Part III: Chapter VIII.

Work and Family:
Re-claiming Human Life in the Industrial Space 1890s–1960s

This chapter explores the ways and means through which the working people seek to re-build social life in an industrial space as a counterpoint to the mechanical reproduction of the work culture of an industrial space. From the First World War onwards the Jharia coalfields witnessed a drive with the stated objectives of restoring a family/home life to the working-class. This drive entailed endowing the workers with, as it were, a ‘civilised life’ by bringing to an end, among other things, the practices of children working in the mines and women working underground. These measures were considered necessary by political advocates to ‘humanize’ the living condition of miners. About half a century after the introduction of these measures, the contemporary society has today come to share corresponding images—a masculine image of colliery worker, a ‘scandalous’ image of single woman breadwinner, and an image of the colliery district as a land of education and money. We need to know in greater details the meaning, function, and the basis of these images characterizing that social space. As the larger backdrop remained, throughout, a conflict between the political and ideological investment of working classes in ‘civilising mission’ and humanisation of the industrial space on the one hand and the reproduction deal offered to them on the other. What was the effect and predicament of their investment? I undertake a critical examination of this period primarily to understand two interlocking issues: the way capital integrated the labour force to ensure its own reproduction, and ideas and praxis of workers to carve out an endurable, dignified existence.
We have seen, in recent writings, different approaches to conceptualizing reproduction of life in an industrial society. One study of the cultural politics of the family has analyzed how the ideas of 'motherhood', 'housewifery' are discursively constituted (Kumar, 1983; Sen, 2003), and the notion of male breadwinner comes to be normalized (Seccombe, 1993, 1997; Creighton, 1997). The protective legislation was, it argued, gender prejudiced, efforts at extension of bourgeois family norm to the working-class, and served in a way to the capital's agenda of rationalisation of the manufacturing labour process. Prabhu Mohapatra (1995) has argued that the labour regime supports the formation of only those forms of household arrangements that it finds suitable for its economics of growth. The labour association acted, these literatures have implied, within the hegemony of bourgeois norms; and workers fell victim to capital's chrematistic machination. By examining the complicated relationships among individual, family, community, worker's association, employer and state-power, I wish to discuss the constitution and reconstitution of the relation of reproduction.

Family structures and processes of reproduction

Historically, a segment of the working-class from various parts of the India, such as Bengal, Bihar, the Central Province and the United Provinces travelled long distance to join the workforce in the Jharia fields, and thus necessarily had to rearrange their social life in a new habitat. Most of the early majdoors, who came from the neighbouring districts, moved in predominantly as family labour. The first flush of immigrants from the relatively distant areas, roughly between 1905—1906, did not alter significantly the balance between units of family-labour, and those that maintained their family back home in the village. Since 1910, the number of single male workers immigrating in began to grow. The single female miners, largely widows and 'deserted' single women, also came to occupy a small proportion of the total working masses by the 1920s and the 1930s (Seth, 1940: 128—65).

I should emphasize here the need to make a distinction between a household, on the one hand, and a family on the other. The household refers to the 'home of
procreation/ reproduction', or as an economic unit, while the family stands for a unit of affective relations, mediated by emotions and sentiments. I have worked with this concept of the family, and juxtaposed it at places with the historical versions of the family and household, as they existed in a particular space and time.

We can identify five forms of familial ties observed amongst the colliers: the typical 'monogamous' household constituted by the husband, wife, child and some other kin; the cohabitational union of a male and a female miner with, possibly, children of either of the two; a single woman miner (either a widow or deserted) with or without a child; single male collier having the rest of his family members back in the bastees; and a single male collier in a cohabitational union with other single women, with or without child. Dagmar Fr. Curjel's report of 1923, for instance, noted multiple kinds of working arrangements:

The Santhali men worked together with women who were either their wives, near relatives, or members of the same village. Many of the low caste Hindu women worked in family groups; but a number also worked with and kept house for men workers from other provinces. Except among the Baurias, no women workers were found living without male protection (Dept. of Ind., 1923: L-920 (5)).

Curjel’s observation categorically emphasized two aspects of social life: one, the importance of 'male protection' in the lives of working women; second, the relative sense of independence of the Bauri women because of a difference in cultural mores. We need to, however, question the discourse that places male protection in the life of women, especially those working in the fields, as essential.

Notions of mutual responsibility were important to the reproduction of familial ties and the relationship between men and women workers in the coalfields. Statements by women colliers attest to the significance of such notions of mutual obligations. Asked if they would like to work on the surface ground while their men folk went below the surface, women colliers in the Pure Jharia and Khatrasgarh mines were emphatic:
No, no; we should like to be together, otherwise we shall always be in fear and anxiety thinking what might happen to them. When we work together, we have no anxiety, for if we die, we die together (Roy April 1923: 511-13).

Similar arguments recur in a memorandum addressed to the IMF:

It is a fact that there are very few divorce cases or criminal or civil cases among a husband and a wife among honest labour communities mostly Santhals, Ghatwars, Dhobi and Rajwars...and this is only because, a husband and a wife are always together in time of hardships or happiness...

Certain shared assumptions underlined such statements. A sharp critique of moral arguments lamenting the loss of family life in the industrial space combined here with an affirmation of family bonds that characterised life in the collieries. To the colliers withdrawal of women from underground work was at once a loss of the earnings for the household and a disruption of the existing notions of family. We will see later the influence of such ideas about reproduction practices on worker’s response to the rationalisation of the industry.

The typical housing units were tenements, known as dhowrahs, consisting of around 60-70 back-to-back houses, allotted to them by companies, or in huts they constructed themselves. One dhowrah meant to house one labourer in terms of living space. In reality however, dhowrahs were frequently ‘overcrowded’, what with between two to three miners along with their families, that is, six to twelve persons living in each of them (Whitely Report (RCL), 1931, IV, 2: 122). The average size of a collier’s family, investigators and observers have reported, was about five to six persons – comprising husband, wife and three to four [surviving] infants (Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. 1923: L-919 (8)). Such a family on an average witnessed five to six occasions of childbirth during the reproductive life of a couple although between three and four sons and daughters survived infant mortality. A few observers have also commented on the insertion of two or three kin members, including the old parent, classifying them as non-earning dependants. Some of these groups often stopped maintaining any regular links with the kin living in their bastees of origin. The overwhelming majority of miners however stayed in touch with their kin and the bastees where the rest of their family members
possessed either a homestead land or a small piece of cultivable land. They were thus located, as it were, within an ‘extended-family’ and moral-economic’ relations. Their home space, therefore, straddled the entire stretch from the bastees to the coalfield. A collier could, and did, freely retreat to his/her bastee on contingency, such as sickness or pregnancy, and decidedly on retirement. The single male worker, who constituted only a minor proportion of the workforce until the late 1910s and about half of it in 1930, belonged exclusively to this category (Whitey Report, 1931, IV, A: 65).

Miners preferred to share a dhowrah with a fellow worker of the same tribe, caste or territory, often from the same district or village. I call this form of familial organization a ‘communitarian family’. Over time, a para (neighbourhood) or dhowrah came to be conceived, experienced and represented as a community space. We hear, for instance, of the Bhuiyan dhowrah, Bauri dhowrah, Mahato dhowrah, Beldar dhowrah, Paschimas’ dhowrah and the Muhammedan dhowrah. This form of spatial concentration of mining classes sharing specific kinship and territorial networks was partly a consequence of ‘the divide, control and rule’ policy of employers and partly a reflection of the social inclination of the mining communities themselves. Some of the employers deliberately encouraged, indeed planned, this kind of housing arrangements in order to obviate prospects of potential class solidarity or threats of colliers’ collective assertion or strike. Barrowman, a manager of Standard Coal Company revealed this very mindset to the Foley committee while elaborating on a proposal for concentrated settlements for miners:

It is essential that all labourers should be settled on the colliery and as near their own shaft or inclines as possible. By this means, the mining staffs get in personal touch with the labourers, and are in a position to assist them in their difficulties ... but...against the combined settlement for labourers...in fear of the cropping up of discontent (Foley, 1920: 68).

Jhaverilall Dholokia, a manager of Joyrampore Colliery, Jharia expressed his apprehension more openly:
Sirdars bring the miners and look after them. We pay commission to these sirdars, and any advances given are cut off from their commission amount. …Strikes will be common and the industry will be insecure in case of common settlement of the miners (Foley, 1920: 82).

These forms of socio-spatial relationships of colliers were coextensive to the formation and reproduction of different cohesive circles along the sirdari and other primordial social ties. Likewise, some miners who preferred to live in nearby bastees, instead of company provided dhowrahs possibly subscribed to the notion of a ‘bastee community’. Santhals and Mahtos often lived together in the bastees. A Mahto remembering his past spoke of how ‘People were simple and honest – the original inhabitants, the Santhals and the Mahtos lived together amicably…almost like the members of the same family’.15 Thus, varieties of ‘communal’ groupings were at hand to support the actual life-process of the working classes.

The most important reproductive activity was the parenting. The bearing of a progeny and his/her propagation appeared the orientation of social life. The reproduction culture associated with the ‘family-labour-economy’ relied on incorporation of maximum working hands, indeed.16 The logic of carrying out responsibility of reproduction, such as parenting, called for some kind of alignment between the domain of reproductive life and that of wage-work. This meant that many in the mining workforce had to carry out tasks like the nursing of the baby, at the workplace (we frequently see this practice today at the construction sites in the cities), where they usually spent between 12—18 hours in a day, four to five days a week and six to eight months in a year. An older child (including those within the below ten age group) often assisted the parent as a loader, water-bailer, shale-picker or dust-carrier. A collier, in contrast to the conventional supposition regarding the industrial society, barely experienced any sharp detachment between their work and family life. Their conjoined production and reproduction tasks, such as the rearing and minding of the baby, certainly involved the loss of some working hours. It was considered legitimate for a woman miner to enjoy some special benefits, such as flexible working hours or late arrival—mostly after a cooing or grinding session, that is—or cooking breaks, going back to the dhowrahs and bringing freshly cooked food for
her family members (B&O Census Report, 1921: VII. Pt. I: 273-76). An approaching pregnancy allowed her varying durations of absence from the colliery. The length of this break could stretch up to a year, but typically, it lasted at least a month or two. Every one of them was not as privileged, however. Quite a large number continued to work for one or the other reasons until close to their confinement day. The majority of kamins could, observed Curjel, retire to their bastees for the confinement-day and the early months of child bearing and rearing. Women loaders like Laki Manjin, Makan Manjin, Sabodhi and Lilmoni, observed the Whitely Commission on Labour in 1929-30, ‘often absented themselves for 6 months or one year at the time of childbirth. After this, they could return to the mines and take up employment again’ (Whitely, 1931, IV, Pt. II: 120--21, 169). The extended family acted as a vital institution of support for a working-class family during the pregnancy and the post delivery period, right through the infancy of the newborns. The kamin, condemned as she was to stay put in the field during this decisive period, looked up to her husband and members of her pada as a support system.

The household for women was not only a site for reproduction but also a place where they were often involved in various informal or unpaid works. The weight of this ‘double burden’ for women varied across social groups, specific cultural mores and historical periods. While the coal-cutting and safety tasks were reserved exclusively for men, women performed both household duties like cooking, housekeeping and mothering, and the task of mining. Men had the prerogative to dispose of any ‘additional’ income and time on gambling or drinking while women were expected to look after the children and run the house with whatever little resources they had at their disposal. It was often at the very early age of 9—12 that this burden was thrust on the women (Deptt. of Rev. & Agri., 1900: 07/1900). This explains why children like Permeshwar Noniya and Uma Deshwali felt emotionally more attached to his/her mother, a trend that June Nash (1979) has also noticed in the Bolivian Tin mining society.

Life on the coalfields offered very few pleasures to the mining women. Occasionally they visited the bazaars, such as in Jharia town or the weekly haat at the colliery areas to pick up the provisions. Moving about in public spaces brought them an experience of mobility and freedom. Contemporary accounts frequently referred to colliery women accompanying their male partners to vendors dispensing the local brews,
Even pleasures such as these remained inaccessible to women whose families—largely from the supervisory and technical strata—practiced more rigid norms of seclusion (Whitely Report, 1931: Vol. I).

Children of mining families grew up on the colliery streets, at the workplace, as also around the bastees. Their very neighbourhoods sustained and perpetuated the existing class structure. As a rule, children of miners graduated to the labourer status, usually at the ‘official’ age of 10 under the IMA, 1901, and 13 under the IMA, 1923. As helpers to parents, however, they started working much before the official registers offered them any recognition. To the colliery operator, the socialization of children in the mines was a positive input to their growth as trained and experienced miner. The reproduction of social relations in mining neighbourhoods in effect contributed to the perpetuation of this specific labour system. Many contemporary accounts present a romanticised picture of everyday social life in the mining neighbourhood, as though the mere presence of women and children constituted a happy family life. Kamini Roy, for instance, observed in 1923:

...When they go to market, husband and wife go together, taking their children along with them. It is pleasant to watch the whole family, including at times a small child on the shoulder of the father and a still smaller in the arms of the mother, and some bigger ones, all marching back with rice and earthen pots and pans and whatever other purchases they have made, all happy and laughing. I think the nearness of wife and children cannot but be a check to a man’s irregular habits, drunkenness and immorality, and check also to the reckless waste of his and his wife’s hard earned money (Modern Review, 1923).

Such idealized representations of family outings glossed over the hazardous life that awaited toddlers and young children in the mines. According to the dominant bourgeois economic theory, low labour productivity is the key reason for the employment of children (Kerr 1997). Such an argument, I suggest, overlooks the fact that the operator paid the working family a wage below the marginal product of labour in the collieries (Chapter ‘Reproduction...’).

How did kamins experience life and work in the coalfields? We have seen that during pregnancy the kamins could go back to the bastees without any risk of losing their
livelihood once they got back. This privilege was applicable to child rearing and other housekeeping activities as well. S/he does not appear, therefore, to see the relationship between the mining and the reproduction responsibilities as antithetical. The cutting and the loading of coals were part of a continuum that also included acts of minding, parenting and amusing children. As L. Barnes (1989) noted, women workers, often narrated 'with joy the work they did below ground, the people they worked with, members of their gang, and how they used to sing and work'. Thus, just as in the pre-colliery days of artisanal and agricultural work, women miners seamlessly negotiated the demands of early pregnancy with those of wage work.

