CHAPTER IV
ACCUMULATION OF LABOUR AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Accumulation

Gold mining is a labour intensive industry. When organised gold mining commenced in 1880 at KGF, the local population was not sufficient to meet the labour requirements of the industry. The industry attracted the poor peasants of the neighbouring states. The process which began in 1881 accelerated and resulted in the accumulation of a massive labour force at the mining centre.

In the initial phase property development was the main task. Labour was needed for sinking of shafts, construction of superstructures, cutting tunnels etc. Early reports of Capt. Benjamin D Plummer, the key person responsible for the development of gold mining in KGF, narrates the process of property development. In his 1882, March Report he made detailed references about the difficulties the Europeans, involved in mining, had to face. They had to confront hostile weather conditions, scarcity for drinking water, and epidemic of influenza. Proper housing facilities also were not available.
Labour - Character and Composition

The mining work force represented a racial pyramid. At the top of the pyramid were the European managers and in the middle were the Anglo Indians. At the bottom remained the native ‘coolie’. Europeans were less in number. They were on top of the hierarchy in terms of pay, status, managerial responsibility, formal training, skill, conditions of service and non-pecuniary benefits. As a group they were only 1% of the total work force and were employed both in the underground and on the surface. Majority of them hailed from UK and more specifically Cornwall. They were accompanied by their wives and made KGF their home. When they left the job it was occupied by their sons or other close relatives. They were provided various amenities like posh bungalows and a battery of servants. All the British personnel enjoyed covenanted status and were on fixed service of three year contract renewed upon request. They were paid expenses furlough (leave with pay) in Europe, free housing, furniture allowance, free fuel, lighting, a pension, medical service and use of exclusive recreational facilities. They formed a close knit community.

Italians constituted the other European group. All Italians were employed as face workers because of their experience in excavating marble. Most of
them dispersed after the Great War. They did not intend to settle permanently and hence came alone.

The Eurasians (Anglo-Indians) constituted 0.57% of the underground work force and 1.2% of the work force during 1907-40. They worked mostly at supervisory levels in technical and administrative wings as clerks, assistant underground agents, foremen, timbermen, pitmen, train engine drivers, boiler operators, hoisting room operators etc.

Native labour constituted the core of both surface and underground work force. No women, girls or boys below ten years were given any underground work. Males formed 97% of the total underground staff and 87% of the surface staff. This was the situation between 1900 and 1946. In 1926 the percentage of females and children (under 12) accounted for 11.7% of all workers and 25.8% of those on surface. This was due to the greater demand for surface wise ore treatment. Women and children were not preferred for underground work, because the nature of jobs available in the mine was physically demanding.

**Birth Place of Native Labour**

KGF, situated in the north east of the Princely Mysore State, is surrounded by the Tamil and Telugu speaking lands. Over half the workers
were recruited from the Madras Presidency. North Arcot supplied the largest number followed by Salem, Chitoor, Madras, Malabar and Cochin. The population census 1921 provided the following figures for KGF city.

**Table 4.1**

*Distribution of Population in KGF City - 1921 census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Place</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N. Arcot</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Adi-Dravida</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>Telugu</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>Other Hindu</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Kannada</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Indian Christian</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabar &amp; Cochin</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysore state</td>
<td>43.41</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Places</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour in India, MA Sreenivasan

