CHAPTER - V

WORKING CONDITIONS IN
THE SPINNING MILLS OF ORISSA

V.0 Working Conditions In the Spinning Mills of Orissa

Unhealthy conditions in the factory as well as noise and dirt in the surrounding affect considerably the workers’ mind and health, diminish their efficiency, and consequently result in loss of production. For this reason modern industrial societies attempt to provide suitable working conditions to the workers. From this point of view it is worth analysing to what extent the spinning mills of Orissa under survey have provided suitable working conditions to their workers.

Chapter -V which is divided into five sections analyses the working conditions of workers employed in different categories of spinning mills in Orissa. Section one deals with health, hygiene and sanitation and their different aspects like cleanliness, dust, dirt, humidification, ventilation, temperature, lighting, overcrowding, drinking water, latrine, urinal, spitton etc. In section two for the purpose of the analysis of safety and welfare measures, certain conditions like safety, welfare, washing, medical facilities canteen, shelter, restroom, recreation, holidays etc have been examined. Section three in order to
examine the employment conditions discusses the categories of workers, length of their service, promotion, hours of work, different shifts and disciplinary measures. This is followed by a summing up

Working conditions in the spinning mills especially located in Orissa need to be better, since the mills have mostly workers of migratory character and of rural stock. It is aptly said:

One of the important causes of migratory character of Indian labour is that the worker who comes from the open surroundings of the village finds his job in the factories entirely different and under bad working conditions, feels miserable and tries to go back to his village as early as possible. Good working conditions can remove this important cause of the instability of labour force and will also reduce absenteeism and labour turnover to a great extent. The relations between employers and employees will also improve if the employees take care of the conditions under which the workers have to work and provide them with a bright and clean atmosphere. The workers will also not feel much exhausted and depressed and will have more time to devote to their organisation, family and welfare measures.

Good working conditions in the plant in the long run repay the employer in the form of higher standard of efficient work. Therefore, the Indian Factories Act has laid down the standard of good working conditions. The spinning mills of Orissa which were established in the recent years have attempted to adhere to the standard laid down by the regulations.
V.1 Health, Hygiene And Sanitation

One of the aspects of working conditions deals with the regulations concerning health, hygiene and sanitation of the workers. It requires the factory to look after the curative as well as the preventive aspects of the workers' health. For curative purpose, ESI facilities, free medical treatment and free medical benefits for the workers have been provided by the law. Factories are also asked to ensure the preventive aspects required for the maintenance of their workers' health. Besides, the State Government has been adequately empowered to make specific prescription to ensure that health standard is maintained through the steps in the direction of cleanliness, dust, dirt, humidification, ventilation, temperature, lighting, overcrowding, drinking water, latrines, urinals, spitoons etc.

V.1.1 Cleanliness, Dust and Dirt

The mills are under the obligation to maintain cleanliness of the premises which is otherwise likely to affect the health of the workers. The standard of cleanliness has been prescribed in the Factories Act of 1948. According to it

"(a) Every factory shall be kept clean and free from effluvial arising from any drain, privy or other nuisance and in particular, (b) accumulation of dirt and refuse shall be removed daily by sweeping or by any other effective method from the floors and benches of work rooms and from staircases and passages, (c) the floor of every workroom shall be cleaned at least once every week by washing, using disinfectant where necessary or by some other effective method (d) all inside walls
and partitions, all ceilings or tops of rooms and all walls, sides, and
tops of passages and staircases shall be kept painted or varnished at
least once in every period of five years.

The spinning mills under survey have taken certain steps to keep
their compounds clean by utilising the services of men and machines. It
is reported by the management that the floor of every workroom is
cleaned at least once in every week by using disinfectant, and inside-
walls, partitions, ceilings and passages are whitewashed once in every
14 months. It is observed that the daily sweepers and sometimes vacuum
cleaners or dust extractors are used to remove dust and dirt from the
floors. The spinning mills belonging to three categories have taken certain
steps like installation of exhaust fans, dust extractors etc, at the point of
origin to prevent its inhalation and accumulation in any workroom.

