productive agents, women were viewed primarily in their capacity as housewives, mothers and 'at-risk reproducers' (Jaquette and Staudt, 1988). Consequently, mainstream 'development' efforts were targeted mainly at the male population, while women were related to the more marginal 'welfare' sector (Kabeer, 1994). The analysis of women's work, their roles in family and society and in the development process reveals the secondary status of women in family society and economy. Thus this study would tend to deeply focus on the different dynamics at the work place in coalmines in India and the complexities with the underlying gender issues.

It is clear that a subsequent generation of women in the 1970s were shaken by the absence of a women's perspective in the overall development process and the indifference of policy-makers and planners. As they put it:

Three decades after Independence, and after three decades of planned development, the picture of women's position that emerged was startling in its grimness. [Desai and Krishnaraj 1987: 4]

It is particularly worthy of note how women in the academy were especially interpellated by the economic dimensions of women's deteriorating circumstances, an orientation which appeared to be decisively new. "The marginalization and impoverishment of the majority of women within the transforming economy became the entry point for academics into the movement" (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). In the face of the reneged promises of independent India, it was not possible for a tiny group of middle class feminist intellectuals and activists to refer to the experiences of their worlds alone. It was more important to emphasize the exclusion of the vast majority of women from the promises-of progress,
modernization and development, than to focus on the gains made by a minority of highly visible relatively privileged women.

The kind of supplementary place that had been allotted to women in the community development programmes financed by the Ford Foundation in the 1950s and 60s, which involved training women in the skills of 'family management' and 'home economics', thus came in for vehement criticism. Feminists in the 1970s could now emphasize the utter incongruity of projects meant to enable village women to become, in the words of the director of the Women's Programme in 1959, "a good wife, a wise mother, a competent housewife, and a responsible member of the village community" (Mehra 1983, Chaudhuri 1995, John 1996).

According to Mary John, the whole purpose behind supplanting the older frame of women in development' by that of 'gender and development' since the late 1980s in many parts of the world had to do with fundamental shortcomings in 'WID' thinking. To begin with, there was the limited nature of speaking only about 'women' rather than about systemic relations of inequality, involving the relations between both men and women. Secondly, attitudes toward development itself tended to remain insufficiently critical, when the entire process, and especially the assumptions underlying development as such, needed to be questioned if gender issues were to be effectively tackled. Mary John questions the change in terminology, important as it is, has it produced the intended result?

Towards Equality report dealing with religion and culture, the law, women's political status and so on was subsequently superseded in the major campaigns The more strongly highlighted 'discovery' of women's declining work participation rates and the overall worsening of employment opportunities of the majority of India's women became the basis of ongoing work. This was a product of a conjuncture where, whatever the agendas of international development agencies or of western feminists, feminists in India produced national directives, sought to influence state policy, expanded the scope of statistical data collection, and so on, in the belief that this would arrest deteriorating trends. By exposing the ambivalent effects of development strategies that had been designed without any consideration for women, feminists demanded that policy-makers actively address the invisibility of women's contributions to the making of the nation.
1.3.3 Women Workers in the Course of Development

The literature on women and development in India has dealt in detail with the marginalization of women in the economy in the course of this century (Gadgil 1965, GOI 1974, Banerjee 1978, Agarwal 1986). It has shown that economic development, with its inevitable impact on market conditions, technological options and socio-legal institutions, has consistently had devastating effects in Indian women’s work and employment. At the beginning of the twentieth century, majority of the Indian women were working in agriculture. There also were various women specific occupations in the household industries that were spread throughout the country. The onset of factory based industry led to rapid erosion of these activities for women. For example, in the textile industry, which is still the largest single employer of women outside agriculture, their marginalization began as far back as the 1820s, when British mill-made yarn destroyed India’s hand-spun yarn industry where women had formed the bulk of the workplace (Banerjee and Mitter 1998). Towards the end of nineteenth century women had found a niche in the newly growing textile mill industry of India. But from 1930 onwards their factory employment in these mills underwent a secular decline (Kumar 1983, Sen 1999, Banerjee 2002: 51). According to the census report, the absolute number of Indian women working in manufacturing industry in 1961 was smaller than in 1911 (Sinha 1972).