Majority of the population were Adi Dravidas. This group also constituted the single largest caste group in the work force of the mine. The 1931 Report by MA Sreenivasan, had the following to say about the Adi Dravida labour. “The Adi Dravida of the Field though very poor and accustomed to an extremely low standard of living, is yet a handy and fairly intelligent labour…. The Adi-Dravidas are employed both in skilled and in unskilled jobs, and there are some contractors and many mastries among them”² The poor Telugu speaking men and women from Nellore District and neighbourhood were employed as scavenging and sanitary staff.
On comparing the character of Indian labour in other industrial centers with that of KGF many common factors are visible. Almost all of them were from the impoverished rural areas. Socially and economically they represent the most backward sections of the population involved in agriculture or menial labour. They belonged to the scheduled castes. In 1937, 43% of the Bombay Textile workers were from the depressed classes. The hereditary occupation of this group was serving as village menials. Guarding crops, scavenging, carrying messages, cutting and collecting fire wood, cow dung etc. were the jobs they were involved in.\(^3\) The village life was full of miseries and demeaning for them. These miserable conditions forced them to migrate. Migration to the industrial cities and towns improved their economic conditions. Further they were able to free themselves from the grip of the rural landlords and caste Hindus. Thus the mass of workers represented the superfluous elements of Indian rural population whom an impoverished land was incapable of supporting. Socially and economically they represented the most backward sections of the population and had nothing to lose by leaving the security of the village.\(^4\)

The 1941 Census of Mysore shows that at KGF out of a total work force of 27820, 13975 (50.2\%) were from the depressed classes. Of this group 3329 were from Mysore state and 10646 from outside.\(^5\) The presence of depressed classes in such large numbers is not all that surprising in view of the non-
traditional and dangerous nature of work itself, the Indian coal miners were similarly drawn from the untouchables, other low castes and tribals.  

Recruitment

Workers were divided into two categories as Company labour employed directly by the Companies and Contract labour - those who were employed through labour contractors. The workers were recruited through kanginis who persuaded the impoverished peasants and landless workers in faraway villages with promises of unrealistic wages and paid small advances to them to disentangle themselves from local debts and contracts. As labour needs increased and supply was streamlined, the management evolved a system of contract labour. These were workers employed by and through contractors and many of them were drawn from surrounding villages. The contractors entered into agreements with the companies to perform a specified task for a given rate of remuneration within a stipulated time. The jobs so contracted were the toughest, unpleasant, physically demanding and most dangerous. On obtaining the contract the contractor hired the required labour and supervised the work and usually does most of it personally. He acts as his own maistry or head of the party. He would supply tools and materials himself and then pay the wages. The contractor followed the general direction of the mining managers and also the normal mining rules and regulations laid down by the companies.
In 1929 contractors controlled over half the underground work force and a quarter of the surface workers. Totally 44% of all employees were contractors’ men. Following table explains the dominance of contract labour.

Table 4.2
Contract and Company Employees 1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract</th>
<th>percentage</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underground</td>
<td>11116</td>
<td>6271</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>4845</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface</td>
<td>7750</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>5757</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground and surface</td>
<td>18866</td>
<td>8264</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>10602</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour in India, MA Sreenivasan.

Labour Shortage and Causes

During the earlier years the companies experienced labour shortage. Depth of the mine and hazards involved in underground work and growth in demand for labour far in excess of supply were the main causes for this shortage. Absence of information about job opportunities due to poor communication and transport systems, a serious accident that killed 52 people during 1897 and spread of epidemics like cholera and plague were other contributory factors.

M/s. John Taylor & Sons’ Committee (JTSC), 1927-28 held lengthy discussions on the labour shortage. It was observed by them that the ordinary
contractor’s coolie had developed the habit of working only 14 days in the month. The better class of Moplah labour was not coming to the Field as they were doing earlier. Equally good wages available locally was supposed to be the reason for this change. The quality of labour was commended as ‘poor’. The increased demand for drillers and other kind of skilled labourers in South India due to government work and railway work affected the supply in this area.\textsuperscript{10}

**Comparison of Company Labour with Contract Labour**

A comparison of the company labour with the contract labour indicates that the conditions of the latter were worse. Contractors forced their workers to work for longer hours at a single stretch. Accident rates were high in this segment. Benefits like attendance bonus, rice advance and fuel allowance were not available to them. Rate of absenteeism was 22\% for the contract labour while for the company labour it was 7.7\%. In case of underground contract labour absenteeism was 36.3\% while for the company underground workers, it was 10.3\% during the year 1929.\textsuperscript{11} Monthly income of contract labour was Rs.15 and for the company worker it was Rs.22.\textsuperscript{12} Till 1940s the contractors held sway. But by 1942 their strength declined and by 1949 they were fully eliminated. In 1927 itself the companies were expressing discontent with the contractors. John Taylor and Committee 1927 opined, “the class of contractors
has deteriorated.” “The whole position of contractors who are rapidly becoming no more than recruiting agents needs to be considered.” Further the Committee came to the consensus of opinion that, “further introduction of Jackhammers should considerably mitigate labour difficulties, but as far as present experience goes this will involve the companies in higher costs.”