V.1.2. Humidification

Factories Act of 1948 prescribes, "In respect of all factories in
which the humidity of air is artificially increased, the State Government
may make rules (a) prescribing standards of humidification, (b) directing
prescribed tests for determining the humidity of air to be correctly carried
out and recorded, (c) prescribing methods to be adopted for securing
adequate ventilation and cooling of the air in the workrooms."

The survey conducted in the cooperative, state and private sector spinning
mills shows that they have installed humidification plants.

V.1.3. Ventilation And Temperature

One of the requirements of working conditions is adequate
ventilation by the circulation of fresh air. That is why natural ventilation
is provided through big sized windows, ventilators and artificial means such as methods of extraction of air by fans or propulsion of air into buildings by mechanical appliances.

A worker cannot put in sustained and energetic work unless there is suitable temperature. Temperature in any factory influences the working conditions. The climatic conditions, specially in summer render physical work very unpleasant due to high temperature. In order to reduce high temperature, spinning mills under survey are seen to have adopted some methods like whitewashing and screening the outside walls by raising the level of roof and installing ceiling and exhaust fans, and air conditioners etc. They try to maintain such a temperature to provide suitable working condition and comfort to workers and prevent injury to their health.

V.1.4 Lighting

Like temperature and ventilation, lighting is a part of better working condition in any factory or mill. According to Factories Act of 1948, "In every part where workers are working or passing there shall be provided and maintained sufficient and suitable lighting natural or artificial or both." Adequate and suitable lighting arrangements help to protect the eyesight of the workers in the places of work. In the spinning mills under survey, natural lighting is derived through glass-panelled roofs, windows and side walls; and artificial light is also provided by the arrangement of electricity. Very often, the continuous use of artificial light strains the eyes and unsatisfactory illumination increases liability to accidents and insanitary conditions as dirt accumulates unnoticed in the absence of adequate light. In order to avoid such problems by making...
lighting arrangements properly, the spinning mills under survey use shaded electric lamps in such a manner that they do not cast shadows on the actual place of work and do not fall directly on the eyes of the workers. Since these spinning mills are bigger units and they have been established in recent years, it appears that they have paid serious attention to create better and modern working conditions by making proper and adequate arrangements in the aspects of temperature, ventilation and lighting.

V.1.5 Overcrowding

It has been mentioned in the Factories Act of 1948 that “no room in any factory shall be overcrowded to an extent injurious to the health of the workers employed therein.” In compliance to the regulations, the spinning mills under survey have taken certain steps. Their layout of the machineries have been done in such a manner that there remain enough space between the machines to accommodate more workers with freedom for movement.

V.1.6. Drinking Water

Factories Act of 1948 prescribes that “In every factory effective arrangements shall be made to provide and maintain at suitable points for all workers employed therein a sufficient supply of drinking water. In every factory wherein more than two hundred and fifty workers are ordinarily employed, provisions shall be made for cool drinking water during hot weather by effective means.”

The spinning mills of Orissa, like other modern mills employing large number of workers follow these legal provisions and arrange to
provide and maintain sufficient supply of good drinking water at convenient points with the signboards in Oriya language. Since all these mills do not have the privilege of getting connection with public water supply, some of them have made their own arrangements of supplying drinking water. They also provide cool drinking water during the summer in or near all of their departments, according to standards prescribed by the Chief Inspector of Factories.

V.1.7 Latrines And Urinals

The Factories Act of 1948 directs, "In every factory (a) sufficient latrine and urinal accommodation of prescribed types shall be provided conveniently situated and accessible to all workers at all times while they are at the factory, (b) separate enclosed accommodation shall be provided for male and female workers, (c) sweepers shall be employed whose primary duty would be to keep clean latrines, urinals, and washing places." 13

The survey shows that the spinning mills have provided sufficient number of latrines and urinals of prescribed types which are situated at convenient places with easy accessibility. The toilets, separately arranged for male and female are adequately lighted and well ventilated and maintained in clean conditions. For this purpose, sweepers are engaged to wash and clean them with disinfectant every day. Under Section 12(3) of Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, the Memorandum of Settlement between the management of Sarala Spinning Mills Ltd. and its workers provides a separate latrine complex for reeling/winding/bundling workers in B and C shift, and employs two sanitation men exclusively for keeping the latrines, spittoons etc clean. 14
V.1.8 Spittoons

The spinning mills also provide and maintain sufficient number of spittoons at different sites in order to create awareness among the workers about cleanliness and hygienic condition. They also notify some kind of punishment to the workers for spitting here and there in the premises without using the spittoons. But in practice such warning hardly affect the offenders who fail to give up their rural habits of chewing betel and spitting here and there.