In the period from 1961 to the mid-1990s, there has been no major change in the level or composition of women’s employment. The all-India workforce participation rates (WFPRs) of women throughout this period have fluctuated around the level of about 28 percent. The urban rates have risen, but in 1994 the total number of urban female workers was no more than one sixth of the rural workers (Visaria 1999, table 26 and Table A1, p.51, Banerjee 2002). Women’s manufacturing employment, especially in urban areas, as a percentage of their total employment, has been going down for the last 20 years (Visaria ibid., table 8, pp40-42). As a share of total male and female employment in the secondary sector, women have suffered significant losses in both urban and rural areas during the last 10 years (Banerjee 1999: 304, Table 4). For the large majority of Indian women workers, the only venue which has shown some further capacity for creating employment is agriculture: in 1961 nearly 90 per cent of rural women workers were in agriculture; in 1994
the percentage had gone down but only to 86 per cent (Banerjee 1999a: 303, Table 3). One reason why women, who are defined as agricultural employment cultivators (as per the census definition), have increased is that men particularly from marginal and small landholding families, have been moving on to other occupations, leaving the family plots to women to cultivate. More and more women thus work mainly as unpaid family labour in the field but leave the decisions about non-field operations, including marketing, to men (Banerjee 1995). Incidentally, this had led to an increase in the sex-wise segregation of women in work. Indian women who come to work are thus almost all women who have family responsibilities and young children and are therefore tied down to their homes. In most cases they enter the workforce because of dire need. Therefore as a desperate, untrained and unskilled workforce they get the worst deals in the market.

1.3.4 Studies on Indian Labour

Dipesh Chakrabarty talks about the Indian workers who did not develop a full fledged “class consciousness” because colonialism foreclosed the possibility of an industrial revolution, or one can argue that Indian workers retained their religious, linguistic or other ethnic ties because it was “rational” for them to do so, that is, the organization of the labour market made these ties essential to the workers’ survival (Chakrabarty 1989).

According to Ranajit Dasgupta, there was no job security in the coalmines before nationalization of the mines and therefore the workers maintained rural ties. Mine workers continued to exhibit features of semi-proletarian wage workers with varied and extensive links with non capitalist sectors in the early mining days. The workers did not adapt themselves passively to changes and conditions imposed from above. They tried to resist the mechanism of control and exploitation of capitalism. This calls for further research on the forms of protest of the mines workers and the gendered understanding of work and protest in mines.

Chitra Joshi in her book “Lost Worlds” broadens our understanding of the development in the plight of the working class and what it means to work in India since the late nineteen century. She reveals the limitations of economic considerations in transforming social identities and relationships by detailing how contrary to Marxist reasoning, that the Hindu
lifestyle continues to trump class' interests. She points out the strained relationships within
the working class between Hindus, Muslims, tribals and migrants and between the
Congress government and workers resulting from repeated government repression of
strikers (Joshi 2006).

Large scale reduction in the female workforce has taken place in independent India in
mining and textiles, the traditional female intensive industries, along with the workforce in
general. Percentage of women declined from 20.1 to11.9 between 1951 and 1971. Even
today in the captive mines of the Bhilai Steel plant, details of the Voluntary Retirement
Schemes are circulated to women workers by the recognized union which is affiliated to
the AITUC (Sen, 1999: 376).

According to Samita Sen, women in Jute industry were never seen as a direct threat to
male employment as in England. Their interests were not seen (except, as mentioned, in a
few specific instances) as separate from or inimical to general working class issues. The
demands for higher wages and welfare measures embraced women automatically, but there
was no attempt to counter discrimination against women. Though unions presumed to
speak for the whole of the working class, they said very little about women. Even the
women activists and the leaders did not speak of the women’s specific problems. Gender
issues were subsumed within the broader economic issues. Only maternity benefit and
demand for crèches were routinely raised. Many of these women leaders came to the
working-class movement from the background of social reform movements or nationalist
movements (Sen 1999).