A Special Meeting of the Chief Underground Agents’, Sub-Committee (of JTSC) held on 27.2.1928 discussed the labour matter and also that of the contractors. This Meeting expressed that labour in good numbers change between mines and also between contractors of the same mine. Treating the contractors as labour recruiters was put forth. It also felt that this step followed by strict supervision will help in improving the prevailing poorer efficiency. To draw labour from outside, the Superintendent of Mysore Mine suggested that the contractors should be discontinued with and the popularity of company work will attract new recruits. The proposal however was not accepted on the grounds that company labour is costlier than the contract system. By dividing labour into two segments –contract and company- the companies were able to achieve two goals, viz; reduced labour cost and stable supply of labour.
Labour Stability

The mining labour at KGF were permanent. A 1944 study reveals that 40.5% of the KGF labour had been working in the mine since 10 years or more. 71% had stayed with the mines above 5 years. The following Table illustrates the stability factor.

Table 4.3
Length of Service of Workers as in 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of service</th>
<th>Percentage of labour force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 and above</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: S.R. Deshpande, Report of the labour investigation Committee, Govt. of India, 1946

The data above reveals that 71% of the workers had put in more than 5 years of experience. Of them more than half the number had been in service for more than 10 years. The conclusion arrived from this data is that the labour of KGF was by and large permanent and not floating as found in other industrial areas. A 1937 view on KGF labour reads thus. “Labour in Kolar Gold Fields, which is practically all native, is more than adequate, and as satisfactory as one could wish. It is cheap, reliable, adaptable and pleasant to
work with…… and the relationship between employers and employees is excellent.16

**Division of Labour**

The mines management perfected an elaborate division of labour. In the underground, machine drillers and handjumpermen were engaged to break the ground and divide the ore body into blocks of workable sizes. timbermen and packwallers supported the ‘workings’ with timber and iron. Stuffcoolies and tramers attended to the haulage of ore-bearing rock pieces to the shaft openings at various levels. It was brought to the surface by hoist gangs consisting of hoist drivers and their assistants. On the ground, surface tramers conveyed the rock pieces to the sorting site, and at the gold mill, machinemen and stamp- millmen attended to the crushing of the ore, its conversion into pulp, retorting, melting and cyanidisation.

A large and diversified engineering team consisting of machinery attendants, fitters, blacksmiths and welders was entrusted with task of repairs and maintenance of shafts and machinery. Besides, a couple or so of helpers were attached to each gang of main workers. Finally there were the ‘miscellaneous workers’ like doorboys, teaboys and watermen. This grand scheme of division of labour was laid out on a scaffold of rigid hierarchies.
Each labour gang was vertically structured with head and assistant maistris at the top, then the ordinary workers and finally the helpers. A managerial hierarchy ensuing from the underground agents through assistant underground agents to foremen directed and disciplined the labour gangs.

**Security of the Mining Area**

The mines management accorded top priority to physical control over the mining area. From the early days of mining the security of mining property was placed under the charge of the Superintendent of Police, KGF. The KGF Rifle Volunteers, as the watch and ward establishment of the police was called, was originally attached to the Bangalore Rifle Volunteers. In 1903 it was delinked and constituted as a separate corps. Further the team was reinforced with formation of special detective squads to detect and prosecute persons indulging in theft of gold. Within a decade the corps grew into 800 strong force consisting of mounted cadet, and cyclist sections in addition to eight ordinary companies. Furthermore, the mines had its own security establishment. This was designed taking care to keep Southern Indians away from key positions on grounds of possible local links. The security of important installations such as shafts and mills was thus entrusted to a team of 60 personnel specially recruited from Punjab. The over all charge of the security establishment was permanently vested with British officers.
Nature of Work