V.2.0 Safety and Welfare Measures

Industrial expansion in many modern welfare states is regulated by safety and welfare measures. The employers are supposed to follow these measures voluntarily because the measures, in the long run, repay the employers in the higher standards of efficient work which they are able to secure from their employees. Along with voluntary actions of the employers, there are also the regulations and controls of the State. The State has legislated a series of acts and regulations from time to time to induce the employers in taking required measures, timely and adequately, in the direction of the safety and welfare of the labourers and has created a number of agencies to regulate and supervise the activities of the employers in this connection.

V.2.1 Safety

Certain measures are taken by the mill authorities for the safety of the labourers. The layout of the machineries in different departments of spinning mills is such that it provides adequate safe space between
the different machineries with which the workers usually come in contact. The machineries are also properly fenced and covered. These measures are taken for the purpose of safety and avoiding overcrowding and congestion. The obligation for fencing of dangerous part of machinery is absolute and its construction is so safe as to be inaccessible to every employee. Factories Act of 1948 prescribes that “no woman or child shall be employed in any part of a factory for pressing cotton in which a cotton opener is at work”.15

In the spinning mills, all floors, steps, passages are of sound construction and properly maintained and are kept free from obstructions and substances likely to cause persons to slip and to ensure further safety steps, stairs and passages are provided with substantial handrails. Safety shoes and hand gloves are issued to the workers. In order to face the outbreak of fire, precautions are taken by providing adequate number of fire extinguishers and extra exits, doors or windows other than the means of exit in ordinary use, affording a means of escape in case of fire. These provisions are made as per the guidelines of the factory regulations. The Factory Inspector from the Government also inspects the mills periodically to ensure that the safety provisions are really followed by the mill authorities.16 For better safety and security of workmen, ‘Janata Accidental Policy’ has been introduced besides implementation of ESI and the Workmen Compensation Act, 1923 provides for the payment of compensation to their workmen for injury by accident to the dependents of workmen involved in fatal accidents.17

It is evident from the reports that in the cooperative sector spinning mills, the total number of accidents have been about 15 during
the period under survey. In case of state sector spinning mills, the number of accidents have been two for which compensation has been paid. In private sector spinning mills, 25 number of accidents have occurred so far, and in each case compensation has been paid. It is evident from the survey reports that the occurrence of accidents in private sector spinning mill is higher than others and it is minimum in case of state sector spinning mills. However, no accident has been fatal so far. It is because the spinning mills use to provide proper safety measures in up-to-date form. These mills were set up in recent years, mostly within the last two decades. Obviously they have adopted all kinds of modern methods in their attempt to provide safety to the workers.

V.2.2 Welfare

Welfare work is defined as voluntary effort of the employer to improve the living and working conditions of his employees. In a note on ‘welfare work’ in the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, H S Pearson states, “This term is used to describe the voluntary efforts of an employer to establish, within the existing industrial system, working and sometimes living and cultural conditions of his employees beyond what is required by law, the customs of industry and the conditions of the market.”

There are several enactments which govern the conditions of work and remuneration. The Indian ‘Factories Act of 1948’ empowers State Governments to lay down standards for cleanliness, artificial humidification, overcrowding, lighting, provision for drinking water, and water for purposes of washing, latrines and urinals, provision of first aid appliances, rest shelters, rooms for children and for the fencing.
of dangerous machinery in motion. The Workmen Compensation Act, 1923, provides for the payment of compensation to their workmen for injury by accident and to the dependents involved in fatal accidents and the Maternity Benefit Act provides for the payment of maternity benefits to them.

V. 2.3 Washing Facilities

Workers in a mill or factory need the washing and sitting facilities. Spinning mills under survey have provided adequate and separate facilities for washing for the use of male and female workers through the wash-basins and bathrooms etc. But the mill authorities have hardly made sitting arrangements for their workers. They apprehend that their workers, obliged to work in a standing position may take advantage of opportunities for rest during the working hours.