Women’s economic participation outside the home remains poorly remunerated. As
Devaki Jain’s essay (Jain: 521), indicates, women workers are often described as
supplementary, subsidiary and secondary workers. Vina Mazumdar and Kumud Sharma
argue that the sexual division of labour, a key variable in the subordination of women,
should be considered within the following parameters: 1) their actual role, 2) benefits they
receive, and 3) contribution. Further, they point out that while some levels of division of
labour may be needed by society, the under valuation of women’s work and their
subordination is supports their patriarchal context (Mazumdar, Sharma: 526-550). Nirmala
Banerjee’s essay provides the background of globalisation and the implication of the ideology of the free market economy on women’s equality. She says that the radical restructuring of the economy will have an adverse impact on women as they are the reproducers of the household and are largely confined to the alternative production system (Banerjee.558).

Globalisation is generally thought to have increased economic opportunities for a large group of workers, especially women through linking urban centers to global economy. Central to this hypothesis has been the focus on flexibility which is often argued to bring in more and more female labour intensive organization of production. Though the link between flexibilisation and feminization seems to be somewhat established, available evidences indicate that the relationship between these are quite complex and needs to be analyzed with greater sensitivity. Research on the impact of economic reforms on women’s employment suggests that the process has been accompanied by increasing casualisation, contract labour and home based work; this worsens the conditions of work for female workers.

Another important issue in the context of globalization is as to how women’s changing status has been translated into redefining gender relations. Not only do women workers face low wages and discrimination, but they also have to combine work with domestic tasks. There has been very little alleviation of domestic drudgery both in rural and urban areas for low income women. Increasing emphasis on cost cutting has also led to erosion of many institutions for labour welfare, and women constitute the worst hit of all categories. Much of women’s work within households- cooking, nurturing, reproduction and care services, comes to be devalued as cash incomes acquire greater status than work that does not result in marketed output. It is this ideological construction of the “dependent women” which affected women’s involvement in the labour market on equal terms with men.

Participation of women in the Labour force in India has increased greatly since Independence. In more recent year the proportion of women employed in the organized sector rose from about 11 percent in 1971 to about 13.1 percent in 1985 (September),
reaching a numerical total of 3.26 million (Sathyamurthy: 1999). The rise has been much
greater in the public sector than in the private. But the active participation of women in the
Trade Union movement does not seem to have increased proportionately. It may even have
declined. Just 40 or 50 years ago, names such as Maniben Kara and Maitreyi Bose, Rama
Devi were prominent among those belonging to national level trade union leadership.
There are no women leaders of comparable stature today. Changes in society’s attitude
towards the role of women have not kept pace with the increase in their participation in the
labour force. Feminist also have a feeling, with justification, that the male dominated Trade
Union leadership is not very receptive to a more active role for women in leadership.

1.3.5 Studies on Jharia Coalmines

In this section of the literature review, the paper to looks at various accounts of work in
the coalmines like the nature of work, spirit of positive approach, militancy and
temperament, male female work participation, division of labour etc.

Miners and their wives worked jointly underground since the male workers could not
singlehandedly cut and load a tub of coal per day. On the other hand it was difficult for a
single woman to obtain employment for all six days of the week as there were limited
number of jobs on the surface and underground work was done only by married women
(Mukherjee, 1945). It is interesting to note that the ‘santhalis’ in particular were
possessive of their women and would not allow them to carry coal for other coal cutters.
The 1896 inquiry reported that men generally refused to carry and load coal in the case of
up-country miners. This created a special difficulty, as many of them had come to
coalfields as singles and needed the assistance of women and children of other castes to do
the loading (Simeon, 1998).