This picture of 'accommodative' industrial relations did not really go deep enough. In actuality, what appeared as mining 'social mores' embodied painful obstacles. A kamin found it doubly painful to continue to perform wage-work during pregnancy, the degree of physical discomfort escalating as she approached the confinement day, often resulting in an unusually high infant mortality rate. The results of an enquiry carried out by Curjel in 1923 among 107 women workers found the death rate among children born at the colliery disproportionately higher than children born in villages. If the birth rate among women settled in the colliery was high, the number of unsuccessful pregnancies and child deaths was no less. The mothers who managed to stop working after confinement for at least a month, were generally found healthy, but not every mother was as fortunate.
Healthy and ‘un-stunted’ children growing up in the mines were more of an exception than a rule, Curjel observed. She noted how puzzled she was to see healthy Santhal children going underground with parents and how she found, on inquiring, that they spent most of the year in their village homes and only a short period in the mines. Infants, whose mothers worked underground, were the worst affected by lack of nourishment. Again, young children who remained above ground were generally healthier, with a lower incidence of skin infections, than those who went underground with their parents.

Notwithstanding the precariousness of work in the mines, the work time regime in the mines, as distinct from factories, appeared more flexible and favourable to family life. With strategic tools like flexible-time regimes and the employment of family labour, capital sought to maximize supply of labour and minimize the cost. The employer focused on the magnitude of coal extraction rather than its swiftness. In other words, the exploitation of labour-power rather than intensity of work characterized the production-process. Jharia coalfields contradict the conventional understanding that industrialization leads to a cleavage between the temporal organization of home and wage-labour. Here the miners did their best to retain an effective control on the labour process, precisely through a clever manipulation of this division between home and wage labour. This, in

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Table I:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. of Mothers</th>
<th>No. of Children born alive</th>
<th>No. of Children who have since died</th>
<th>No. of children who were born on colliery</th>
<th>No. of Children born on a colliery and now dead</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers go home at least once a year</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>64 (29%)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers settled on a colliery or go home only at long intervals</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>46 (40%)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>44 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Curjel’s Report (Deptt. of Industries, March 1923). [These incidences of destruction of humanity was not marred by the other story of fatality occurred to the children accompanying their parents underground or on the surface.]
turn, enabled them to work out a *equilibrium* between family life and labour, howsoever fragile it might be.

The industry organised work in the mines in two ways in the mines. First, there was the gang system, popularly known as the ‘family gang’ system, which was the predominant form of work unit in the Jharia and the Raniganj fields until the 1920s. The second system also employed miners who were part of a family in a particular colliery, but allocated them different jobs. In this case, the individual member was paid for his or her labour separately. Apart from these, there were single male and female workers, outside gangs, who received payment individually. Three defining features of the family gang practice must be noted: (a) a family gang included a man and woman, and children and (b) it had a particular ‘familial-communitarian’ dimension. It included a pair of coal-cutters (*malcutta*), a loader and a trammer, and was composed of man and woman from a broad *socio-familial grouping*. Dagmar Engels (1993) has shown in the case of the Raniganj coalfields and the Darjeeling tea gardens that the family gangs working there consisted of couples who were not necessarily husband and wife. Likewise, evidence for the Jharia coalfields shows that the ties that bound men and women in the gangs to each other were not exclusively marital. For instance, a special investigation by the Chief Inspector of Mines in October 1925 showed that out of a sample of 7000 women in the Jharia and Ranigungee coalfields, about 49 percent were working with their husbands, 29 percent with their relatives and about 22 percent were unattached. ‘It has been usual to see,’ the chief inspector observed, ‘two woman workers loading coal for four to six persons’.

The other characteristic feature of these gangs was the communitarian constitution of the familial-grouping. Colliers preferred to work with members of their community. As in the *dhorrarahs* where they lived, ideas of community in these gangs too were not formed strictly along caste or religious lines. The *ilaka* or *gaon bhai* (fraternity) was integral to their notion of community. The *kamins*, working underground in the 1910s and 1920s, refused to work alongside any male worker other than members of their familial grouping. The *kamins* from groups like the Santhals, Dusadhs, Rajwars, Mahtos, Bhuiyans, Bilaspuris, and the Mushahars refused to work as loaders alongside
the Paschima (up-country) male miner. Over time, however, some kamins, particularly from the Bauris, agreed to work with Paschima male miners. The familial nexus between the members shaped the manner of task allocation and payment distribution in a gang. Payment was made to the gang sirdar or head of the family in a household-based gang, rather than to each member. In case of the non-family gangs, men and women were paid together in terms of the amount of coal they cut and loaded.

Gender and age were key considerations in the distribution of tasks within a gang. The number of members in each dangal (gang) consisted of 6-12 colliers: the malcutta, loader, trammer, and mining sirdar. The male member normally works as malcutta, the women and the children largely work as loaders, trammers, water-bailers. Male workers dug and blasted coal while kamins carried baskets loads, weighing around 60-80 lbs, on their heads or clutched at their waist, to tubs on a trolley line, or to bullock carts located at a distance. Kamins then had to push the tubs to the bottom of the pit, from where gin-girls pulled them up to the surface. Sometimes, they carried baskets on their heads all the way up to the surface. Under normal conditions, a malcutta and loader pair cut and loaded, on an average, between two to four tubs of coal, in a workday of 12 to 18 hours. (Chapter, ‘Work, Time...’).

In regard to surface work, the family gang was involved in digging and removing the earth. The women and the children were the carriers, while the men did the digging. Labouring people from regions like Orissa, Nagpur and Bilaspuris preferred this work. When members of the mining family worked separately, the men usually worked underground as timber-mistries, railway line mistries, and women and children worked as loaders, wagon-loaders, shale-pickers and wooden-ginners. According to Kerr (1997), a similar organisation of labour, called ‘family-labour-economy’, an established pattern since mid nineteenth century, characterized railway constructions.

Low agency costs and tradition of family-labour-economy lay at the core of this system based on the employment of the family labour and handicraft-type labour process. Such a system allowed both miner and employer much room for negotiation, with the objective of working out ‘flexible’ yet ‘endurable’ arrangements. Within this overall framework, adjustments such as attending to domestic tasks including minding children, housekeeping and mothering in between work time, were not seen as disruptive.
Responding to an inquiry into the use of child labour in the mines, Jhaverilall Dholokia, a manager of Joyrampore Colliery, responded: ‘It is impossible...How can children be left back? In this way they lose their liberty’. Capital, in other words, preferred to employ family labour without paying a ‘family-wage’, going against proposed legislations restricting the recruitment of women and children (Chapter Wage Politics...’). ‘Flexible’ work time arrangements deployed in the mines therefore served a double purpose. On the one hand, they ensured steady supply of cheap labour in greater numbers, and on the other, they served as strategies to accommodate the temporal rhythms of colliers’ lives.

Colliers struggled in various ways to try to re-fashion relations and their living conditions in their new habitat. Certain notions of a family wage and family-labour-economy were important in shaping their actions. In 1920, miners in the Standard and Kirkend collieries went on strike and in 1921, there was a general strike lasting almost a week. Miners demanded improved wage rates, regulation of work-time and an end to maltreatment of workers, but no demands for a family wage. The ‘communal and familial’ gang system, in the mines, as Simeon (1984) has suggested, virtually acted as a wage-deflationary institution, and served as an instrument of exploitation. A collective family earning could nonetheless provide a minimum ‘subsistence’. However, single women working as loaders, trammers and shale-pickers in the mines, found it much more difficult to manage the household economy (Dagmar Engels, 1993). The family-labour system allowed colliers to earn a little more, just about the bare minimum to discharge their parental and other social duties. There were instances when male colliers exercised their prerogative to reserve jobs for women employable with them. Likewise, women miners affirmed their right to choose whom they worked with. An Indian Mining Association preview survey in the 1920s regarding to the proposal of withdrawing women from underground mining found widespread opposition among colliers against such a move. They withheld their consent, unless promises of an upward revision of the male workers wages were forthcoming.

The reproductive life was harsh and tough in the industrial space since it was not considered necessary to support the creation of a new generation of proletariat within its immediate boundaries. The limits and contradictions inherent within such a bourgeois reproduction-deal came to the fore soon enough. It is not as though miners were
physically prevented from bearing children within the premises of the mines. The inhospitality showed up more in the guise of bacteria, germs, rats, contaminated water and soil, unsanitary spaces, epidemics, all wreaking havoc on the unsuspecting bodies of mining wo/men and children. Between them, the deaths and mass exodus that followed in the wake of a plague epidemic in 1906-7 and of cholera in 1907-8 took a toll of several thousands, deaths alone running well over a thousand. Faced with the prospect of losing out on profits during the trade boom in 1906-8, some operators woke up to the threats that besieged the fragile bodies of colliers. A few big operators gradually developed a plan for better living conditions for miners. The plan proposed to replace makeshift straw and thatch accommodations with brick built structures and to make available filtered and chlorated drinking water in place of the pond water or khadan (pits) water. Other provisions of the plan included regular sanitary inspection by the local conservancy committee and the operationalization of a colliery dispensary as a substitute for the Ojhas (the quacks) and the Hakims (the Unani or Ayurvedic medicine practitioner), to whom the sick miners always ran for medical treatment. In 1909, The Indian Mines Association (IMA: Organisation of operators active since 1892) and the Manbhum District Board built a hospital having one dozen beds at Dhanbad. The grave threats to the industry caused by repeated bouts of cholera which, for instance, caused 214 deaths and affected over thousands in 1913, along with recurrent outbreaks of smallpox and plague, reinforced this new industrial sensibility that called for some ameliorative measures. Subsequently, the Jharia Health Board (JHB, 1914) and Jharia Water Board (JWB, 1915) were formed under Bengal Mining Settlement Act, 1912, and Bihar and Orissa Mining Settlement Act, 1919-20 (for housing) respectively. These legislative interventions addressed two basic structural constraints through setting up dedicated institutions. The first constraint pertained to the necessary limitations, budgetary and otherwise, of isolated individual initiatives and the second was the threat that the stubborn indifference of a large number of small and medium proprietors to the unsanitary and unhealthy conditions posed to the neighbouring colliery populace. This was clearly an instance of the state-power, which had so far only levied excise duties and other charges on the coal trade, stepping in to bail out the errant proprietors on both counts. Likewise, it saved the big, better-variety coal-producing proprietors from the
menace of the soaring labour price in 1917-18, when a large number of competing small collieries entered the field. This the state did by refusing to purchase coal from the latter collieries, in effect forcing labourers to return to the big pit with only a marginal increase in the wage rates (Deptt. of Commerce and Industry 1917: F/no.20, 3). On two occasions, in 1915-6 and again in 1923-4, the state gave the industry the necessary loans on nominal interest rates to undertake the construction of Topchhanchi reservoir and other pipelines to ensure the supply of safe drinking water (Deptt. of Finance 1922: 676-77). Hence, it would be an oversight to study reproduction relations without taking into account the ideological and political character of state-power and their implications in this context.

The Jharia Health and Water Boards did initiate some measures to improve the infrastructure related to the provision of drinking water, housing, health and sanitation and maternity and child welfare. However, lack of adequate financial resources forced them to act only in fits and starts, their activities coming to an abrupt halt during the great depression. Subsequently, the popular ministry led by the National Congress, not convinced with the finding of Royal Commission on Labour (Whitely Report) prepared in 1931, initiated a fresh enquiry in 1938 with Dr. Rajender Prasad, who was then an Executive Committee member of the Congress, heading the committee. Prasad Committee report brings out several important details. From the perspective of health, as late as in 1938-9, the housing arrangements remained, ‘insufficient’ in terms of both number and living space. Even the best efforts to provide housing managed to construct not more than one-third to one-half dhowrahs in proportion to the total workforce. Hence, between two and three families shared a single room, and in cases where a single male collier occupied it, there would be roughly one dozen males sharing a room. The situation was worse in the small establishments.

A little more than a dozen collieries provided primary school facility in their vicinity. However, these schools were the preserve of the babus, who managed them and did their best to keep children of direct producers away from these, citing either the low caste status or the allegedly ‘uncared’ bodies of these children. Barely seven percent children of the mining people including those of the babus attended schools. The fragile
economic condition of the direct producers demanded that their young children (i.e. under thirteen age group) generate supplementary earnings, notwithstanding despite the prohibition on their employment introduced since 1923. These children usually worked as coal-dust carrier, domestic servant and herder.

About half a dozen collieries provided dispensary or hospital, and maternity and child welfare benefits. The Jealgora group formed a contributory benefit-fund which offered support to miners on occasions of marriage, birth and death ceremonies. About a dozen big establishments like the TISCO (Jamadoba and Malkera groups), the Eastern Coal Company (Bhowra, Amlabad and Potkee groups) and the Ranigunjee Coal Association (Kustore) which had accesses to secure coal markets, eventually developed these fringe benefits as part of a reproduction support system. Such steps were motivated by their need for stable, contented and experienced labour forces in order to mitigate the impact of seasonal fluctuations as also the losses caused by accidents. We can call it a modern industrial reproduction deal. They also invested in technology to improve efficiency (Prasad Report (BLEC), 1941, II, A: 324, 380-88). Hence, these collieries saw to it that a core of the total employed persons became part of a stable and dependent workforce willing, and fit enough, to provide uninterrupted output across seasons.

These measures then produced two connected developments. First, a core of employed persons eventually became stable workers who worked alongside a set of 'casual' complementary workers. Both as a whole, however, found the housing facilities offered them were quite inadequate. Second, the dependency of stable miners effectively required them to meet all their needs with income from colliery alone. Let us not forget that the cost of living in 'the fields was higher than that in their bastees. Even though these miners were appreciative of the role the reproduction support system played in reducing the cost of living, they knew too that it could not help them offset a number of other, basic, costs of social and cultural life. The dependent workers along with other non-beneficiaries went in struggles precisely in those establishments to demand adequate income and supporting facility.

Overall, Jharia mines worked on the principle of a continuous renewal of workforce through a supply of fresh immigrants replacing old and worn out hands.35 In
order for such a policy to run successfully, it was necessary to continue to expand the
zone of labour recruitment, that is, to keep finding new areas from which to recruit
labour. The modern industrial reproduction deal, as we shall see, however, gradually led
to the emergence of a ‘surplus population’ in a few collieries. Given such a perpetually
high labour demand, investigator like Curjel was struck by the lack of concern for the
high rate of infant mortality in mining families. In public statements, colliery owners like
Seth Ramjash Agarwalla was effusive in their concern for the living condition of miners.
In an address to the second session of the AITUC in Jharia in November 1921, he self-deprecatingly acknowledged the responsibility of mine owners in creating these conditions:

...we who only wring money from your misery and degradation from year's end to year's end? You
are none of us. Ours aim is only to overwork you, to wither your flesh and to weary your bones and to
turn you on the street when you are past all use. You must think out your own problems. This is the
why this Congress has been called (Deptt. of Ind., 1923: L- 1028).