V. 2.4 Medical Facilities

The spinning mills under survey maintain during working hours first-aid boxes or cupboards equipped with prescribed contents so as to be readily accessible in case of emergency. And again, around spinning mills, E.S.I. dispensaries or hospitals under the control of the E.S.I. Scheme of Orissa have been set up. They provide all kinds of short term and long term medical treatment as well as benefits to the workers who are called IPs in the E.S.I. terminology.

Under the authority of the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, the E.S.I. Scheme of Orissa maintains a chain of hospitals and dispensaries for the industrial workers including those of the spinning mills. The E.S.I. fund, held and administered by the Employees State
Insurance Corporation is made up of employers’ special contribution, employees contribution and the contribution of the State Government. For 1000 IPs, an ESI dispensary is run by one medical officer, one nurse, one midwife, one pharmacist, one laboratory technician, one dresser, and a few class III and class IV office staff. The strength of the staff of an ESI dispensary increases on the basis of same yardstick with the increase of per 1000 IPs more. The IPs and their family members are entitled to free and full medical care which consists of out-patient’s treatment, domiciliary treatment, specialist consultation, in-patient treatment, free supply of drugs and dressings, vaccination and preventive inoculations, anti-natal care, confinement and post-natal care, ambulance service, medical certification etc. The IPs usually receive the medical benefit in kind, and the sickness benefit, maternity benefit, disablement benefit, dependent’s benefit and funeral benefit in cash.

However, while analysing the provisions of the medical facilities available to the workers of the spinning mills under survey, one can observe easily certain things worthy to be mentioned. Firstly, the existing medical affair is directed almost entirely to the curative side, and no attention is paid to the preventive side for the maintenance of good health of the workers. Secondly, since the workers as IPs of the ESI Scheme receive cash benefits for their suffering of ordinary nature from the fourth day of incapacity, and that is possible only by the certificate issued by the medical officer of the local ESI dispensary or hospital, there is very often misuse of this facility. Some workers are tempted to add to their income by getting the ESI benefit in cash through obtaining medical certificate for fake sickness. In that case, they either make
unholy alliance with the medical officer or terrorise him by violent behaviour and trade unionism. It is also reported that some trade union leaders and unruly workers pretend to suffer from serious disease like TB, force the ESI doctors to get admission as indoor patients in the medical wards where they take rich food without staying, and draw sickness benefit in cash without attending their mill duties. Such false certification and fake admission in hospitals not only result in drainage in the ESI fund but also encourage absenteeism in the spinning mills.

V.2.5 Canteen, Shelter And Restroom

*Orissa Factory Manual* says, “In every factory wherein more than one hundred and fifty workers are ordinarily employed adequate and suitable shelters or rest-rooms and suitable lunch-room, with provision of drinking water, where workers can eat meals brought by them, shall be provided and maintained for the use of workers.” According to the reports from the mills under survey it is evident that in case of each cooperative sector spinning mill a canteen is functioning inside the mill premises to cater to the needs of the workmen. Free accommodation, power and water supply and fuels are being provided to the canteen by the mills as a measure of subsidy to supply food to the workers at much cheaper rate. But in the spinning mills under the state sector as well as the private sector, asbestos roofed open rest shed has been provided. The dining rooms are ill-kept and not adequately furnished and accommodation provided is not spacious. It is also observed that separate retiring room for female workers has not been provided.
V.2.6  Creches

According to *Orissa Factory Manual*, "In every factory wherein more than thirty women workers are ordinarily employed there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or room for the use of children under the age of six years of such women. Such rooms shall provide adequate accommodation, shall be adequately lighted and ventilated, shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition and shall be under the charge of women trained in the case of children and infants" 29

Since more than thirty women workers are employed, the spinning mill provides creche facilities as required by the factory rules. The mill provides a well-ventilated and lighted room where a female attendant looks after the kids of female workers at work. However, it is observed that toys are not provided to the children. And again, different categories of spinning mills maintain different standards as regards the provision of creches. Many mills have not provided cots, cradles and other necessities. Even the spinning mills under co-operative sector have converted a space of the existing building into creches, and that facility is even not found in the private sector mills. It appears that the mills are paying lip service to this facility without really doing anything in this regard, and their intention is to respect the factory rules in the most nominal manner without incurring any expenditure.