There was a shift in the worker’s attitude towards their job after nationalization of
coalmines\(^\text{13}\). After the nationalization of Coalmines there was job security within the

\(^{13}\) Adequate capital investment to meet the burgeoning energy needs of the country was not
forthcoming from the private coal mine owners. Unscientific mining practices adopted by some of
them and poor working conditions of labour in some of the private coal mines became matters of
concern for the Government. On account of these reasons, the Central Government took a
decision to nationalise the private coal mines. The nationalisation was done in two phases, the first
with the coking coal mines in 1971-72 and then with the non-coking coal mines in 1973.
working class. With a government job in hand, the workers became more powerful and aggressive. The women miners often showed their aggressiveness by rebuking and assaulting their managers. Lindsay Barnes (one of the prominent researcher of the place) felt quite at easy meeting these women at work, at the sidings, as they were quick to take a break from the heavy manual job of loading the railway wagons with coal. If their bosses, the loading babus tried to rebuke them or get them to return to work, the women laughed, pulling his leg and continued to chat (Barnes 2006). In the bazaar, the women would sit for hours, gossiping in the tea-shops chatting and laughing at their problems. The union leaders admitted that women were always the most militant section of workers. The boldness and outspokenness of these working women was obviously facilitated by the sort of wages they earned. Since nationalization of the coking coal mine since 1971, the wages of colliery workers increased enormously. Wages alone however cannot explain colliery women’s relative independence. True their wages were much higher than most working class women’s of other sectors but middle class salary earners earned much more yet exhibited less freedom. “Freedom” and “independence” are not absolutes here and they are not terms used by the women themselves.

Both the wages that they earned and the militant struggles they engaged in seems to have given these women the freedom to see movies, spend their own money or socialize in the bazaars of the coalfield. Middle class women may have earned higher salaries, but rarely organized as women or as a class to demand such rights. Middle class urban based feminists display less solidarity or sisterhood than many colliery women workers who were not familiar with the women’s movement. The women in coal mines shatter all previously held misconceptions about Indian Womanhood in general and women in the shadow of the “mafias” in particular (Barnes 1989).

Women in the colliery workforce performed multiple tasks involving simple manual labour such as gin-winding, loading, carrying and screening coal, bailing water, pushing tubs and cleaning boilers, along with the household work. The parlance of the workplace was imbued with gender- women coolies were called ‘rezas’ and in their capacity as loaders attached to male ‘hewer’s, were known as ‘kamins’, a term signifying the performance of service. Gangs usually broke up into pairs; the hewers were into coal cutting and the
kamins walked along distances with baskets on their heads to load it. These women were invariably paid less than their male counterparts doing the same job. Gender influenced the determination of mining jobs and influenced workers attitudes. Although the government had possessed the power to prohibit the employment of women underground for over a couple of years, "the extent to which coal mining in particular depended on women's labour had stood in the way of action, and the development of the industry which had steadily added to the female labour force had steadily increased the difficulties along the way' (Simeon 1995)

The early 1920's saw the beginning of machine mining, the opening of coke ovens and the development of electrification. By 1923 the power plant was completed and the colliery was totally electrified. Coal cutting machines also came into operation. In the process of these already mentioned, women began to be marginalized in the coal mining industry in the 1920s. The years that saw the introduction of coal cutting machinery below ground, also saw the decrease in the total number of women employed. (Barnes 113).

The legislation prohibiting women from working below ground in the coal mines was introduced in 1929. This was the first piece of protective legislation, and is, even now, used to justify women's marginalization in the coal industry. Angela John's study of the debate surrounding the right to women's employment in the coal mining industry in Britain in the 19th century is very interesting and can be drawn parallel to the situation in Jharia coal mines as well. Just as in the case of Johns' study women were declining in the industry before legislation was introduced in England due to domestic ideology rather than protective legislation. So similarly in the case of Jharia in 1929 legislation to remove women from working underground had similar implications. (Barnes 2006)