This period was characterized by nationalist attempts to mobilize the representatives of
Indian capital and workers under the umbrella of a common struggle against British
imperialism. Capitalists like Agarwalla gladly teamed up with nationalists in their
opposition to the discriminatory ‘laissez-faire’ economic policies of the colonial state.
Yet even colliery owners like him did not quite support the idea of state intervention
leading to restrictions on or regulation of work in the mines. On maternity legislation, for
instance, his reservations were categorical:

The state may kindly step in and stop her going to work. But, that is easy philanthropy. Where is
the money to come from to meet the daily expenditure, let alone the expenses of confinement?
(Deptt. of Ind., 1923: L- 1028).

Such ‘Capitalist’ notion of profit making, expressing a continuum of a ‘mercantilist
capitalist’ preference, characteristic of the Jharia coalfields, was however common to
most contemporary mining societies in the colonial world, such as in Transvaal in South
Africa and the Rhodesian mines in Zimbabwe (Alexander (2007), Onselen (1976)). Such
reproduction regime was rooted in an ideology that promoted the belief that the
responsibility of taking care of any ‘non-working’ pregnant woman and child, or for that matter any sick or old non-earning member rested exclusively with the family and its breadwinner. In the industrial context in India, the assumption underlying much official and non-official discourse was that the extended family in the bastees in villages would provide for the necessary support for the aged and infirm and for pregnant women. Within such a perspective, proposals for maternity benefit were seen as alien or Western (Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. 1925: L- 1150 (9)).

The liberalisation of reproduction deal

By the 1920s, there arose a significant difference in the approaches of big companies, predominantly European owned and Indian ones like TISCO, i.e. those represented by the IMA and those of other Indian companies represented by the IMF. The former agreed in principle to the prohibition of children from the mines and of women from underground work, and to the introduction of maternity and child welfare initiatives. However, they demanded more time for the implementation of these measures. The latter, on the other hand, continued in their opposition to such proposals. The IMA began to empathise with arguments for reform and the need for raising the standard of life of Indian labourers, articulated by organizations like the ILO. The IMF, in contrast, strongly opposed restrictive regulations, arguing that the ‘social and moral mores’ of Indian miners – particularly those from the aboriginal groups – were different from those of western labourers.

The public criticism began to mount, in the aftermath of WWI, against the ‘inhuman’ treatment meted out to workers in the factory and mines. The instances of a high mortality rate, infant and maternal mortality, and the lack of opportunity for education and cultural growth in the working-class proved to be great material for the political publicist. In 1919-22, the Workers Welfare League of India (WWLI: London), a participant body in the convention of the ILO, brought to India the calls for measures to develop welfare facilities for child-care and schooling and provisions for housing. The other demands, which it voiced loud and clear, were reduction in working hours, equal wages to women and barring women and children from dangerous work sites.36
Association like the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and its associates, Indian Colliery Employees Association (ICEA), too, pressed for reforms. Political activists like N.M. Joshi, Chaman Lal and Pd. Krishna Kant Malaviya\(^\text{37}\) engaged in lively debates on issues concerning workers’ welfare in the early 1920s. They pressed for a ratification of the ILO conventions and legislative interventions to provide for maternity care, crèches, sickness, old age and unemployment-related insurance schemes, together with measures to improve wage rates, equal wage to woman, housing and schooling.\(^\text{38}\) Civil society groups like the Women Indian Association, Gujarati Hindu Stri Mandal, Jain Mahila Samaj, Young Women’s Christian Association and the Bhaginin Samaj endorsed initiatives like the Maternity Bill introduced by Joshi in the central legislative assembly in 1924 (Dept. of Ind. and Lab., 1925: L- 1150 (9)). It was in response to these pressures that the Curjel Enquiry Committee was constituted in 1922-23.

In this context, particularly significant were the public debates and movements concerning the question of ‘civilizing’ or ‘humanizing’ the worker’s reproductive life. The cultural politics at stake in these debates revolved around three broad approaches to organizing the reproductive life of the workers. One set of arguments promoted the new idea that a well managed and stable reproductive life was integral to the emergence of ‘advancing and healthy humanity’. The broader philosophy that underlaying this approach was that children as such should be free to participate in schooling and other creative exercises and that mothers should receive protection from hazardous occupation. ‘Humanised’ life, in other words, was defined by this approach as the ability of a person to freely participate in various cultural, intellectual and political activities. It required therefore that the family or domestic life should be a caregiving and jovial experience for a worker so that s/he remained healthy, pursued wholesome social life and undertook wage work more efficiently. The logic of this approach further required that, ideally, women revert from the coarse domain of mills and mines back within the protected precincts of the home and help generate a healthy and efficient worker cum citizen. To meet such an end, went the argument, it was necessary to make the reproduction of labourer independent of wage-centred everyday labour. Reproduction of labour was sought to be released from it dependence on capitalist relations of production. This objective was to be achieved by setting up institutional support systems to the
reproduction needs of the workers, known otherwise as social insurance programmes. Now such institutions could come into being either in the wake of general protective legislations or be funded by the state or the industry on specific cases. Irrespective of the way these programmes came into being, the ideology that supported them was clearly a movement away from the tradition of family-labour-economy and the attendant presumption that the weak, the sick and the pregnant were the ‘sole liability of the family’. These attitudinal changes contributed significantly to the creation of programmes and institutions to make reproductive life bearable, healthier, compassionate and efficient in the age of industrialism.

The second set of resolutions could be found in the concerns of committees consisting of reformers and medical doctors like Dagmar Curjel and Francis Barnes, from the women’s medical service. These often went beyond the narrower focus of the colonial government. The findings of these committees forced official attention upon questions of health and maternity care. However, the colonial state as well as the capitalists generally tended to be evasive about proposals for maternity and child welfare. Colonial official like A.H. Ley, the Secretary to the Department of Industry and Labour in 1924, for instance, was sceptical of social welfare policies of leaders like N.M. Joshi, seeing them as being ‘very much in advance of the public opinion in this country’. Ley chose to highlight what he must have considered as three formidable challenges that rendered the prospects of such schemes impracticable. First, he argued that it was difficult to generate resources for such programmes, from both the state as well as the employers. Secondly, he help up the floating nature of the Indian working population as a major roadblock for insurance schemes. Third, he emphasized the responsibilities of the family and the breadwinner to take care of issues relating to maternity, sickness and old age (Deptt. of Ind. and Lab., 1925: L-1150 (9)).

The agenda of coalfield-based leaders championing the cause of mining classes in the early twenties, such as Swami Bishwanand, was often more sensitive to a few other (local) needs than national publicists. Bishwanand emphasized, for instance, the need for small schools and prohibition on the sale of spirits, and a better wage-rate for workers employed in the dangerous work (Deprt. of Industry, 1923: L- 1028). Although he too, unlike national leaders like N.M. Joshi, believed that taking care of the sick and the
elderly was the sole responsibility of the family and its breadwinner, his proposals were in many ways paid more attention to local issues than those of reformers like Kamini Roy. The latter, for instance, opposed the prohibition of women from underground work, but their desire to protect the interests of small Indian firms prevented them from demanding an improvement of wage rates. However, local leaders regarded facilities such as maternity benefits or crèche schemes as an alien imposition. Therefore, movements around such demands did not pick up any momentum until the textile-factory strikes in Bombay and Madras. Nonetheless, one needs to underline the significance of these local ‘worker welfare’ activities as some of the earliest attempts at influencing public/state policies in favour of improving the quality of the labouring masses’ reproductive lives. These efforts most definitely contributed to the growth of a progressive political culture recognising the need for the welfare of the working-class leading to a ‘human’ and ‘civilised’ existence, and to the gradual penetration of legislative democracy in the aftermath of the WWI.

Local and international pressures eventually forced the colonial government to bring about a semblance of uniformity in labour standards in line with wider global trends. A number of welfare schemes relating to housing, health services, sanitation, schools, maternity, and child welfare were all introduced in the 1920s, albeit in a slow and iniquitous manner although the ‘sole-liability-of-a-family- and-its-breadwinner’ doctrine did not yet beat a full retreat. There was a noticeable absence of concern for ensuring a sufficient income for the breadwinner, or for laying down necessary schemes to support reproduction activity, if she was not part of a family. Reforms like the prohibition on women’s underground employment, in the absence of alternative employment and improved wages for the earning member, in fact proved detrimental for many, including single, unmarried and widowed women, depriving them a claim to a home life and reproductive affirmation.

Industrialists had been reluctant, since the late 1890s, to the very idea of the prohibition on employment of women and children, which they saw as ‘destructive imposition of the ‘Western social standard’ on the industry in India. Notwithstanding some empathy shown by larger establishments following persuasion by the government in the 1920s, in general they continued to resist the principle of individual wage for
individual subsistence and refused to bear the cost of non-earning members in worker’s family.\textsuperscript{43} This attitude would further compromise, as we shall see, the benefits of the limited the reproduction support systems that were on offer in the collieries.

**Sexual economy\textsuperscript{44} of the coalfield**

From the second-half of the 1920s onwards, three important developments left their imprints on reproduction relations: (a) the measures to ‘rationalize’ the production-process; (b) movements for social upliftment\textsuperscript{45} and growing ‘civilizing’ and ‘humanizing’ concerns; (c) the expansion of the social insurance programme for workers.

The rationalization schemes leading to the removal of children, and women labourers from industrial work were also introduced in other industrial centres like Calcutta, Bombay and Raniganj in the 1920s and after. However, the impact of the withdrawal of women and children from the active workforce proved to be much harsher on the mining households. Women colliers were phased out from the underground mines since the second half of the 1920s. From around 42 per cent of the total underground labour force in 1920 they became 32 per cent in 1928-29 and nil by October 1937.\textsuperscript{46} In actual terms, it signified a loss of nearly 40 per cent earnings for some households. A wage cut from the mid twenties, and the reduction of working days during the Depression years (i.e.1930-34) further exacerbated the general plight. The average earning of different categories of colliers came down by 40 to 80 per cent between 1923 and 1936.\textsuperscript{47} Members of official inquiry commissions in the 1920s and 1930s agreed that average real earnings of most colliers were inadequate to meet household expenses, contributing in effect to their ever-increasing debt burdens.\textsuperscript{48}

A crucial issue, often unnoticed even by empathetic official observers, was the differential impact of recessionary conditions on different categories of workers. The direct producers, in other words, clearly came off the worst. It was against these iniquities that the Indian Colliery Labour Union (ICLU) complained in 1933:
We can cite innumerable cases where the cost per ton has been brought down solely by reduction of the wages of the poorly paid workmen and labourers, while the superior officials have been left untouched or at the most some allowances or scales of commissions have been reduced or curtailed. This is not justice and fair policy (Pol. Spl. 8 (III)/1933).

The managerial-supervisory staff, including the sirdar, they noted, continued to take home a proportionately higher salary than that of the direct producers like coal cutter, loader, trammer, timber-mistry, lineman and wagon-loader. Added to these anomalies were the discriminatory practices of supervisors regarding distribution of tubs, imposition of fines or other deductions, all of which, in their combined impact, came down very heavily on these labourers, particularly those from an Adivasi background (Seth, 1940: 71-74, 102. 109--27). Women, particularly those who were single, such as widows or the deserted woman suffered as much if not more. Herded together in a few surface and quarry works, these women now received a lower wage rate compared to their male counterparts for the same work. Moreover, unlike women in other households, when faced with retrenchment, they had no one to fall back upon (Seth, 1940: 133, 138-39, 144).

In the changed context after the 1920s, the colliery population was subject to new pressures, resulting in the erosion of its ‘frayed’, and yet ‘endurable and engaging’ social arrangements. Over time, the mining community needed to cope with changes resulting from the gradual wearing down of the family gang, removal of women from underground work and of children from mines and the fall in household earnings. It became increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between mining tasks and familial obligation. Evidence before the Bihar Labour Enquiry Commission (BLEC) in 1938 drew attention to the impact of ‘protective’ regulations on miners’ lives. In many households, women and children retreated to the agricultural fields. Reports on the health of miners pointed to the deterioration in their physical conditions. The incidence of malnutrition and of diseases like rickets was high. Abnormally underweight children – a one-year-old child weighing only 10 lbs for example, and a two-year-old only 13 lbs. – were spotted. Members of official inquiry commissions were concerned about the moral consequences of the changes in the gender composition of the workforce. B.R. Seth in his memorandum to the BLEC noted how increased sexual disparity led to growing
problems of drunkenness among colliers. In his account of labour in the coalfields, Seth noted:

It is an unquestionable fact that the morals of both married and unmarried women have considerably suffered. Widows have been compelled by their low earnings to seek refuge in persons whose income they may be able to share. So it is frequently found that a widow is kept by a man for some months but is often deserted and driven for support to others... Poverty has compelled even the Santal women who have been well-known for their chastity to fall easy victims to the wiles of the sirdars and subordinate staff of the collieries who generally live alone...

We need to move beyond such concerns and look at the wider implications of a masculinised workforce in the coalfields. With the removal of women, a family gang, in a pit, was gradually converted into a gang of male majdoors. Many women who had worked in the mines earlier went back to the agricultural fields, and ventured again into the coalfields during the war. Only a small fraction of the redundant female kamgars could secure other work, as wagon loaders, maidservants (daiés), domestic servants, scavengers, and rice-huskers. The coalfields, like other industrial cities of that time such as Calcutta became predominantly male worlds in terms of both their preponderance and domination. This masculine sphere, we shall see, came to symbolize the domination of the Paschimas. It resulted in and indeed was predicated upon the exclusion, insecurities, and the dispossession of both women and traditional peasant-miners, known for frequently reinforcing their preference for family-gang practice.

The changed social geography of the coalfields meant a sharp conflict between work and family. For single male recruits and family members in the bastees, the experience was shattering. Popular Bideshia folksongs of these areas reflect the pathos of longing, absence and denial of marital love. They capture how for the wife in the village, the seductions of wealth or the cash earnings of wage-labour utterly failed to mitigate the feelings of loss resulting from the absence of her husband:

*Railiya na bairi, jahajiya na bairi, Naukariya bairi ho.*

(Neither the railways nor the ships are our enemies; it is the job that is taking our husband away.)
Amwan mojari jailen
Mahowa tapaki jailen
Kekra se pathaan sandes
Re nirmohia chhor de nokaria
(The mango trees are blooming, and so are the mahua trees. With whom shall I send my message? Oh cruel one, leave your job.)