V.2.7  Recreation

One of the objects in reducing the length of the working days is to secure greater leisure to workers since leisure properly spent leads to better efficiency at work. That is why the employers as well as
Government and trade unions attempt to provide the industrial workers with suitable recreational facilities in the factories and labour colonies.

The spinning mills in Orissa under survey have provided recreational facilities of various kinds to their workers. Each spinning mill has at least a library cum reading room where literate workers can spend time by reading magazines, books and newspaper, and a place where popular films are shown to the workers in the weekend. The mills also provide some indoor game facilities and sometimes organise sports for their labour force. Since majority of the workers are Hindu by religion, a temple constructed and maintained by the mills inside their premises is a common sight. "In case of cooperative spinning mills, as measures of entertainment of the workers, film shows, opera etc. are exhibited only on mill holidays. Besides a TV set has been installed in the workers' restshed. They also organise athletic and other cultural programmes and distribute prizes to encourage talent of the workmen once in a year." 

But in case of mills in the state sector, according to reports furnished by the management, there is hardly any provision for recreation of the workers. Same is the situation in the private sector mills.

Mills are directed by the regulations to provide gardens and pleasant surroundings where the workers can relax during their spare hours. But in reality, mills hardly follow the direction. Similarly the other provisions that factory inspectors and labour welfare officers should inspect the mills periodically to see that safety provisions are followed in order to improve the welfare of the workers have turned out to be mere unimportant affair.
V. 3.0 Employment Conditions

Conditions of employment which influence the health the efficiency of the workers include the methods of recruitment of the workers, hours of work, length of service, holidays with pay and disciplinary measures etc are closely connected with problems of labour welfare and conditions of work and employment.

V. 3.1 Categories of Workers

According to Standing Orders of the mills, workers are generally classified into permanent, probationer, badli/substitute, casual and apprentice. A 'permanent' workman is one who has been engaged on permanent basis against a sanctioned post. He must have completed one year probationary service after the decision of Departmental Promotion Committee which takes into account the nature of the job, efficiency of worker and the total number of days worked before deciding to give promotion to a permanent worker. A permanent worker enjoys certain rights such as (a) one day leave after 20 days of work (b) casual leave of 10 days in a year and sick leave, (c) privilege leave of usually one month after one year's service, (d) increments, attendance bonus, uniform facilities etc (e) loan from co-operative society and other benefits (f) benefit of provident fund or gratuity, (g) house rent allowance if not provided with quarters, (h) night shift allowance @ Rs 1/- per day of physical attendance, (i) attendance bonus, (j) dust allowance, (k) washing allowance etc.
'Probationers' are those who have been engaged on probation and have not completed six months service in a post. They are entitled to casual leave, sick leave privilege leave and all those benefits and privileges what permanent workers enjoy except pension, provident fund and gratuity.

Some kind of substitution labour is unavoidable in order to manage the situation created by absenteeism, and substitution becomes a regular feature when absenteeism becomes common. For this reason 'badli' or substitute, casual and apprentice type of workmen are engaged. Badli or substitute is one who is appointed in the post of a permanent workman or a probationer who is temporarily absent. A badli working continuously in place of a probationer is deemed to be permanent after completion of the qualifying period. Such workman on completion of 240 days in a calendar year in the same post is considered for permanent post. A workman when engaged in work which is of an essentially casual nature is a 'casual worker' who is also not qualified for any privilege or concession. An 'apprentice', who is either paid an allowance or not paid gets training in a job, and after successful completion may be engaged as badli workman.