Underground mining was a strenuous, hazardous exercise. The pressure increased as shafts went deeper. The blowing in of chilled dehumidified air could not render the hot and humid underground just bearable. The cage-lifts could not reach the lowest work spots, and therefore in conjunction with these, ladders, cradles and buckets had to be used. Often the workers had to crawl through narrow passages and connections, wallowing in warm water. Dust, humidity, poisonous gases, fire, rock bursts and occupational diseases were the hazards the underground workers had to face.

Epidemics

Epidemics like cholera, plague, typhoid, smallpox, malaria and influenza were frequent. Deaths due to epidemics were very high. Almost all these deaths were confined to the coolies (native labour). Stray incidents of two or three Europeans succumbing too are recorded. During June/July 1896 there was a severe outbreak of cholera. Three Italian miners were reported to have died. About the native labour, the Company report said, “how many coolies succumbed is almost impossible to state. We, however, find that a great many have not turned up since the cessation of the epidemic.” According to the Company by 1919 the epidemics were controlled almost fully. Medical and sanitary staff deserve full credit for this achievement. Their work of inspection
and treatment was fairly easy because the population / labour families were a compact disciplined unit. Infant mortality rate was better when compared with other industrial areas. On the whole the health of the labour community was good.\textsuperscript{18}

These observations by the Company were not correct. A report on the working of the KGF Sanitary Board during the year 1918 - 19 states that when compared to the previous year there was an increase in deaths to the tune of 2994. The increase was mainly due to the influenza epidemic, which accounted for 1547 deaths, likewise to cholera, plague, small-pox, and reduced vitality, consequent to insufficient clothing and feeding owing to the dearness of food-stuffs and other necessaries of life.\textsuperscript{19} Similarly on infant mortality rate also figures provided by the KGF Sanitary Board gives a different picture. Infant mortality for the years ranging from 1929 – 1936 was 182.4 per 1000 births. These deaths were among infants under one year.\textsuperscript{20} Around this time the child mortality rate was 125 and 167 respectively for the State and India.\textsuperscript{21}

**Accidents**

The accident death rate in the Kolar mines very often surpassed those of the gold mines in Transvaal, South Africa. During the period 1908-46, accident death rate per unit value of gold extracted in Kolar was higher than
Transvaal. Annual average number of serious accidents in Kolar increased from 148.4 in 1920, to 185.3 in the 1930s. It further soared to 200 during the period 1940-46.\textsuperscript{22} The lurking danger in the great depths of the hostile underground resulted in the framing of the epigram, ‘\emph{keelay pona ponam, mele vanda panam.}’ \textsuperscript{23} (if you go down, corpse – if you come up, money.) The gravity of accidents can be assessed from the table given below.

\textbf{Table 4.4}
\textbf{Deaths Due to Accidents and Number of Serious Accidents in Kolar Gold Mines 1900-1946}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of deaths</th>
<th>No. of serious accidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900-1909</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>2428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1919</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1929</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>1484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-1939</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1946</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Colin Simmons, The Case of Kolar Gold Fields 1883-1955 pp.114,115

Note: (i) Between 1891 and 1899 deaths were 362  
(ii) Total deaths from 1891-1946 were 3398  
(iii) Accident figures from 1898-1899 are not available. For 1898 and 1899 they were 81 and 91 respectively.

Accidents were very high especially in the underground. Annual number of fatal and serious accidents during 1891-1946 shows an average of 61.8 deaths every year. Total lives lost were 3398.\textsuperscript{24} Accidents during 1924-28
were about 200 fatal/serious. The rate of accidents per thousand workers was 10 per year during these four years. For the decade 1919-28 this rate was 3.05 and for 1909-1919 the rate was 3.15. The average number of employees killed during 1924-28 was 3.36 for each 1,00,000 Sterling Pound of gold produced. Between 1919 and 1928 rock bursts have claimed 231 lives\textsuperscript{25}.