There were also fears about familial discord and changes in marital lives once the men were alone in the mines. Bideshiya songs refer to lovers going away to the city and coming back with a second wife or concubine:

\[ \text{Pia mor gaiti Hoogly saharwa se} \\
\text{Le ailey na ek Bengali sawatia,} \\
\text{Le ailey na.} \]
(My lover went to Hoogly and has brought a Bengali second wife/concubine)

Male voices in the songs, however, focus less on the pain and anguish of separation and more on the riches they could bring back:

\[ \text{Pyari desh Bangalwajieh} \\
\text{Tuh ke achha sari laieb.} \]
(Beloved, I will go to Bengal and bring you fine saris.)

Or,

\[ \text{Poorab ke deshwa me kaiti nokaria} \\
\text{Te kari sonwan ke rojigar jania ho.} \]
(One who gets a job in the east can fill his house with gold.)

The fetish of money power was not a totally fulfilling experience. As we see in *Gabargichor*, a play of Bhikhari Thakur, a *Paschima* was equally perplexed over the fact of the temporal loss of conjugal life and, occasionally, a shattered family. He too yearned for a regular ‘natural’ family life, and wailed when he found that he became the father of a son while he was away for a year or so in the *Pardesh* (factory and collier). These miners developed a new *subculture*, which conveyed the dominant images of the colliery social life. Some of them, of course, entered into a household cum sex ties with
a few unmarried, widowed or separated women, who their better halves cursed as *sawatia*. Such double layered sex ties, when they became public knowledge, usually after an accident, occasionally generated scandalous controversies. There were occasions, recorded Shyamal Chandra Bhattacharya, a communist and labour activist in the Madhuban colliery area, when two wives with their children would press their claims for compensation money payable to the expired miner. In such instances, ‘(n)ormally, we (labour union) arbitrated and helped distribute the compensation benefits equally or proportionally between the two claimants.’ His statement also suggests that the second woman was treated as neither a prostitute nor mistress. She did graduate to a status of the second-wife within popular sociability, notwithstanding the prohibition imposed on bigamy in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. This was a new geography of the family/home in the industrial society, where male individuals claimed a layered temporality inscribed at once on the rural and colliery social spaces. This explains apparent anomalies in the finding of B.P. Guha in 1959. He saw that a little more than one-fifth women were married and less than five percent were widow and separated women, whereas more than two-fifth miners’ families had both husband and wife (Labour Bureau, 1965: 11, 39). Having consciously made such choices, a miner conformed to the image that June Nash (1979) has called sexually adventurous in case of the Bolivian Tin mining society.

Yet others visited prostitutes to overcome sexual estrangement. The police noted the presence of a *tawaj* in 1923 in Lalbazar, the red light area in the Jharia town, in course of an enquiry into the murder of a trader in a house occupied by a “comfort woman” and frequented by men of commerce. However, the woman in question stated that ‘she performed only Mujjra (a dance recital) in her capacity as a practitioner of this craft and firmly denied any involvement in prostitution business.’ Later such distinctions were blurred into irrelevance. As P.C. Roy Chaudhury noted after four decades, ‘many prostitute’s quarters sprouted in the colliery district in the recent decades to satisfy the craving for cheap popular entertainment. The absence of wholesome recreational and leisure activities, such as use of libraries, natural gifts like forests, springs and beauty spots helped such localities to grow.’ The police declared Lalbazar a ‘red light area’ under the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Girls and Woman Act,
1956. Hence, the prostitutes’ families left the area. ‘The interested person now makes visit to Asansol area. There is still’, Roy Chaudhury continued, ‘a certain amount of underground traffic in women going on’ (Roy Chaudhury, 1964: 162-163). **Sirdars** (labour recruiter) and contractors like Ram Prasad Singh indeed maintained a gang of prostitutes in the Chasnala area to serve his gang men and induce single male immigrants to his company. Operators organised **nach** (Dances) of **laundas** (Sodomites), **randis** (Woman songsters) on regular basis and **nautanki** (popular theatre) shows on occasions like **Fagua** (spring), Holi and Durga-puja. The performing teams came from faraway towns like Banaras, Patna and Kanpur. Of course, there were other musical programmes like **bhajan, kirthan, virha** as also the performance of Bhikhari Thakur’s plays, which contained religious, spiritual and social messages. The programmes had huge appeal to the colliery men who were keen to mitigate the impact of sexual estrangement without at the same time suffering from the moral dilemma involved in such choices. The labour associations undertook adult literacy drives and regular evening lantern lectures since mid 1920s. The sanitation, health and maternity services teams of the Jharia Mines Health Board also began to organise public lectures and demonstration. These activities received further boost after the formation of the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund in 1944. By the end of 1950s, the latter had set up public recreational centres, popularly known as **Chall or Chaupal** (Public room), in almost all the big and medium size collieries. All these **Challs** were provided with sources of information and entertainment like radio, newspaper and regular demonstration lectures. However, these ‘wholesome recreational and leisure centres’ clearly could not satisfy the entire range of physical and mental needs of colliers. Therefore, they could do little to undermine the popularity of the so-called ‘non-wholesome’ musical and mental indulgences. I do not think that the observation of Gareth Steadman Jones (1987) made in reference to the London working-class in the latter 19th century that workers preferred to maintain their distance from the ‘Christianisation and civilising mission’ drives of the middle-class, applied in full measure to the Jharia miners. Rather I suggest that the ‘music hall’ and ‘Lalbazar’ visits and the ‘wholesome’ sessions in library and lectures served very different functions to in the spacio-social life of Jharia miners. It is not as though that most of the miners were not aware of the essential conflict between these
two domains of popular entertainment. We shall see below how they attempted to manage such conflicts in the realms of cultural and social practice.

The sex ties built around bigamy and prostitute visits flourished especially during the decades of 1930s to 1960s. These were the severest blow, as it were, to the 'civilising mission' that aimed at restoration of a family/home life in the industrial space. The people as a whole were certainly not at peace with the persistence of such practices. Colliers in fact often struggled against a host of financial and cultural obstacles to actualize a 'regular' family life as their ultimate destiny, and invested heavily into such a prospect. This irrepressible yearning for a 'normal' family life fuelled the sustained militancy of the working-class drives to rectify anomalous reproduction relations.

The kamins, who remained in the coalfields, working in the quarry and on the surface as loaders, wagon loaders, shale pickers or unskilled coolies, lived a precarious life. They were vulnerable to manipulations by scheming supervisors looking to exploit the competition among female workers in an atmosphere of shrinking employment opportunities. Statements before the BLEC underlined the anomalies of the situation:

Those who could grease the palms of loading clerks or other members of the subordinate and supervising staff, or could make some personal compromise, were getting work all the six days in a week, and others who were uninfluential and valued their modesty more than anything else in this world, had no other alternative but to keep their family semi-starved...A widow was resorting to immoral means to tide over the difficulties of low income.63

Such a social life clearly presented a rather unpleasant image of the universe that was the colliery. These sexual preferences were seen as polluting the living space of the colliery. Sathrughan Rajwar, for instance, believed that even a 'respectable' person with sufficient income to bring his wife and family over and enjoy a regular family life within the colliery premises could not actually do so precisely for these reasons. The managerial and supervisory staff and the lathaihths of company were notorious for setting their eyes on even non-working women. However, the choice not to bring his wife over also rested with only those who had a piece of land back in the countryside. Many others, however, were not so fortunate. The yearning for a regular home life was, therefore, common to
most mining people. Their effort at reclaiming the industrial space, as I hope to show, constituted the history of modern industrialisation.

The mining community in general did not approve of what it considered scheming and ‘vulgar’ means to satisfy material needs, such as physical desire. These seemed to undercut the very initiative to humanise the conditions of work and living, and attain a decent and dignified life. The male and the female in the community with time adopted multi-pronged approaches to resist such assaults on collective conscience. For instance, the woman collectivity beat up a loading clerk who knocked down and raped Ganeshiya, a kamin employed for sweeping in Bhulanbararee colliery (Phusbangala area) in 1951. Ganeshiya came out of the mines chasing him with her broom. In a remarkable display of solidarity and resolve, the women of the colliery surrounded the colliery office and later the house of the clerk, finally raining their blows on the culprit. Subsequently, Ganeshiya used to hurl her broom frequently on him whenever he passed her way. He was turned into a site of satire and verbal abuse in the community, and was forced eventually to leave the colliery area. The point to be noted here is that the women effectively enjoyed the ‘unquestioned’ sympathy of the male fraternity who did nothing whatsoever to stop their aggressive moves against the culprit. Prasadin Amma and her husband Prasad Jee, a retired trammer and loader, still recalls that moment of collective solidarity clearly and with lot of force and passion. The mood they represented was not exceptional. Pilloo Deswal, a loader employed in the Chaitudih-Katras (i.e. the Burrakar Coal Co. Ltd., under Bird & Co. managing agency) who doubled up as a folk singer, captures in one of his songs the various experiences constituting the miners’ sensibilities—the heavy workload, tough bosses, rough individuals as well as that general mood of resistance to sexual aggression:

Loader ke kamwa karthe – karthe / so hard the loader’s work
Baith gaile hamar gala ge / my voice I cannot lift
Aloo ke bhunjiya bhunje ge sajani/ make a good potato curry, dear wife,
Khate jaibe rath pala ge / off I go for the night shift

Sahibwa haike mota sota / the officer grows fatter
Inchargewa haike lala ge / the in-charge makes calls hoax,
Once again, we see how Pillū Deshwal encouraged the *sajani* (the better half) to take all measures to ward off any aggression. Contrary to their days under the *zamindary* system in agrarian economy, they were no longer prepared to tolerate all sorts of extra-economic exaction. They joined colliery precisely to escape or drive out for good many
such burdens imposed by the zaminday system. Their struggle finally bore fruit when the
industry, following some persuasion by the government, finally agreed to include
provisioning of rations to the entire family of miner in wage system under the Tripartite
Dhanbad Conference in December 1943. This arrangement was persisted with under the
subsequent wage agreements as well (Chapter ‘Reproduction...’). A few of the miners
now seized the new opportunity to bring their wife and children to live in the coalfield
premises, to resume, as it were, a ‘natural’, regular, domestic life.

Pilloo Deshwal’s ballad captures poignantly how the male miner’s pursuit of a
‘dignified’ life required him come to terms with issues at several levels—wage,
workplace, management and other social relations threatening to intrude into the
private/domestic space. The community, on the other hand, had been passing through a
moment of intense emotional and social fluidity. The need of the hour clearly was to
place individuals and households within a stable normative order. The community,
therefore, tried its best to encourage couples to invest heavily in the sanctity of stable
relationships. ‘It went to the extent of tying, at times by force, a widow or a separated
woman, who preferred to be on her own, with a man’, reported Moteshwar Mondal.66
Apart from such community-induced couplings, there were cases when a Dabang Neta
(an awful leader) type man and a Beneta (a degenerate lathaith) seduced single women to
stay with them. A woman went into such ‘liaisons’ under compulsion, since she had to
ensure proper care herself and her child. Rarely, if ever, informed Mondal, would a
woman indulge herself to the extent of deserting her children to pursue such dangerous
liaisons. The family and community of a single woman swore by the template of the
‘monogamous’ conjugal home. For the community, therefore, the ‘vulnerable’ status of
single women, whether unmarried or widowed, with or without children, was a cause for
serious concern. The same code of conduct presumably did not apply to single men. The
community did of course continue to observe closely the sexual behaviour of a man once
he entered into an alliance with a particular woman, but it would not overtly pressurize
the man to get married to the woman.

This culture of community vigilance reflected much more than a simple
communal desire to discipline a sexually transgressing woman into a staid and sedate
one. Two anthropological studies focused on such community vigilance adopted by the
Santhals and the Bauris offer some interesting leads in this regard. They have suggested that the traditional colliery communities were concerned with the vulnerability of woman against the larger background of what they considered an overall moral 'degeneration'. This degeneration was manifest in the form of sexually predatory acts by aggressive individuals. Given the unequal power relations in the industrial area, the community could not always subject these aggressive individuals to retribution. The community could not penalize, for instance, a high official for leading its women astray. Instead, the members of the community perceived such dalliances as a collective embarrassment. A woman ensnared in an abhorrent affair was understood to bring disgrace to the entire community. The community to which the woman in question belonged would be taunted by the so-called respectable immigrant as violable and inferior at the scale of civilisation. The only way left for the community in such instances to reclaim an 'honorable' existence was to try to prevent the recurrence of such 'denigrating' events. The community raided houses of the individual who resorted to prostitution. All precautions were taken to guard against the vulnerability of its women to sexual exploitation by the loading and time-keeping babus and other Paschimas. A group of the Santhal youth, associated with the newly formed Adibasi Parishad and Sanot Santal Samaj (Cleaner Santal Society), wrote letters in 1963 to the manager and contractor requesting them to 'cease the employment of illiterate young ladies with immediate effect. In special case, she may be employed only on written permission from the Association.' (Banerjee, 1981: 157). The illiteracy of young woman, they believed, made her too gullible to resist sexual advances on her own. Yet another organization, the Adibasi Parisad, formed in 1960 under the leadership an educated miner employed at the Bhowra colliery, exhorted the workers to abandon drinking, to educate themselves to lead a contented and dignified life and to keep a close watch on the up-country labourer denying him any more chance to dishonour their women workers. The Santhals completely boycotted any individual who entered into a 'liaison' with non-Santhal mining personnel. On the other hand, if a Bauris woman entered into a pairing family, the Bauris wanted her to hold on to a decent home life. These responses of the communities of course predicated on a palpable feeling of hierarchical power relations and the consequent sense of haplessness.
The Santhals *vigilante* evidently differed from that of the Bauris. The differences stemmed only partly from the degree the intensity with which a given community wants to preserve its traditions and self-respect. Partly, however, such responses were efforts at rectifying these very traditions and practices. The numerical strength of the Santhals was significant within the colliery surroundings as well as in the larger Chhotanagpur region. Given their sound access to arable land and the forest, they were less chronically dependent on the colliery for their sustenance. For past several decades, the community had been making efforts to revive a distinct and honorable political and socio-cultural identity and to ensure fair deals off with immigrants, especially moneylenders, industrialists and contractors. A socio-religious reform movement with purifying drives, known as the Kharwar movement, had been going on among the Santhals since the last decade of the 19th century. In some respects, this movement was analogous to the Tanabdagat movement that had revitalized the Oraons since 1914-15. Its adherents preached, among other things, that it is ethically inferior to prefer alcoholic liquor over the house-fermented rice-beer, called *handia*; that foul flesh eating must be abjured and that conformity to a monogamous conjugal family was more desirable, and ethically just, than sexual indulgence. Campaigns were mounted demanding rent-free land tenures, immediate stoppage of land rent payment, restoration of land and jungles to its original inhabitants and advocating austere lifestyles along with the preservation custom and traditions. The movement continued to grow in the form of anti-usury agitations, campaigns for land and jungle restoration and the demand for statehood since 1955-1956, under the banner of the Jharkhand Party and Karatikari Morcha (Sengupta, 1982). The Santhals approached the question of an honorable public life of their woman as critical to the preservation of 'communal' chastity and purity in the context of this larger quest for selfhood. In contrast, the Bauris had no long history of self-assertion to draw from. The Bauri youth formed the Harijan Sevak Sangh, and initiated the first reform efforts in 1945, following Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's visit in Dhanbad district. They were inspired by a vision of integration of different castes within a just and equitable social order. They organised inter caste marriage between a Bauri girl and a Rajwar boy in order to remove the caste barrier (Sengupta, 1979: 91-118). Therefore, they had no problem approving sexual alliances with the *Paschimas* provided these were informed with mutual respect.
Those communities were neither ‘sectarian’ nor ‘alienated’ in the struggle. They enjoyed the support of a vast section of the rest of the labours, as evident from the account of Prasadin Amma and Prasad Jee. These two were Kurmis and fled to the colliery in order to resist unfair claims made by the landed gentry from Babhan and Rajput communities. Since the early decades of the 20th century, several caste-Hindus had been resisting agrestic bondage and exaction and aspired for dignified and fraternal treatment (See Footnote 69).