According to Kuntala Lahiri, in spite of women being part of the mining workforce, it was common for mining to be popularly perceived as a uniquely male world where the separation of men and women's lives was virtually total. The history of early industrial mining as a dangerous, risky, and hazardous job created a myth of masculinity around it. Consequently, mining was seen as a job in which men go down the mines everyday, endangering their lives, to earn the bread for their families. The isolation of miners' work
and the shared nature of risks have contributed to build over the years a particular form of male solidarity that has given rise to working class images and traditions. Women are seen as belonging to this working class because of their men, as McDowell and Massey (1994) have shown in the colliery settlements of Durham, England. Here gender segregation in the mining industry had led men to view themselves as industrial proletariat but enjoying the ownership of home. The isolation, risks and solidarity of earlier mines have endowed the manual labour with attributes of masculinity (Burke 2006). Even when technology has contributed to improving the working situation in mines, the halo of risk and ‘dirty’ work has continued to surround mining (Lahiri-Dutt 2006). This masculinity associated with the work in mining has led to various myths around the entry of women in mines that are propagated to prove the unfitness of women. Above all, the culturally propagated myths are supported by formal laws that restrict women’s work in mines. Restrictions in any area of work for any individual based on sex, race, caste or creed is against the human right of the individual. Such restrictions result in a concentration of women only in lower level, manual, less safe and more insecure jobs. Better paid or technical jobs in mines do not usually go to women nor do women receive training in mineral sciences or engineering. Women do not own the mines due to limited access to and control over resources such as land, including what lies under or over it. The inequity gets transmitted from the industry to the community of its location; the unequal economic and social relationships between men and women imposed by the social organization of mining industry reinforce the subordinate position of women in the mining regions.

The term “women’s movement” is an abstraction. In reality, it comprises heterogeneous groups, some engaged in consistent and some in sporadic action. Action itself ranging from a wide variety of militant struggles with a focus on structural changes to welfare-oriented social service agencies that do not question the status quo. To study the story of the Indian women’s movement, the critical consciousness that women gained from their participation in the nationalist movement was lost in the post Independence period, as the state policies for women focused on their welfare, rather than tackled the more contentious issue of gender equality. The new feminist consciousness grew out of the various civil rights and protest actions that marked the decade of the 1960s. Despite the brutal state repression
faced by the various movements, the stage was set for the growth of the new women's movement (Agnihotri, Mazumdar 2005: 48).

Theoretical complexities emerged as a response to the changing socio-economic and political conditions and newer challenges confronting the women's movement. The insidious growth of religious fundamentalism marked by communal violence since the 1980s, for instance, forced feminists to acknowledge gender identities which subsumed other forms of competing identities such as caste, class and religion—a point foregrounded in the articulation of women from different locations. Feminist articulations during the period, also emerged out of women's participation in mass based movements. Their participation in such movements, spearheaded by breakaway factions of Left political parties as well as those inspired by the Gadhian/Sarvodaya ideology, often defined and shaped the direction of the movements. The leadership was also forced to confront intimate questions of marriage, sexuality and children (Sen 1990: 100). Leela Kasturi argues that although women have been in the forefront of the various struggles for equality and justice, their share in political decision-making has been abysmally low. The reason for this seeming contradiction is not that women are politically apathetic, but rather that the structures of institutionalized politics do not facilitate women's participation. Apart from the cultural and familial constraints that women face, they are deterred from entering politics by the prevailing climate of criminalization of politics (Kasturi 1990: 178).

The period of the 70's saw an increased participation of the urban masses, drawing particularly the educated middle class in the urban areas. The post emergency's political awakening in the country led to a re-examination of the true nature of democratic polity in the country. This manifested itself in the emergence of numerous civil liberties organizations and women's groups. The UN declaration of the decade of women strengthened these newly formed women's groups by providing both moral and material support as well as a rationale for their existence that could in some instance camouflage their own political origin. In the case of women, the disillusionment with party politics led to the formation of independent and autonomous women's groups, drawing, in some instances, women from political parties, and co-opting others who would otherwise have been drawn closer to the parties. These independent and autonomous women's groups may
be termed 'non-party political formations’ and do not constitute a homogenous lot in respect to ideologies or strategies. Some of the groups were the outcome of dissatisfaction with the left parties’ tradition and had a conscious class-based political and feminist approach with struggle as their focus, while others that were the outcome of non-left political and trade union practices had a developmental approach rather than struggle. (Kalpagam, 1994)

There has been an increasing concern for gender issues in development planning and a growing awareness of the need to recognize women’s economic role and contribution to national development. While gender planning is yet to be mainstreamed, far less attention has been focused on the impact of the social construction of gender on women as workers, recognizing their contribution to work, the regulation of conditions of work and the division of work. Central to the study would be an effort to see the links between gender organisation within the private and the public sphere. So the study would be of interest to researchers, activists and practitioners concerned with the issue of gender and labour.