V.3.2 Length of Service

Length of service of the workers is another factor determining the employment conditions. Because of the security of tenure, larger percentage of workers with long service records are found in the spinning mills under the state and co-operative sectors. In order to have comprehensive idea on the length of service of the workers in different categories of spinning mills Table 5.1 is presented.
### TABLE 5.1

LENGTH OF SERVICE OF WORKERS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sl no</th>
<th>Category of the</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0 to 2 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spinning Mills</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cooperative Sector</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>State Sector</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Source: Management's Questionnaire Schedule*
The table under reference shows larger percentage of workers belonging to the co-operative sector spinning mills have comparatively long service of six to eight years. In case of private sector spinning mills, 41.79 per cent of workers have two to four years of service and 38.41 per cent have 10 and more years of service. The table also shows that larger percentage of labour force have long service, mainly because the workers use to stick to their jobs for the benefit of provident fund and gratuity. The other factor is that the skilled workers who predominant the labour force are generally more stable and also more dependent on industrial employment. To some extent, the length of service in spinning mills also depends upon the workers, village connections and lack of suitable alternative employment in the neighbourhood.

V.3.3 Promotions

Importance of promotion in the life of the industrial workers is evident from the remarks of the Bombay Textile Labour Inquiry Committee which said, "In all progressive industrial countries it is recognised that one of the effective methods of securing contentment among workers and creating loyalty to the organisation is the existence of a definite and well-planned system of transfers and promotions." For that reason, the system of graded and incremental promotions has been an important aspect of the employment conditions. Promotions mean a better grade or a rise in status or wages or both, and a movement from a lower grade to a higher grade within the same category. Increments mean where a worker gets higher and higher income in the same grade by periodical annual increments.
In the spinning mills of Orissa there are no incremental scales for the workers, except for supervisory staff and officers. Graded promotions are given to the workers only when there arises vacancy in the post. In respect of promotion, it is the DPC which takes the decisions. Seniority, efficiency and conduct are taken into consideration by the DPC to promote a worker in filling up the vacancy. However, it is observed that the Standing Orders for the spinning mills which speak of the framing of service rules, laying down the scale of pay, grades and promotion are often ignored by the management. Promotion is sometimes considered as bestowing favour, and is sometimes made under the influence of political, personal or trade union factors. Consequently, promotion matters often create dissatisfaction and unrest among the workers of the spinning mills.

V.3.4 Hours of Work

The number of hours a worker has to work influences his health and efficiency. Concentrated labour for a period of four to five hours ceaselessly imposes strain on a worker who obviously becomes slack in his job by the closing hours of the shift. As a result, he tries to escape from fatigue and develop the habit of gossip and loitering under various pretexts. Section 51 of Factories Act of 1948, therefore say, "No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work in a factory for more than nine hours in any day. Besides, the periods of work of adult worker in a factory each day shall be fixed that no period shall exceed five hours and that no worker shall work for more than five hours before he has had an interval for rest of at least half an hour. No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work in a factory for more than forty-eight hours in a week."
In the spinning mills under survey besides a general shift for office staff from 8 A M to 5 P M, there are three shifts for the workers. Each shift extends over eight hours with half an hour break, and no woman is allowed to work except between 6 A M to 7 P M. In respect of overtime work, when a labourer works for more than nine hours in a day or for more than forty-eight hours in any week, he is entitled to wages at the rate of twice his ordinary rate of wages.

V.3.5 Shifts

All spinning mills adopt multiple shift system of three shifts, each of eight hours with a rest interval of half an hour or one hour with a general day shift. The shifting system has the advantage that it makes full use of machinery and reduces overhead costs in terms of output. Besides the general shift from 8 A M to 5 P M, ‘A’ shift operates in between 6 A M to 2 P M, ‘B’ shift extends from 2 P M to 10 P M, and ‘C’ shift from 10 P M to 6 A M. Labourers work in these three shifts by rotation every month. Though the night shifts reduces the overhead costs, it has an adverse effect on the health of the workers and quality and quantity of their output. It becomes difficult for the workers to get sound sleep during day time on account of overcrowded living conditions and noise. Obviously, the workers do not do their best during the night shifts, especially during the third shift. According to survey reports production in the night shift is lower than that of the day shift. However, there is no statistics to show the effects of night duty on the quantity and quality of production. From the survey conducted, it is also evident that workers are unwilling to work in night shift, and consequently the rate of absenteeism is higher during night shifts.
V.3.6 Disciplinary Measures

Standing Orders of Onssa spinning mills which emphasise on the proper maintenance of discipline inside the mill premises, declare, "An employee in the spinning mill showing disobedience or insubordination to a higher rank or doing anything amounting to misconduct is entitled to punishment Depending on the nature of offence, the punishment depends entirely on the discretion of the management. Certain acts will be treated as minor misconduct such as loitering during duty hours, unauthorised absence from proper place of duty, furnishing false information regarding one's bio-data at the time of employment, etc. Repetition of minor misconduct and other types of misconduct or criminal offence, etc., enumerated in the standing orders will constitute major misconduct."