A key feature of miners’ response was an intimate link forged between the community and idea of honor. The honour of the community was perceived to rise or fall in direct proportion to its purity, and the bodies of its woman were claimed to be the repository of this communal purity. Their struggle for better wages did not focus on individual subsistence, nor did it draw inspiration from bourgeois notions of individualism or individual citizenry. The idea of an individual was invested with a new meaning as the community made a claim on the individual’s life. Colliery individuals invested in two ontological discourses. Direct producers felt themselves belonging to a general class of ‘Garib – Dukhiya’ (poor–distressed). They saw themselves as part of a people frequently harassed and swindled by officials like time-keeping and loading clerk. Secondly, they aspired for a life of freedom and sufficiency, to which existing social relations consistently denied them access. Archival sources offer plenty of evidence of the ways how working-class publicists and other political advocates regularly spoke and wrote about the pitiful condition of workers. In so doing, they were self consciously deploying a new aspiration to generate mobilisable effects. As is clear from the following testimony of a few kamins these experiences and aspirations had deep roots within existing social relations:

We have a little relief today. In those days of the Company Raj, we did not have money. But we had a family: five or so children to feed and one earner. Hence, we relied on coarse food grains like corn, millet and broken rice. We suffered a lot. A garib – dukhiya who had five to ten family members took frequent recourse to debts. …Then the colliery brimmed with working persons, all here and there. All of them were our people…the Janana (kamins) were in good number, too. Therefore, we enjoyed working. Several kamins were there to move together, either to participate in the gherao (encircling)...in the Julus (procession) in order to demand improved wages, regular duty, proper
attendance, and supplies of household provisions and of drinking and bathing water. (Interviews: January 19, 2004 (Doobaree colliery, Bilashpuris Dhowrahs); and January 22, 2004 (Jealgora colliery, Mahtoo Dhowrah).

Although miners belonged to various castes, gender, religious and ethnic backgrounds, such shared inter-subjective experiences and aspirations helped them forge a living, active community of interests, that is, a common agenda and concerted action. Women were a crucial component of such communities. The continued insistence on alternative jobs for women and equal wages for kamins was expressions of the vital presence of women in the social re/production. We do not know how they felt when compelled, against their desire, to hitch their lot with a particular man only to allow that the ‘communal’ normative order to survive undisturbed. Neither do we know their reaction when yet others among them faced boycott for their independent will and unapproved ‘liaisons’. Obviously, the women paid heavily at the alter of community approved ‘sound’ reproduction arrangements, the primary objectives of which was either maintaining the purity of the community or forging an integrated territorial community against the imposition of a ‘hypocrite’ violent relation. All of these had a concrete material foundation. I now take up for discussion aspects of the ideological and economic bases underpinning these working class struggles.

Resurrecting a social space

It became difficult for mining households, confronted with the intensification of labour and tightened work-time discipline, to sustain the increasingly fragile relationship between colliery tasks and familial commitments (Chapter ‘Work, Time…’). The mining Acts of 1923 and its subsequent amendments (1935) prohibited the employment of children of ages below 14. Further, colliers were prohibited from carrying infants to the workplace. The absence of proper financial support, crèche, and schooling facilities for children made the new situation especially onerous. Workers now found it almost impossible to discharge their parental commitment even as they saw that their children were doomed to suffer from lack of care. Kamins tried various ways to adjust with the new situation, forced, as they were to become used to working late into pregnancy. This
in turn led to more abortions as well as infant and maternal deaths. As the desperate Kamins devoted themselves to somehow sneaking their young children into the mines, mining regulations were often fell by the wayside. There were many instances of women hiding their babies away when white officials came on inspections. They were told that 'the white-man considers this practice of carrying children to the mines un-civilized'. Some tried to devise yet other ways of handling the twin responsibilities of work and child-care. They shared their one-roomed dhowrah with other families and divided child-care responsibilities amongst themselves. Under this arrangement, different families staying together worked at alternate shifts in the mines, with those remaining at home taking care of the children. Such arrangements almost inevitably led to over-crowding, and disease and poor health of the inhabitants. With time, Kamins decided to reduce the birth rate in order to satisfy the demand of regularity in the workplace. 72

The 'disruption' in family life and inability to support the household with dignity caused serious injuries to the 'Patriarchal' parental authority. Such loss and inability in effect amounted to an existential crisis. 'Many miners have drowned themselves in liquor', observed Seth in 1938, 'because they cannot see their son and daughter staying without food or falling to vices' (Seth, 1940: 92). Equally unsettled by the threat of subversion of family authority, they proceeded to oppose the withdrawal of kamins, and pressed for an improved wage-rate paid to the male worker, alternative jobs for retrenched women; and improved housing, crèche, maternity and schooling. They reconciled themselves to parting from the age-old tradition of family-labour-economy, as they stood to lose much in their effort at retaining the family-based recruitment and supervision system. 73 The dominant stream of politics of the mining masses now focussed on living family wage, primarily payable to a breadwinner, as distinct from an insistence on family labour as such. Mukut Dhari Singh, a representative of the National Congress and the Chhotanagpur Majdoor Sangh (CMS) was one of the most cogent advocates of this line since 1938:

In order to maintain the required stamina to keep up the health and normal standard of efficiency the necessity of comparatively higher wages than obtaining in other industries is unchallengeable...the wages being far below the living wage, workers are not able to make necessary provision for food,
wearing apparels, housing, recreation, etc., to resist the continuous wear and tear of the body in the course of employment. We would define a living wage as the quantum of currency necessary in the province for a working class family to live a life progressively healthy, social, and efficient unit... a worker getting a living wage would not be forced to send his wife and immature children to work and thereby partially make up the deficiency in his earnings. Such a state of normal domestic life with a healthy and comfortable home, having cheerful and intelligent children receiving education, would develop a cultural life, which in turn is bound to raise the morale of the workers. 74

From late 1930s onwards, more and more direct producers began to involve themselves in agitations for this new set of demands, expressing, as it were, more ‘civilised’ preferences for managing reproduction responsibilities. It was indeed a marked shift in their beliefs and practices of reproduction. The tradition celebrating of the arrival of maximum working hands, i.e. children, under family-labour-economy had now to make way for ‘civilised’ reproduction preferences, i.e., a ‘healthy’, ‘efficient’, and ‘varied’ life-process. Corresponding to this rather fundamental temperamental shift, the political and emotional investments of the miners now came to concentrate much more on the upbringing of children, management of the domestic space, and a living-wage system.

This specific vision, articulated by MD Singh, was most advantageous for the single male miner and technical staff, who predictably turned out to be its chief votaries. 75 To many other colliers, the restoration of women’s employability and that of the adolescent son remained pertinent, given capital’s persistent refusal to satisfy the new reproduction agenda. Upon the complete removal of kamins from underground mines, the government persuaded employers to offer a compensatory revision in the wage-rate by twenty percent in October 1937. The other facilities necessary to make the new reproduction deal endurable, we have seen before, remained well below the satisfaction level and, even more importantly, confined only to a few big collieries. Furthermore, the single woman, i.e. widowed or separated, fought for a restoration of her employability as a matter of course. 76 They belonged to the very same traditional mining communities, which were at the receiving ends. Hence, they could, and did, manage to see their some of their demands remaining in the agenda of negotiation with capital. Their customs of the family-labour-economy easily made peace with the prohibition on employment of children, but women’s withdrawal from wage employment proved refused to be accepted
with such cordiality. Both the man and the woman struck back with demand for alternative jobs for woman and a preference for the family member of the permanent collier for any new opening. They forced the unions and political publicists, especially those with socialist and communist leanings to accommodate these demands in their agenda (chapter ‘Reproduction...’). For years to come, this animated negotiation between two contending visions of home life, one represented by the miners’ publicists and the other by the ‘traditional’ mining community, was to become a central feature of the cultural politics unfolding in the coalfields. The nature of linkage between the spatial community and the industry significantly conditioned the reproduction deal that these two would eventually settle with on a given moment. There was no unilinear progress from the custom of family-labour-economy to a notion of family-wage breadwinner, nor was it ever complete in praxis. This cultural politics of reproduction, rather than any economic analysis, would help us explain the colliers’ demand made on the production relations.

We should not however ignore the ‘civilizing’ and ‘humanizing’ implications of the protective social-insurance programmes or movements for social upliftment. By the 1940s, improved wages, together with provisions for housing, maternity, child-care, and schooling, did indeed permit some colliery staff to live more comfortably as well as support non-earning members. These categories included clerical, supervisory, technical, and other skilled workers like electricians and safety or mine-surveyors, shot-firers, pump-men, coal-cutting machine drivers, and a few other colliers, who were all considered indispensible for regular output across the seasons. Mechanization and safety regulations, introduced since the 1920s, required especially skilled technical operators and experienced, stable colliers in the mines. To meet these new requirements, efforts were made to set up technical training institutions like, for instance, the School of Mines at Dhanbad. A few big colliery proprietors and the Dhanbad Municipalit, too, responded favourably to pressures from official Inquiry commissions to provide facilities for schooling, especially in the wake of the prohibition on children’s employment and of the politics of safety that demanded literate, informed workers. However, the experience of education and social upliftment measures among the miners’ children were often distressingly similar to that of other working class children elsewhere. Some like
Ramjash Rawani were fortunate enough to acquire a matriculation degree but many others were forced, after a few years in primary school, to give up and start working in the mines. 79

There were two areas of discordance with modern industrial reproduction mechanism, as it was, laid down in the colliery. One, the excluded colliers fought either for inclusion into the protected class of personnel or for an extension of the protective social-insurance arrangement itself. Secondly, the notion of 'civilised', 'human' life became springboard for the politics of a new standard of living. Associations of miners like the Jharia Coalfield Workers Union and All India Mine Workers' Federation exerted consistent pressure on the authorities to make workers' welfare more effective and non-discriminatory. These demands, of course, would have helped to contain the cost of reproduction, hence were mutually consistent with the demand for a wage hike. But, the political investment in such an agenda signified much more than a simple desire for reduced reproduction costs, a point that the state officials who looked at workers agitation in terms of political conspiracy and wage cum price question could not quite unerstand. Prof. Abdul Bari (President of the Jharia Coalfield Workers’ Union), Hazara Singh and Shyam Deo Narayain, all left-nationalist labour representatives, expressed the essence of this point during a ninety-one days long strike at the collieries of Badroochak, Chaittabad-Katras, Loyabad and Mudidih between September 26 and December 27, 1938:

They should remain firm until the capitalist, who had grown fat by sucking their blood fell down on their feet, so that the government which was on their back and which had locked their comrades in the jail set them free. The company is making a large amount from coal mines, having palatial house, all comfort and luxuries of life, whereas labourer did not have bare comfort of everyday life, they need sufficient water to drink, to bathe, or lavatory, do not have sufficient bread and clothes, nor accommodation in their dhowras. They were kept in dirty place, and there was no arrangement of education for their children. They need good accommodation. They need arrangement for education of their children. They need proper hospital. They need provident fund. They need profit-sharing bonus and other allowance. ....but when they demanded there are lathi-charges (Pol. Spl. 1938: 379/38).
The spirit of movement that animated such poignant outbursts took firm root in the working-class politics, and continued to reinforce itself through a series of long and comprehensive strikes from 1937-38 onwards. The government appeared to follow a carrot and stick policy. On the one hand, the Mines Maternity Benefit and Creche Act, 1941 was passed in order to assuage the agitating miners. On the other, there was a crackdown launched under the Defence of India Act, 1940 since April 1940, to arrest the flight of miner's family and the kamins in particular to maintain the high production levels to meet the sudden demands because of WWII. With the same intent, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as labour member of the Viceroy-in-council in 1942—1946, seized an opportunity in December 1943—January 1944 to lay down the programme of Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund (CMLWF). The government, he said, was responsible for making arrangements to 'provide the fullest facilities for growth to every individual according to his needs. 'It should aim at' ensuring, said Ambedkar 'the basic right of all Indians to share in the industrial wealth as a means for a decent and dignified existence' (Ambedkar Papers: Indian Information, 1944). Notably, the National-ministry formed in September 1946, continued to vest political mandate with the government led and regulated 'worker welfare' mechanism.