1.4 Objective and Scope of the Study

Sociological analysis of working women’s participation in labour movements, and mass mobilization at different stages of socio-economic formation, involves addressing a vast array of questions. In order to look at the gender issues that have been addressed in the labour movement, one has to first examine why women participated to a lesser extent than men in the labour movement in Jharia. For studying the experiences of women’s group, their struggle and efforts at mobilization of women workers one needs to look at who were these women in the coalmines who had made history? Why could they not preserve their important role in the industry? What were the organizing strategies of the coalminers, and how did women shape these strategies, or how were they shaped by them? Why were the women workers replaced by the men workers in the mines? What is the impact on the families of women workers who are replaced or removed from the mines? What were the economic complexities which led to the marginalization of women workforce from the mines? What forms of patriarchy existed in the work culture and what are the
contemporary forms of patriarchy that have now emerged which allow more public and private space to women miners? What is sustaining this culture of patriarchy? What kinds of family structures, kinship relations, and marriage practices are at work? What implications and connections do these have with gender as an organizing principle in the work place and in the labour movement?

This study is focused on the Jharia Coalmines. Coal India Limited was formed as holding Company with 5 subsidiaries viz. Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), Western Coalfields Limited (WCL), Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) and Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (CMPDIL). Several years later, three more subsidiaries were added: Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) (Rourkela), South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL)(Bilaspur), Northern Coalfields Limited, Singrauli (NCL, Singrauli). As would be evident later in the study my field was focused on BCCL (Bharat Coking Coal Limited). This study focuses on the women in the mining Industry of Jharia. I have tried to capture their everyday life and the way they negotiate with the macho work culture of the coalmine.

Women in the labour movement do not have a very visible presence either in the narratives of the union or in academic studies in the coalmines. The gender issue in the labour movement has received very little attention. A critical concern of this study is to examine the extent to which labour institutions in the country, be they Trade Unions, Labour Cooperatives and Morchas, address issues of gender equity and partnering. The experience of the women workers indicates that women are not in position of authority in most such institutions. Few of these institutions bring women and men together as partners to manage and control these institutions. Greater attention has been paid to redress “women’s issues” rather than to rethink and rework the internal functioning of these institutions to ensure and promote gender equity. (Prasad: 1995)

This study endeavours to highlight the experience of various groups of workers and their struggle and efforts at mobilization of workers. Did women participate in equal numbers and were they encouraged to join the movement by their male counterparts? As far as women in the coal mines are concerned, the view that coalfield is unsafe with mafias and
gangsters played an important role in keeping them away from their involvement in the women's movement and the Labour movement (Barnes, 2006). As Janaki Nair reports on her study of Kolar Gold Fields:

> A gold mine has no official place for women, at least in underground work."
> Several hundred women are engaged in a variety of jobs related to the mines: retrieving gold, pieces of metal, or coal from disused mill sites and cyanide heaps. They make the best of a mining town that has turned inhospitable. (Nair 1991: 32)

In India, for example, women comprised almost one third of the total workforce in the coal mining industry during the first quarter of the 20th century. Their number started to decline after the protective laws restricted women from working underground and during the nights. The masculine image of the mining pits, however, had been constructed long ago, even when the women miners were present there in large number and in good proportion (Lahiri-Dutt and Macintyre, 2006). These pit women (known as kamins, dulangs or palliries in various societies) have been "crucial in building a gendered understanding of mining". Whatever the name, women in the mines have remained obscure, and hidden, forgotten and devalued" (Lahiri-Dutt and Macintyre, 2006)

Whether in the mines of coal, gold, bauxite or iron-ore, women have been displaced in large numbers, justice towards them in providing employment opportunities has never been considered. Women's interests are subsumed into wider interests' and they have never been identified as 'a distinct group of stakeholders' as found in the field researchers of the mining companies themselves.