Rock bursts and fire underground belonged to the category of unavoidable accidents. In 1916 there was a 100\% increase in fatalities due to the rockbursts\textsuperscript{26}. The companies and GOM made it clear that they do not have responsibility over the incidence of these unavoidable accidents. Other types of accidents were considered as ‘criminal’ follies. These accidents were due to falling down from shafts, winzes and floats. Such deaths were very high and the companies were playing them down by citing the reason as, ‘due to carelessness’ of the worker. The Mining Regulation that came into force in 1911 made some attempts to minimise accidents in this category. Provisions of the Act made attempts to make the worker of rural origin more efficient by providing training to them. However in 1920-21 when such accidents kept on increasing abnormally the companies admitted that high temperature underground and the fatigue it caused were responsible for the falls. The decline in temperature after the installation of air conditioning plants in Oorgaum during 1935 also witnessed decline in accidents\textsuperscript{27}. 

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Health Hazards

Workers collapsing at underground work spots were a common hazard. This was attributed to the high temperature underground. A study conducted by Anthony Caplan, Senior Medical Officer, Kolar Gold Fields Hospital on the subject provides disturbing details. Collapse was very rare above 500 feet. For all the mining companies put together the incidence of collapse during 1939-40 was 204, which was 20.8 per thousand workmen. In the collapse cases studied in 1940s, 98.7% of the cases were native labour and 1.3% Anglo Indians. The high incidence amongst native labour was attributed to their large size in the employment and also to their exposure to hot atmosphere for longer hours than the European and Anglo Indian employees. Further the latter groups being employed as supervisors and above did not have to do jobs that required physical exertion.

In the case of native labour the incidence of collapse was more in the contract labour who were almost entirely confined to jobs that required prolonged exposure to atmosphere in the hottest parts of the mine. Per thousand workers the incidence of collapse was 57 in case of contract labour while for company labour it was 21. Machine coolies and handjumper coolies were the most vulnerable and among them the incidence of collapse per thousand were 21 and 20 respectively.
Caplan also observed that disturbance of health and the workers neglecting it also lead to underground collapse. The underground workmen often refuse to report sick while suffering from mild illness because of the fear of losing attendance bonus. Insufficient food intake too added to the problem. On intake of food Caplan noted that an adequate daily food intake is obviously important to the underground worker and a state of acute inanition is conducive to collapse. The diet of average workman is far from ideal.\textsuperscript{32}

Apart from all the above risks was the killer disease – silicosis. Silicosis is an occupational disease associated with hard rock mining due to inhalation of siliceous dust. During the earlier days the companies did not accept the fact of the incidence of the disease so as to avoid compensation to the affected workers. The disease was generally called as miners’ phthisis. During 1929 there was a move from the Government department concerned to include the disease as an occupational disease under the Workmen’s Compensation Regulation. This was vehemently opposed by the companies. The Minutes of JTSC Meeting held on 6\textsuperscript{th} February 1930 shows the reaction of the companies to this move. The Minutes reads thus, “Agreed that there are no grounds for such action which should be strenuously resisted.”\textsuperscript{33} It further states, “In this connection the word “phthisis” is being too loosely used and should not be confused with “Silicosis” so frequently referred to as “Miners’ phthisis”.”\textsuperscript{34}
The stubborn attitude of the companies prevented Silicosis from being considered as an occupational disease till 1940. In fact the companies even refused to admit the incidence of the disease and chose to shelve it under ‘pulmonary tuberculosis’. During 1930 a civil servant greatly disturbed by the prevalence of silicosis in KGF and bent on reporting it to the Mysore Government was sought to be dissuaded by the management. He was approached by a highly influential representative of the mining companies and persuaded him to alter the report. Ralph Nye the representative of the Companies even threatened that if silicosis is treated as an occupational disease the financial burden resulting out of it will force the companies to wind up their operations. Even though the civil servant stuck to his position, ultimately the companies had the final say. The report when published contained not even a single reference to silicosis.35