The CMLWF charged two annas as cess on every ton of coal and coke despatched, and the funds thus raised financed a host of scheme including construction and administration of central and regional hospitals, colliery dispensaries, ambulance, sanitation, maternity and child welfare centres, colliery schools, anti-malaria campaigns, and supply of drinking water and washing and bathing facilities. It ran these facilities on its own with some equipment on loan from the Jharia Mines Health Board (JMHB) and offered assistance to certain programmes undertaken by individual collieries. Within two to three years, it became a legend. The number of lower and upper primary schools and makhtahs rose from 34, 8 and 7 in 1945 to 69, 18 and 14 in 1946. There were 193 dispensaries attached to the collieries in 1946 as against 168 in 1945, of which 23 had beds in 1945 as against 25 in 1946. The ambulance car belonging to the JMHB took care of emergencies. The total number of child and maternity centres managed by the Board rose to 11 in 1946 as against six in 1944. They were grouped in three circles, each under
the charge of a Lady Health visitor. Three new circles of Maternity and Child Welfare activities, and 12 new clinics were established in 1947 at Bhowra, Bhulanbararee and Tisra, extending the number of circles to six. A number of neighbouring collieries were grouped with the old clinics with the result that compared to 13 large collieries served by the Board in the previous year, the scheme was now in force on 56 large and medium or small collieries, about 117 villages and Jharia, Katras, and Kenduadih bazaars. The advantage of a centralised welfare plan was evident as the recalcitrant smaller collieries too fell in line with the vision of improvement. Secondly, it helped overcome the financial limitations that often plagued the individual initiatives (Labour Deptt. (1947: M-23/47), (1948: M-23/48)). The effective factor at work here, unlike the previous experience of the JMHB working since 1915-16, was the representation exercised by the working-class vis a vis the employer, and the nominal representation of woman in the advisory committee of the CMLWF. They were, however, nominated by the central government. It redressed the old complain of the working people that they had no representation in the existing public bodies in the coalfields, which was responsible, M.D. Singh argued before Prasad Committee in 1938, for the tepid performance of bodies like JMHB. The CMLWF shifted its focus, since 1947, to building a few large central and regional hospitals equipped with necessary X-ray and other facilities, and a modern township alongside colliery accommodation. The infant mortality and other mortality rates went remarkably down, amply testifying to the benefits these initiatives brought to the miners.

The welfare programme suffered, in the long-run, from the same difficulties that plagued the regulated deal of minimum wage and other social security provisions offered to colliers under the Dhanbad Tripartite Agreement, 1943-1944 and the subsequent Conciliation Board Award (CBA). It became amenable to the selective implementation by various employers. The problem was evident to B.N. Srivastva, an Investigator of the Survey of Labour Condition in Coal Mining Industry, undertaken by the labour ministry in 1962-63 to see the efficacy of its worker welfare initiatives. Some of his representative observations were indeed alarming. While the industrialist agreed to offer the benefit of two-roomed houses to supervisors and clerks, he refused extend it to the direct producer. Despite some efforts to construct subsidized houses, less than sixty
percent workers received one-roomed accommodations received in 1963. Others demanded housing materials be made available to them so that they build their own huts. Moving to a separate accommodation was a pressing issue particularly to married couples because it was considered unfair to further crowd the accommodation offered to the parent. The industry did not arrange for water supply facilities, either underground or on the surface, until 1946. 'A considerable improvement has taken place since then. Most of the defaulting small mines are in Bihar under the Mines Act, 1952 and the Coal Mines Pithead Bath Rules, 1959.' About sixty-eight percent collieries provided medical services. Sixty-five percent of the larger mines employing over 400 workers had primary schooling arrangements for the children of miners but the percentage dipped to just twenty-two in case of all the collieries put together. Only in these large collieries, miners' families had access to some recreational arrangements like reading and radio room, popularly known as chaupal or chal. Srivastva noticed a similar trend in relation to crèche services. Since 1945 miners made strong demands for crèche services and provisions were made, under new Mines Rules 1955, for monthly paid medical check up of children, cradles beddings, milk, diet, soap, clean towels, toys, etc. However, the number of mines that actually offered these facilities was pitifully small. As noted by Srivastava, miners employed in the larger mines received a better deal in all these respects than their counterparts employed in the smaller firms (Labour Bureau, 1966: 55-73).

The difference in the provisioning of reproduction support facilities between the larger colliery and the smaller one was a rather hard lesson to miners. It is no wonder, therefore, that they preferred that the smaller mines, often lacking in finance to run the enterprise in a responsible and efficient way, be merged with the larger ones. Under the new scheme of the CMLWF, colliery firms, rather than compromising their profit margins, transferred the whole welfare budget on the consumer of coal. The Coal Board, a Central Government body that governed the pricing of coal, ensured a guaranteed profit margin and immunity from any critical market fluctuation. Employers wanted to fix the criteria such as a minimum of work, i.e., attendance and labour productiveness, for a labourer to qualify for 'welfare benefits' like rent-free housing as opposed to any generalized commitment to the well-being of workers (IMA Report, 1951: 86). Let us
not forget, however, that the very criteria of attendance and productiveness could be, and
were, used as means to deny other claims of the miner (Chapter Reproduction...'). The
extent to which an employer needed a set of regular, experienced personnel and
'industrial peace' was inscribed on the kind of reproduction support system that he
eventually offered. It led to a hierachization among the working classes with managers at
the top, followed by supervisors and clerks who in turn had regular mechanical,
technical and other 'permanent' employees below them in point of ranks. In this pecking
order of workers constructed on the basis of reproduction support facilities received
from the employers, the direct producers stood at the very bottom. The first two sets did
become, in one way or another, the 'beneficiaries' of the combined effects of capitalist
paternalism and of bureaucratic paternalism thrust into the industrial life in a view to
mitigate the effects of market despotism. At the same time, the miner's agitation,
continued to remain a driving force to realise enhanced reproduction supports. The
institutional arrangement had nothing inherently discriminatory about them that
explained the disparity of services offered to the direct producer, on the one hand, and
the better-off staff on the other. I will take up a case of schooling to elaborate on what I
call a new experience of 'worker welfare' initiative within a capitalist order.

Colliers found in modern education a new ray of hope, an avenue to help their
children escape the drudgery of mining and to bring some measure of prestige to the
family, which they lost every other day to the babus and sarkar. Increasingly, they
enrolled their children, especially sons, in colliery schools. There are three points to be
noted in this regard. The families took great pains, wilfully suffering financial difficulties
and absolving the school going elder son from all responsibilities otherwise incumbent
on him, and effectively making sure that a majority of their children never went to
school. The increased share of education in household budgets and the fact that they
provided regular subscriptions to the respective labour associations expressed
unanimously the positive position every one of them took on the question of schooling.84
But, the third point is about unique debility that haunted the children of direct producers
alone. They regularly faced discriminations and even persecution, because of their caste
identity, in the hands of teacher and babus responsible for the management of colliery
schools. These problems drew attention of investigators like B.R. Seth and S.R. Deshpande in 1938—1945:

Again, the schools which have been provided by the employers at their own cost in big collieries, are looked upon by the working classes as institutions for the education of children of the Babus, i.e., clerks and higher paid employees. This inferiority complex from which the workers suffer together with the discouraging and unsympathetic treatment that the teachers meet out to the workers' children, is greatly responsible for keeping away their children from schools. In not a few schools that were visited, it was found that benches were provided for the Babus' children while the children of the workers were made to squat on bare floor. In three or four schools miners' children were found to be sitting in the corners of the class rooms like untouchables. When some workers were questioned as to why they were not sending their children to schools, they not only complained about the big demand of the masters or their discriminatory and unsympathetic treatment towards their children, but also went so far as to say that the teachers do not pay so much attention to their children as they pay to the children of the Babus of high class skilled workers. There may be some objections on the part of the caste Hindus to have their children educated in the same school with the children of the depressed classes, and who can say that some moral pressure is not brought to bear upon the depressed class workers not to send their children to schools. Other reasons sometimes urged for not sending their children to schools are, either that some parents do not like their children to be beaten by the schoolmasters, or the children have no inclination to study (Prasad Report, 1941, II, A: 325).

Seth did not look into why 'children ha(d) no inclination to study'. The 'Babus' whom Seth referred to were only too ready to undermine of these institutions designed to usher in 'civilised life' and for 'humanisation of working and living condition'. The babus were products of an earlier phase of improvement in the labour-management relationship and led the Swaraj campaign in the aftermath of WWI. Many of them chose to confine their energies to trying to ensure proper implementation of the benefits concerning work hours, leaves and other facilities offered through the Amendment to the IMA, 1923. The other mining people and publicists had outgrown those demands. They proceeded to launch independent initiative during the great depression when class conflict between employer and worker as well as between supervisor and direct-producer assumed a sharper edge on the issue of supervisory exaction (Chapter 'Reproduction...'). The social relation between different sections of the working masses was subject to mediation of ideological and political struggles that animated the working-class as a whole as well
as those between its different strata and within the class of babus. The scenario observed in the colliery school represented the struggle as also the agreement reached between the conservative liberal babus and others against the reactionary (brahmanical) babus. Many persons of the former camp perceived the new agreement as an advance whereby children of the ‘depressed’ castes entered colliery school. The brahmanical babus and sarkar believed, noted Deshpande with disgust in 1945, that education would make the children of coal-cutters or loaders refuse to enter into the colliery, (Deshpande, 1946a: 98). This was the strongest hurdle that confronted the children of direct producers head on. Chapal Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the All India Mine Workers’ Federation, strongly disapproved of such myths in preference over the necessity of a better citizen and educated efficient miner and complained against castes-based discriminatory practices found in colliery schools, to the Indian Coalfield Committee on the eve of formation of a Republican nation.87

The tryst of mining children with schooling produced mixed results. For instance, the experience of Permeshwar Noniya stood in contrast to that of Ramjash Rawani. ‘He could not spend more than some six years on schooling, before relinquishing his educational pursuit in favour of idiosyncratic calling of subsistence, in the aftermath of demise of his ‘earning’ mother. His father was opposite in character to his ‘caring’ mother (Kamla Noniya) who made conscious effort at ensuring a schooling to her youngest son. His father was a regular indulgent who, along with his one elder brother (a collier), regularly visited a kalali (grogshop) and often enough, there ensued a quarrel between them that they took all the way home.88 Discordance within the family could therefore force students to drop out. Syamnarain Rawani, a son of trolleyman Kesho Rawani and Sathrughan Rajwar, a son of a mining sirdar, had altogether different lessons to learn. Their fathers sent them to colliery schools. They were socially not privileged enough to receive engaging treatment at the hands of the teachers and other schoolmates. The teacher at the under-primary school in Bhowra colliery frequently beat Syamnarain, and hence he opted out of schools. He also felt that his father was not able to provide him, besides regular meals at the home, any pocket money. He therefore proceeded to take up a construction job with a contractor at the young age of 12 or 13. In the case of Sathrughan Rajwar, the death of his father put breaks on his schooling since he had to
take care of his other siblings. Notwithstanding such instances of dropouts, the modern ideas of emplacement of children in school away from the dark colliery defined the new ethico-politics and social economy. It opened up the possibility of development of a new socio-political force, of the recognition of variation of labour, and of the intellectual fitness of a person for different kinds of labour including those of fitter, clerk, surveyor, mining sirdar, overman, engineer, and political advocate. Many of the militants in the movement seen in collieries in 1968—1975 to satisfy varieties of concerns including universal parenthood, not surprisingly, were youngsters who had been to schools, who relived, as it were, the spirit of Pavel Korchagin.

To recapitulate, I focused in this chapter on changes in the lives of mining communities in times of rationalization and industrial restructuring, and their experiences of passing through two characteristic phases of the industrialisation. Marx, in writings in 1844, addressed questions about the social, spiritual, and intellectual degradation in the life of a vast majority of people in the age of [early] industrialization. He also spoke about how ‘the partially developed individual’, who was merely the bearer of one specialized social function, gave way to ‘the totally developed individual’, for whom different social functions are different modes of activity, which s/he takes up in turn. Life of the working people in the Jharia coalfields, that I have examined, bears out some of the experiences of the early industrial society that Marx discussed. The particular economic changes and reorganization of work on the coalfields had disruptive consequences — financial and emotional — for mining communities. Yet what stood out throughout this period were the efforts in different ways by the mining people to affirm and resuscitate new ‘advancing’ notions, though in flux, of home and family life.

Inferences

The movement to humanise the living conditions of, and to ensure a civilised life to, the working masses in the industrial space saw ‘unintended’ consequences. The coalfields demanded workers to adjust with long hours of work, an ‘uncongenial’ work environment, and a crammed space to share with unfamiliar others. The family labourer lived through an ‘endurable’ reproduction life despite incidence of high infant mortality,
health, and financial insecurities to negotiate. A single male miner lived through an
estranged ‘irregular’ family/home. ‘Traditions of ‘sole responsibility’ of the family for
reproduction necessaries and family-labour-economy, and handicraft-type labour process
supported such reproduction experience. The critiques of the existing ‘unjust’ and
‘animalistic’ treatment dealt to workers emerged, and argued for the provision of ‘worker
welfare’ (social insurance) benefits, schooling to children and withdrawal of women
from ‘hazardous occupation’. I suggest such moves were not efforts at extension of
bourgeois family norms, though on family and woman questions worker-publicist
retained the effect of popular social, which wanted to salvage family/home life. The
move aspired for an enjoyable, healthy, advancing life, for the recognition of republican
equality of all humankind and a fair human treatment. It met with two different
responses. The legislative measures (1923—1937) prohibited children from colliery and
women from underground mining; but it did not ensure colliers an insured access to
alternative reproduction supports. This was a monstrous discrepancy. Industrialists
adhered to the principle of cost economisation and reproduction ideology of the bygone
days, though they gradually braced for satisfying a principal component of the
workforce, wherein other workers attracted as a peripheral component. The result was
laying out on a modern-industrial reproduction deal, which bred an involution in the
working populace: a ‘better-off’ supervisor, technician and a few direct-producers, on
one side, and the rests (a majority), on the other. Contrary to Mohapatra thesis (1995),
the new deal owed more to the pressure exerted by miners’ new reproduction politics and
the competition within mining classes than to employers’ self-image of market-
despotism or paternalism. Meanwhile, a huge reshuffle in the composition of workforce
occurred. Single male miners replaced family labourer and woman. It was equally a
reshuffle in custom and practice of miners employed. They attempted to resuscitate
family/home life, though the structure of reproduction was reconstituted and subject to
atavistic pugnacious negotiations between miners attached to different customs of family
labour: male breadwinner family vs. family-labour-economy. The traditional miners’
families disagreed with the proposal of a loss of family’s say in recruitment and
supervision of particularly woman, and pressed for an improved breadwinner wage,
alternative jobs to withdrawn women, and other reproduction supports (Contrary to
They faced a shattering effect of capitalist way of rationalisation of the industry and the family, hence financial, ethical, and 'spiritual' immiserisation and convulsion. Women confronted the social and sexual vulnerability with the shrinkage in her livelihood entitlement. Children experienced a dereliction and/or aggression of caste and class prejudices in the hands of Patriarchs of schools. Family heads faced the erosion of patriarchal and parental stature. They recollected themselves and fought back with re-articulation. What triumphed, in the end, was the will to improve, advance and new reproduction ideology focused on advancing humanity in place of recessive ones. The former invested in the image of industrial space not what capital and prejudiced 'better-off' minority wanted them to avail but, rather, what they thought appropriate to them. It included a chivalrous protection to women and certain educational opportunity to children. A woman saw claim and counterclaim on the site of her body rather than labour-power. Her individuality was subordinate to the notion of 'communal' chastity and purity, and she continued to look for a reversal. The restriction on woman labour gave a lease of life to the wage-based domination of man. Nevertheless, mining families represented experience and effort that were a challenge to those three images posted to them by individuals against whom they were in a battle or an argument with.
Photograph I: Samuel Bhattacharya
Chart 1: Social Composition of Workers