By and large, the 'women's question' in India has been reduced to and is now almost completely identified with meeting practical gender needs, particularly at the level of gender policy and planning. While individual writings on the subject uncover the ideological basis of the persistence of gender inequities, a content analysis of the state's plan documents, its periodic policy statements, the major documents brought out by the women's movement in India, show the dominance of practical gender needs over strategic
gender interests both in the conception and in the transformation of these policies into programmes of action (Swaminathan 1991).

In every form of activity, be it agriculture, fishing, construction, mining, handicrafts, garment sector etc women contribute substantially to add value to the final product. Yet invariably their work is conveniently perceived by all state employers and unions as unskilled and often as a skill only of domestic value. Therefore they are paid and positioned at the lowest level in the work organization, whatever the forms of those organizations is. This apart, where women are employed in factory like situation, there is the issue of de-skilling of women workers which results from greater access of men to skill acquisition, skill training and skill up gradation. In such situations women are invariably not considered for skill development.

Finally, despite the presence of a large bureaucracy, both at the central and the state levels enforcing a plethora of labour laws, women in the labour force largely remain unprotected and extremely vulnerable. One of the core labour standards set by the international labour organization as equal pay for equal work is hardly met in the coalmining industry in Eastern India. Similar to other organizations, the labour bureaucracy too seems to have an extremely small proportion of women in position of authority.

1.5 Chapterization Scheme

Given the background of the mining town and an understanding of intersection of class, caste and gender in the mining town of Jharkhand the discussion further flows in the direction of understanding gender and labour movement in Jharia. One has also focused upon the women’s work and status in the mining town of Jharia.

The second chapter introduces the reader to the field and its basic features such as demography, geography, and the social composition of the field. The multi ethnic, multi tribal and the multi caste composition of the field has been emphasized in this chapter. The migration pattern of the workers are also been talked about in this chapter which helps one to understand the networks carried over from rural society to the new industrial belt. The
close connection with the kin, caste and community provided a physical, material and ideological basis for political collectiveness and promoted cohesive action.

The third chapter talks about the methods used to collect data, the various sources through which the data was collected and the researcher’s experience on the field. I have used a combination of method which proved the best way out to elicit both intensive qualitative information without neglecting the larger profile of the area. I have used the ethnographic field work where oral accounts of the miner’s tales did provide a picture of their life which any official sources would fail to provide. I got an account of the personal lives of the miners which helped me look into their day to day life.

The fourth chapter describes the nature of work in the coalmines, the gender division at work and the women workers negotiations with the masculine work culture. This chapter starts with the early mining days, where women workers’ wage labour was subordinated to the needs of the household. Their family responsibilities usually included and overlapped with their role as workers. This in a way influenced the terms on which they undertook wage labour, and migrated to the mining town from the village. Work culture and workers movement in different phases have been talked about in this chapter. The caste and the class politics between the workers and the Trade Unions are been highlighted clearly. An influx of migrant labour led to an ideological clash with the Jharian natives. The high caste workers and the Trade Union leaders subscribed to traditional notions of gender roles and disparaged the idea of the woman as an economic asset.

The fifth chapter looks at the safety issues at work and the vulnerable working condition of the coalmines and the workers resistance towards such work culture. This chapter explores how mining capital perceived the connection between safety politics and system of labour subordination, and how the miners negotiated the dangers in the mines.

The sixth chapter talks about the women’s struggle in the coalmines and reflects upon their identity as workers. Even though women workers in the coalmines were numerically and socially marginalized, they did not fully abide by the expectation of feminine docility. Their
participation in working-class politics was vigorous though unorganized. This chapter also focuses on the politics behind the various benefits that the women workers are entitled to. How the company “drew on domesticity and motherhood” in a rhetorical attempt to further deter women from employment.

The last chapter talks about their everyday life at work and the changing workforce ratio. In this chapter one seeks to explore the ways and means through which the working people seek to rebuild social life in an industrial town of Jharia. One has dealt with the family life, marriage, social organization, the religious belief, and the social life of the people in the Industrial city.