According to the Standing Orders, a worker found guilty of any misconduct is liable to punishment. Minor punishment includes (i) warning, (ii) censure, (iii) suspension without wages or salaries for a period not exceeding four days at a time and (iv) fine in accordance with the Payment of Wages Act of 1936. Likewise, the major punishments constitute (i) reduction to a lower grade or demotion, (ii) withholding of increment either partially or wholly, (iii) not allowing promotion and (iv) dismissal or discharge from service without any notice or payment in lieu of notice.

The procedure for imposition of minor punishment is that a labourer accused of misconduct is informed in writing of the allegations made against him. He is given an opportunity to explain the charges within two days, and his explanation is taken into account before
imposing a minor penalty on him. In case of imposition of major
punishment, an accused of misconduct is given a chargesheet and two
days time to explain the charges alleged against him. If he fails to submit
an explanation within specified time, an enquiry is conducted against
him, and if he refuses or fails to present himself the enquiry is conducted
ex parte and punishment is awarded by taking into account the
misconduct committed by him.

When a disciplinary proceeding against a worker is contemplated
or criminal proceedings is under investigation or trial, the management
by order may suspend him. During the period of suspension, the labourer
is paid a subsistence allowance at the rate that, for the first 90 days,
half of the basic wages, dearness allowance and other compensatory
allowances. After 90 days, the subsistence allowance is reduced to 25
per cent of his basic wages, dearness allowance and other compensatory
allowances. In awarding punishment, the management takes into account
the gravity of his misconduct, his previous records and any other
aggravating circumstance that may exist. For that reason, the
management of spinning mills have introduced the system of Registration
Card or Service Card. In this card all kinds of information about the
workers, both of permanent nature like name, age, address etc and of
changing nature, such as changes in occupation, wages, attendance,
leave, disciplinary measures, compensations etc are noted down. If a
worker commits an offence, whether of indiscipline, slackness or any
other, and if the offence is proved he is warned and such warning is
noted down on the card. For the second offence, he is again warned and
his card is endorsed. On the occasion of third offence, he faces major
punishment including dismissal from service. These cards enable the
management to decide promotions and dismissals and envisage to make the worker sincere and regular.

However, in practice the management finds a lot of difficulties to follow the procedures and award punishment. Under the changing socio-political scenario, close association of workers with the political parties and trade unions does not allow the management a free hand in this matter. To avoid tension inside the mill premises and interference from outside, and sometimes violence and even strike, the mill authorities have learned to compromise and adjust. Consequently, punishment is becoming rare occurrence, and laxity in discipline inside the mill is a common sight.

V.4. A Summing up

The main findings regarding working conditions of labourers in the spinning mills of Orissa can be summed up as follows:

(i) The spinning mills under survey have been set up mostly during the last two decades, and therefore are comparatively modern. So they pay serious attention to create better and modern working conditions by making proper and adequate arrangement of health, hygiene and sanitation and other essential services inside their premises. However, private sector spinning mills are seen to be lagging behind in this aspect.

(ii) Since the standard of safety in the spinning mills is in up-to-date form, there are no fatal accidents. Of course, there are minor accidents occasionally, and they occur mostly in the private sector spinning mill.
(iii) In the absence of well-defined promotion plans and proper promotion criteria, merit is not always the basis of promotion. This often creates dissatisfaction and unrest among the workers.

(iv) To maintain discipline in the spinning mills, the management authorities impose minor punishments in the form of warnings and fines, but rarely go for major punishments like suspension and dismissal. This leniency in the attitude of the management is due to politicalisation of the labour force and trade unionism, and consequently there is growing laxity of discipline.

FOOT NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. Workers’ Questionnaire - Schedule And Field Survey
6. Act No. 63 of 1948, Sec 15
7. Ibid, Sec 13
8. Workers’ Questionnaire - Schedule And Field Survey
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