Social Origins of Workers in Jharia Colfields in 1931

Social Composition of Workers in Jharia Coalfields in 1934

- Bhuiyans
- Bauris
- Manjhis/Santhals
- Chamars
- Muslims
- Dusadhs
- Ghatwals
- Turis
- Kurmis
- Rests
Social Composition of Workers in Jharia in 1938

Social Composition of Woman Workers (per hundred males) in Jharia Coalfields 1934 (Source: Seth, 1940, P.129.)
the agricultural labourer and 'semi-peasant'
widow or deserted woman was
population of woman became so disproportionate in particularly the upward mobile landed community,
communities. The presence of so-called 'illegitimate' child, born out of'extra-marital' or 'premarital'
wedlock, deserved to receive acceptable recognition. In contrast, a recognisable number of incidences of
murder of 'illegitimate' children and 'transgressed' women were noted between the minority-elites. The
with the graded caste superiority and purity, chastity, and distancing from field labour. The remarriage of
like the Babhans, so that it needed to bring brides from the distant north Bihar and the Himalayan Nepal.

1 I have used the terms like reproduction and regeneration interchangeably. The reproduction means three
sets of activity: the recuperation of an individual from wears and tears; the emotional and carnal fulfilment;
and the propagation of new human species. In other words, the reproduction is also an elemental part of
human life (doing and being). The latter includes both the species character and historical human character
of a person. It is a historical specificity of the growth of essential power/nature of humankind in
correspondence with the movement of civilisation, on the one hand, and the articulation of the idea of
humane essence, i.e., the humane need as opposed to vulgar/ crude practical need, on the other. At every
stage of the social advancement, wo/mankind expresses her will to realise human essence in a particular
manner, i.e., historical articulation of humane form of her social being in order to resolve the social
contradiction. Marx (1844/1977) though identified the species character, humane character and the
estranged labour character; he usually tended to dissolve the first two characters into one. Consequently, he
offered acceptable meaning of humanness, i.e., affirmation of humankind's creative and innovative
capacity; but this [Marxian] humane affirmation is wanting in the light of a historical manner of the
articulation of humanness. The latter apparently corresponds to the condition of social relations and the
nature of wo/mankind's essential power, known as human agency.
2 From the districts of Manbhum, Hazaribagh, Santhal Pargana, Bankura and Burdwan.
3 From the districts of Hazaribagh, Gaya, Sahabad, Saran, Monghyr and Burdwan.
4 Foley Report, 1920: 57--132; Whitely Rep01t (RCL), 1931, Vol. I. It is difficult to estimate the proportion
of majdoor families working in the mines and single male workers. There is evidence, which shows that
'aboriginal', and the 'semi-aboriginal' (the Santhals, the Bauris, the Kurmi-Mahtos, the Turis, the
Ghatwals, etc.) who worked with their families, constituted more than 50 per cent of the total labouring
mass by mid-1930s. See Seth, 1940: 176.
5 Hareven (1982) has worked with this distinction in her analysis.
6 On usage along these lines, see the report of Census enumerators; ‘Curjel’s Report 1923’ (Deptt.
Industries. 1923: L-920 (5); Seth (1940); Banerjee (1981), Sachidananda and B.B. Mandal (eds. 1985). See
also Engels (1891/1973).
7 A.K. Sen underlined both material and cultural coordinates of the family institution. He sees the family as
a unit in which various household arrangements are fixed based on the implicit bargaining strength of its
members and solutions emerge depending upon the relative bargaining power of the different members.
See also Margrit Pernau (2003) on the cultural construction of the family.
8 Reply of the IMF to the Department of Industry and Labour upon the enquiry into the question of
prohibition of underground employment of woman in the mining industry. ‘The Employment of Women in
Mines’, Bulletins of Indian Industries & Labour (hereafter BILL), 1926. No. 35. P.34, Government of India
(Hereafter GOI), Calcutta. It was quite possible that Kamini Roy, who was instrumental in drafting such
memorandum, machinated the language and argument of it. Nevertheless, the overall position taken by the
miners in this memorandum against the Bill of prohibition is corroborative with their other action.
9 We need to grasp the specificity of this aspect of social experience of the working people in the
industrialising territory if compared to the agricultural and artisanal society, which most miners initially
belonged. As a precautionary note, I suggest to avoid any trap of looking out for a historicist movement of
custom and tradition from a pre-modern agricultural to a modern industrial territory. The agricultural
territory was itself not insular, secluded and stasis. We will see later how the former social space
witnessed a momentous battle for a cultural – social transmutation occurred between the peasantry,
herders and craftsperson. I briefly a few representative elements of the social mores of the ‘semi-feudal’,
‘colonial’ society found in the countryside. Until 1910-20s, a ‘permissive liberal’ and affectionate sexual
economy appeared to inform the ties of sex in the popular life; its regressive and offensive patriarchal
character heightened as it moved towards the caste population. The latter is known to have attachment
with the graded caste superiority and purity, chastity, and distancing from field labour. The remarriage of
widow or deserted woman was permissive between the farming and labouring communities. The choice of
selection of a life partner was further exercised between the agricultural labourer and ‘semi-peasant’
communities. The presence of so-called ‘illegitimate’ child, born out of‘extra-marital’ or ‘premarital’
wedlock, deserved to receive acceptable recognition. In contrast, a recognisable number of incidences of
murder of ‘illegitimate’ children and ‘transgressed’ women were noted between the minority-elites. The
population of woman became so disproportionate in particularly the upward mobile landed community,
like the Babhans, so that it needed to bring brides from the distant north Bihar and the Himalayan Nepal.
Bahar: Agri. often misleading because often the single woman and the widow were not in any way attached to the gang

Engels (1993) has suggested that the widely circulated managerial talk of 'Family Gang', in fact, was
members as family members.

range of works.


For a discussion on these lines, see Wally

It observed it as early as in 1920-21. For a detail discussion on this issue and the drinking culture in the coalfields one may look at my chapter 'Drinking Culture and Class Conflict' in Nite

The proportion of this group of colliers was, however, very small, around 15 per cent of the total workforce, until the early 1920s and rose to around 20 per cent by the late 1920s. See CRBO 1921; Whitely Report, 931.

Chitra Joshi (2003) has also observed a similar phenomenon between Kanpur textile workers and, Ranjit Dasgupta (1994) in case of Calcutta Jute and Cotton Mills workers.


Seth (1940: 167-68). This was possible because of the way dhowrahs were distributed. The labour sirdar (recruiter) usually distributed these between his gang members. This helped the sirdar to maintain control on miners from his own social network or labour catchments. See Foley Report (1920: 62, 82).


This was responsible for employment of the tender age children. The under-subsistence wage economy and the low labour productivity, after Kerr (1997), appeared as economic precondition.

For a discussion on these lines, see Wally Seccombe (1993, 1997).

See, Memorandum submitted by Indian Mines Association to the Indian Mines Bill. Deptt. of Rev. & Agri. 1900: 07/1900. See also CRBO for 1901, 1921, and 1931. She conceived a child at the age of 12 to 14. The marriage age went up after the prohibition on employment of children. B.P. Guha found in 1959 very few married persons in the field in the age group below 15; and only 55 to 62 percents male and female were married in the age group of 15-34 (Labour Bureau, 1965: 11).

P. Noniya, Interview on January 24, 2004, at the Dhansar Colliery bastee. He was third generation in his family to work in the mines. His father and mother were coal cutter and loader at the Bhowra colliery. He was four brothers and the youngest one. He joined colliery work at very early age of 12 as wagon loader in the early 1950s. U. Deshwal, Interviews, January 2, 2008, at the Chettudih-Katras bastee. She began to work as wagon loader alongside her mother-in-law since the late 1950s.

For a detail discussion on this issue and the drinking culture in the coalfields one may look at my chapter 'Drinking Culture and Class Conflict' in Nite (2005b).

The theory of the breakdown in the family under the impact of industrialization comes forth from a wide range of works. See: Thompson (1963/68); Banerjee (1981); Sachidananda and Mandal (1985).

Engels (1993) has suggested that the widely circulated managerial talk of 'Family Gang', in fact, was often misleading because often the single woman and the widow were not in any way attached to the gang members as family members.

Report of the Special Investigation of the Chief Inspector (Penman) of Mines in 1925. The percentage of women working unattached was lower (15 per cent) in the Jharia fields, and the percentage with relatives was higher. See, Bulletins of Indian Industries & Labour (hereafter BILL), 1926: 41-42, 46.

The Santhals from Hazaribagh and Santhal Pargana, the Bauris from Burdwan, Bakura and Manbhum, the Rajwars from Manbhum, and the Bhuiyans from Monghyr and Gaya, in particular, worked in family gangs.

The women constituted a larger number than the man in the Bauris community in 1921 (CRBO, 1921).

Seth (1940:131) noted 'The job of loading, in particular, has been so consistently a part of the women work that the male-folks feel it below their dignity to take up it, as they regard it as the womanish'. There were 6.9 women (42 per cent of the total labour force underground) for every 10 men underground and 6.1 (38 per cent of the total labour force) women for every 10 men in the Jharia coalfields in 1920.

80 pound = 36 kg
conventions; improvement in the wage rates and an equal wages for the woman workers; reduction in working hours, provisions for the weekly holiday; the housing, creche, education, medical facilities; the housing, creche, education, medical facilities; the

37 NM Joshi was a member of the Servant of India Society and nominated member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Chaman Lal was the General Secretary of AITUC, and a nominated MLA. Krishna Kant was an MLA.

38 Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. (1925: L - 1150 (9), L - 1174 (4); (1924: L - 1162 (1)). The very second congress of AITUC held in Jharia called for agitation on a wide range of issues: the ratification of the ILO conventions; improvement in the wage rates and an equal wages for the woman workers; reduction in working hours, provisions for the weekly holiday; the housing, crèche, education, medical facilities; the

39 Kerr (1997) has pointed out that the more than eighty percent labourers employed in the railway constructions, especially earthworks, ballast works, and brick kiln labour, belonged to this form. This tradition was prevalent in many home-based handicraft works.

40 Foley Report (1920: 82). Child labour, according to the statistics of the mines department, accounted for not more than 5—7 per cent of the total miners in the early 1920s. However, official statistics overlooked the presence of younger children who assisted their parents as part of family gangs.

41 Their replies to The Indian Mines Bill, 1899 (Deptt. Of Rev. and Agri. 1900: 07); the Foley committee (1920: 57-131); and Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. 1923: M- 665; IMF’s Souvenir (1963: 57-58, 87-88). The debate first surfaced as early as the 1890s on the issue of removal of women and children from mines. The Mining Act, 1901 entitled the Governor General of India to stipulate a law in this respect, if desired. The Mining Act, 1923-24 simply renewed that provision. European managers complained against the practice of family gangs and employment of women in underground mining, especially after the war (1918-21). See Foley (1920: 75), Noyce Report (1925, vol. 1: 34).

42 Simeon (1984) has also made a detailed inquiry into political economic basis of the practice of labour gang system.

43 Curjel’s Report (1923: 7; Indian Mines Bill, 1900. The tradition of family-wage-economy changed with the introduction of individual wage payment system.

44 ‘Memorandum of Indian Mining Association to the Department of Industries and Labour concerning the question of prohibition on underground employment of woman in the mines’, BILL 1926.

45 For a comparison with recruitment strategy seen in the Assam plantations, see Punekar and Varickayil (1989).

46 At one level, the new phase of republican modernization, initiated in the aftermath of World War I, appears to have been an extension of the ‘civilizing’ zeal put on in the 1890s. The effort to protect the health of women and children employed in the mines now graduated to include the idea of general improvement in the condition of the working masses; restoring them their worn-out home/family life; and bestowing them with a dignified life and participatory political standing (entitlements in education, schooling, and leisure). Nonetheless, the new ethico-political spirit appears markedly advanced one, which was expressed through the talk of working-class rights and entitlement. This was a new stage in republican modernity, as expressed through the politics of Red Trade Unions of World. There is a tendency to give credit to the emergence of ILO for new terms of discussion and direction seen in India in the aftermath of WWI. We have normally overlooked the role played by WWLI, in the leadership of Saparul Saklatwala, in bringing the new approach to Indian political scenario. The WWLI represented the young Indian intelligentsia placed in London in 1912-16. They shared interests in social and political improvement in Indian society. The people’s right and labour reforms constituted their central concerns. They perceived the industrial labouring people as ‘revolutionary force’ for the project of agitation in order to force British Govt. to concede independence to the country and accord democracy to the people. They believed that their concern with labour reform represented the social discontent of the industrializing world. The formation of WWLI represented this social discontent, where they sought after a united front of the workers of the empire. The members associated with it took initiatives to form a national level association of labour in 1920, known as AITUC, whereby they aimed to advance the struggle of the working people. Their critique of industrial anomalies was in terms of inequality and iniquitous sharing of profits of industrial development; subjugation of labourer to an overlong work time; and thus denial of natural human needs. They also shared certain critiques directed against the shortcoming of ILO, which conceded concessions to colonial government about working hours, and other provision in the colony. A combination of revolutionary and functional relationship between the political publicist and the masses emerged as a lasting phenomenon in the society since then (Saklatwala, 1920).

47 NM Joshi was a member of the Servant of India Society and nominated member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Chaman Lal was the General Secretary of AITUC and a nominated MLA. Krishna Kant was an MLA.

302
maternity benefits and leaves for the woman workers; and the representation of working masses in the legislative assembly; the prohibition on employment of the women in night works and of the children below the age of fourteen. The emphasis on the need of removing the coal control and a supply of sufficient number of wagons to all Indian colliery proprietors, and a prohibition on the sale of spirits accompanied the aforesaid agenda (Deptt. of Industries, 1923: L-1028). They included the agenda of nationalisation of the means of production in the session held in the year of 1928, when the AITUC congress held again in Jharia, in their quest for a genuine social emancipation of humankind. See Pol. Spl. 1923/115/1923; 1928: 244, 102 / 1928; Deptt. of Ind., 1923: L – 1028.

38 A few scholars see this cultural politics as an expression of the middle class efforts to extend the ‘bourgeois’ notion of family life to the working classes. We can identify one of the areas of ideological difference, which led to the varied articulation of new meaning of life. The bourgeois perspective laid emphasis on building of efficient and healthy workforce. In contrast, the socialist or communist perspective put emphasis on the idea of advancing humanity and pursuit of comprehensive realisation of human essence (creative and innovative energy).

39 The concerns of the colonial state about the question of reforming the reproduction relation were focussed pre-eminently on issues of prohibition of employment of the women before and after childbirth and the provision of maternity benefits. See Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. 1923: L-920 (5); Deptt. of Industries 1922: L-920 (1).

40 The problems of the colonial state about the question of reforming the reproduction relation were focussed pre-eminently on issues of prohibition of employment of the women before and after childbirth and the provision of maternity benefits. See Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. 1923: L-920 (5); Deptt. of Industries 1922: L-920 (1).

41 Deptt. of Rev. & Agri. (1900: 07); BIIL 1926.

42 Observers like Whitely Commission (1929---31), Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee (1938---41), Seth (1934---40), and Deshpande Labour Commission (1945---46) complained at different times about the dismal progress of worker welfare programmes.

43 Deptt. of Rev. and Agri. (1900: G&M 07/1900); Deptt. of Industries (1923: M-665), (1923: M-498). BIIL (1926), Deptt. of Ind. and Lab. (1929: M – 1055/1929 (62)). Barnes (1989) has argued that the big colliery establishments, usually Europeans, began to favour the restriction of employment of women from underground mines in a view to mechanise and speed up work and get rid of ‘cantankerous’ women workers in a condition of surplus cheap labourers found since mid 1920s. In contrast, the small enterprises, mainly Indians, opposed the proposal for the consideration of cost of production. My reading of sources suggests that both the groups of industrialist were opposed to prohibition. Europeans consented to it only under vigorous official persuasion and in a situation when the cheap male labour was in surplus at their disposal in the latter 1920s. In addition, many of them were financially equipped to undertake mechanical mining in the aftermath of WWI. The associations of European manager, engineer and other European scientist (those attached to the Mines Department) were the staunchest advocate of prohibition to promote mechanical safe mining and to see an extension of European mining practice to India. They already successfully undertook such metamorphosis in South Africa.

44 The sexual economy means materiality of the site of sexual relation and practice. For a detail discussion on it, see Marry E John and Janaki Nair (1998/2000: 7, 9).

45 The churning of the social (caste) upliftment movements took roots in the vast populace, comprising more than a dozen caste-solidarities from unprivileged and underprivileged social conditions in the province. Some of their characteristic pursuits included the claim for the higher social status of the Kshatryas, Viskarma-Brahmin and the Vaishyas; the adoption of Janeo (sacred thread); the prevention of beggary and services of labour of woman member in the other’s fields and in the distant market; the prevention of widow remarriage and child marriage; the exhortation of the members for education of children (both boys and girls) and the demand for access to educational and training institutions; the prohibition on drinking and adherence to the pious food habit and sanitary accommodation. In this way, these preferences neither fall under the concept of orthodox ‘sanskritisation’ as they did not like to go for the child marriage practice of the orthodox Hindu caste, nor the modernisation as they preferred to adopt prevention of widow remarriage. See CRBO for 1921 and 1931. Pol Spl. 397/1922; 60/1924; 171/1925; 07/1926; 102/1931.

46 Now the total employment of woman, including surface work and quarry came down from about one-third in 1928-29 to a little above thirteen percent of the total workforce in 1937.

47 CIMAR, 1923-38, quoted in Seth (1940: 97, 104-105, 150). Whitely (1931: 127). The average earning of a worker was calculated by taking 4 days as the average number of days worked in a week.
central and north Bihar, and eastern (Jj apprenticeship and mining Committee (1937: 26).

56 Mr. Thomas’s evidence to the Copeland committee (1934), cited in Seth (1940: 246, 248).


58 Seth, 1940: 136-1370. Some of such relations of sexual subjugation and appropriation that are often interlocked with the work relations as seen in the mining society in the Kollar gold fields, and in the Assam plantations society.

59 Deshpande (1946b) found that 57 percent households had working women in the mines in 1945.

60 CIMAR. 1948. Kuntula Lahiri-Dutt (2001) has examined this aspect of the mining society in Raniganj coalfields.

61 The proportion of women to the total population of the miners’ families came down from sixty percent in 1930 to about 40 percent in 1959. The percentage of working woman in 1959 was fourteen, and twenty-five percent households had working women in the mines (Labour Bureau, 1965: 11).

62 Deshpande (1946b) found that 57 percent households had working women in the mines in 1945.

63 Barnes (1989) has engaged with this historical process in her Ph.D.

64 Plays of Bhikhari Thakur, such as ‘Bideshya’ and some of the popular rural Bideshya folk songs of central and north Bihar, and eastern United Provinces convey experiences and feelings of the kind working-class families had here.

65 The latter was arranged for the colonial army personnel in their camp.

66 I have collected these folksongs from DP Saxena (1977: 175-178); Sangari and Vaid (1989/99: 294-95).

67 Prasad Committee (1941, Vol. II, A: 327-330) found them in more than one-fifth of his sample of families in 1938.

68 Shyamal Chandra Bhattacharya, Jahru Mahtoo and some other comrades: Interviews on March 24, 2008 at 11.15—2.45 o’clock at the labour association office in the Madhuban colliery. Bhattacharya was the younger son of a colliery medical officer in the Madhuban. He worked as a surveyor in the Madhuban colliery between 1957 and 2000. His elder brother (a clerk) and he were associates of the communist activity since the 1960s. The company employed the lathaiits to eliminate physically his father and brother in 1968, since they were witnesses to the murder of a few labour agitators in the aftermath of agitation over the implementation of the colliery wage board declared in September 1967.

69 The crafts-women, like Paturia Gulabo from Chhapara, Dhela Bai from Muzhafarpur, Munya Bai and Duniya Bai from Mirganj (Gopalganj), in the late nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, were reputed for their crafts of lyrics composition, singing and dancing, popularly known as Mujra. Still the society recognised a distinction between them and the ‘comfort woman’, called prostitute. The latter was arranged for the colonial army personnel in their camp.

70 Several workers reported me about these programmes when I posed them an enquiry as how did they spend their non-working time in different seasons.

71 We need to have more research on this issue.

72 Prasad Report, 1941: 343, 373. Such aggression on and usurpation of the body of woman in colliery communities received resistance in the 1950s on, as the traditional mining communities gradually became politically organized and economically settled.

73 Prasad Jee and Prasadin Amma: Interviews on January 20, 2004, at the Bhualanbararee baste (near Phusbangla). The former immigrated to the field from Banaras district (United Province) in 1942. His brother-in-law was employed in the colliery. He came to the colliery to enable his family to bear the exaction of rent by the zamindar. Opposed to the convention, he brought his family, i.e., his wife, after a few years of his marriage, to the colliery baste. It was possible to do so in the aftermath of introduction of family ration and minimum wages under the Conciliation Board Award.

74 A Loader’s Song (Composed by Piloo Deshwal in the 1950s, who was also author of a play ‘Zinda Kafan’ focused on the problem of sodkkhor (usury)). Piloo Deshwal was father-in-law of Uma Deshwal and Manoj whom I have interviewed on Interviewed at 12-2 pm, on April2, 2008 at their residence in the Chetudih colliery baste (Kratsa block area).

75 Moteshwar Mondal, Interviews: January 29, 2004, at the Dubaree Colliery. He was a retired time keeping clerk. He stayed in the colliery with his father in the 1950s, completed a course in survey apprenticeship and mining sirdar. He joined Dubaree colliery as time-keeping clerk in July 1960.


77 One Santhal man employed at the Bhowra colliery (Karam Chandra & Thapar Co. Ltd.) received serious injury, which he latter succumbed to, when he defended, in 1962, his wife from the vile of a lathaith.
Jones (1987) has suggested that the root of alienation between working-class children from the church and

15 century.

69 See CRBO 1921 and 1931 (section on religions); Pol. Spl. 121/1929; 57/1931; 1932: 55/1932; 210/1938.

The chivalrous notion of honour of an individual and a community saw things in terms of chastity and purity of the female member, and the subordination of her to a male patriarch as a safeguard. The female individuality was vulnerable to aggression and her insured defense was her ‘ritual’ privatization to one man than socialization of her individuality itself. The vestige of chivalrous honor feeling continued to have effect. Although, its material foundation was eroding, as an increased number of women participated in social production, took part in socialized production process, and were agents in public domain. Despite all odds, the indomitable will of the woman to pursue such public presence was a constant challenge and source of erosion to the chivalrous vestige. The political basis to support the new individuality was yet to take root.

71 The 1952 amendment to the Indian Mines Act, known as Mines Act, 1952 once again altered the age barrier to include the age group of fifteen years young. It asked the adolescent person of age group fifteen to seventeen to show a medical certificate of physical competency. The child labour in the Jharia coalfields was never as predominant as a phenomenon in the English pit-mines and the textile factories until mid 19th century. Simmons (1976) has explained this difference in terms of supplies of the cheap adult labour in India. Thompson (1968) has observed that the thinness of coal seams led the proprietors to look out for child labour in the English mines. In Jharia, the child labour accounted around four to six percent during 1915 and 1923. However, actual presence of child labour appears to have been much higher in Jharia. A considerable number of children worked as part of the family gangs, thus remained disguised.

72 The birth rate went down in a major way in the mining settlements between the families who were now permanently settled there. See Jabbi (CIMAR), 1966: 114. However, the survival rate of the child improved over time with the betterment of maternity, health and wage conditions. B.P. Guha, not surprisingly, found in 1959 that the average number of children in miners’ families was 1.01. Actually, this figure would come to on average two to three children if we take into account facts that 42 percent workers were single persons with their parent and sibling in the bastees, and only about one-third miners’ families had husband and wife with a few children. See Labour Bureau (1965: specially pages 11 and 39).

73 Chapter ‘Reproduction...’. The traditional [family-type] colliers were insistent on the continuation of the family based gang system. In contrast, new [singly] Paschimas majdoor (about 50 to 40 percent of the total working populace in 1930) struck with the demand for an increased wage-rate for male worker and prohibition on employment of the kamins. We know, after Smelser (1959), that the disruption in the family-based employment in English mills precipitated some of the struggles between spinners in the 1820s and the 1830s. In these struggles, English spinners looked to defend their patriarchal control, too, in the mills and in the family.

74 ‘Memorandum of MD Singh to Prasad Committee (BLEC, 1941: III. Pt. C: 230-231).

75 The managerial, supervisory, clerical, and mechanical-technical staff formed about fifteen percent of the total workforce.

76 Deshpande (1946b: 11) found that the woman breadwinner constituted about fifteen percent of the total workforce in 1945.

77 This pattern recurred in years of 1947—48, when the kamins whom colliers’ families readily allowed to participate in underground work during war years of 1943—46 were once again withdrawn. See Pol. Spl. 1938: 379/1938: 101. CIMAR for the years of 1947 and 1948. For a detail discussion on this point, see (Chapter ‘Wages...’).

78 Recasting against Smelser thesis (1959), Anderson (1976) has emphasised the effect of other factors: the attempt to maintain family incomes in the face of declining wages. The republican government prohibited employment of the kamins for night works in the colliery under the Mines Act, 1952 despite the objection registered by employers. The traditional mining community saw haplessly the argument of protection of womanhood and parenthood.

79 Ramjash Rawani: Interviews, January 29, 2004; nearby Twelve-number-incline bastee in Bhowra colliery. He joined Bhowra colliery as a clerk in 1946-47, retired in the mid 1990s, and was now permanently settled there. His grandparent immigrated to the field from the Arrah area in Bihar. Steadman Jones (1987) has suggested that the root of alienation between working-class children from the church and
public school lied in its unanimitating and ‘authoritarian’ environment seen in the latter nineteenth century England.

It laid down the provision that a colliery employing woman worker should provide maternity leaves and a relief wage of annas 8 per day for four weeks before and four weeks after the confinement day. Such colliery should also maintain crèche service attended by daies (attendant) to the woman worker. The Amendment brought to the Act in 1945 ensured that the underground woman worker should receive mandatory leaves for ten weeks and a relief wage of annas 12 per day.

Now there were 70 lower primary school, 18 upper primary school, and 15 maktabs in 1947. There were 199 dispensaries attached to the collieries of which 27 were with beds.

Twenty-one percent of the total collieries (465) in Bihar employed more than 500 workers, which were known as the larger colliery. There 59.6 percent of collieries employed 150 plus workers, 43.8 percent employed 250 plus workers, and the 68.6 percent had more than 100 workers in 1963. The larger colliery produced more than two-third of the total output, and employed a similar proportion of the total workforce (Labour Bureau, 1966).

B.P. Guha found in 1959 that about 18 percent of the children in the mining settlements appeared in colliery schools at the under primary level against seven percent of the children visiting to colliery schools in 1938. Notably, the total literacy in Dhanbad district in 1960 approached eighteen percent, and it stood second in the literacy table in the province of Bihar.

Permeshwar Noniya got married at age of fifteen or sixteen to a girl, a few years junior to him. She accompanied him on wagon loading work. This makes us rethink the concept of general degradation of labour in the capitalist industrial system. For a discussion on the latter conception, see Harry Braverman (1974).

Pavel Korchagin was the central protagonist of Istrovasky’s novel (1936). He emerged as a revolutionary from a similar social background in Ukraine during and after WWI.

Marx (Capital, 1977, Vol. I: 618). One needs to recognise the mediation of particular ideology in shaping the articulation of social interest and production politics. One of the components of ideology is reproduction belief ways.