With the introduction of the Mysore Silicosis Rules in 1940, the secrets began to be revealed. During the period 1940-41, 1824 cases of silicosis were reported. Even this was clearly under-reporting. First, silicosis was recognisable only in its advanced stage and workers were subjected for medical examination at this stage. Second, silicosis cases were examined and certified by the company’s medical officers and only disputed cases were referred to the medical bureau constituted under the Mysore Silicosis Rules.36
Caplan, at a conference held in London in April 1947 in his presentation stated that silicosis as seen in Rand is unknown in KGF but a form of pneumoconiosis is common. His paper was based upon the chemical and radiological examination of 7653 underground workmen with five or more years of service and 60 lung specimens of underground workmen obtained at postmortem examinations. The paper covered a period of six years – April 1940 to June 1946. Of the 3351 certified cases of pneumoconiosis 3348 (96.76%) were Indians, 3 Anglo Indians and no Europeans.\textsuperscript{37}

During 1940-44 when the Mysore Silicosis Rules were first introduced, a large number of men with long years of service were examined and a very high proportion found suffering from pneumoconiosis. These men accepted compensation and left the employment of the companies.

**Wage Disparity Between Native Workers and European Workers**

Remunerating the mining labour presented an interesting scenario. Disparity in wages between the European and native labour was very high. The difference ratio during the year 1917 was the highest, 22.2:1.\textsuperscript{38} The average monthly money wage in Sterling Pounds for the European worker was 30.05 and for the native employee this was 1.58. From 1899 – 1946 the differential ratio remained 17:1. The differential ratio for the South African
The wage disparity that prevailed between the native employees and the European employees is depicted in the form of a table.

**Table 4.5**

**Average Wages for European and Indian Employees in Pound Sterling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average monthly for European</th>
<th>Average monthly for Indian</th>
<th>Wage Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>17.68</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>12.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>21.45</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>14.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>16 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>28.19</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>18.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>13.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>45.64</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>20.3 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>44.88</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>18.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>42.12</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>17.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>46.39</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>17.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>49.03</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>15.8 : 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The exchange rate for Pound Sterling for the period mentioned above was between Rs.13 – 14

**Wages of the Indian Labour**

Wages paid to the Indian workers were very low. For several years up to 1940, the basic wage structure in the mines were not modified. Till 1942 no dearness allowance was paid. The following table illustrates the monthly wages paid to the Indian workers during the earlier years.
## Table 4.6
### Monthly Earnings of the Indian Worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lowest wage Surface Coolie</th>
<th>Lowest wage Underground Coolie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>.60*</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>.60*</td>
<td>.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>15.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>18.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>14.76</td>
<td>17.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>16.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>15.61</td>
<td>18.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report, Chief Inspector of Mines & Explosives, Govt. of Mysore, Bangalore, Years 1903-1935.

Note: The Highest wage earners till 1909 were Smiths and from 1918, I Class Engine Drivers were getting the highest wages.
* The figures are in Pound Sterling. From 1918 onwards the figures are in Indian Rupees.

The lowest wage earners were timber coolies, stuff coolies etc. During this time period the highest wage earners from the Indian labour were Smiths and First Class Engine Drivers. Between 1918 and 1935 their average monthly wage was Rs. 47.6

The Labour Investigation Committee Report 1946 stated that the earnings for a fortnight for the lowest paid workers was Rs.13 Annas 6 and Paise 2. (13-6-2). The Report also mentions that for nearly half of the workers the
total earnings for a fortnight were Rs.13. The earnings of different categories of the employees during the year 1944 are provided in the table given below.

**Table 4.7**
**Earnings of Indian Labour During 1944**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Average daily basic wage Re. A. P</th>
<th>Average No of days worked in the wage period</th>
<th>Total earnings Rs. P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Machine Mestry</td>
<td>1-3-4</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>21.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pack walling coolie</td>
<td>0-9-4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground coolie - contract</td>
<td>0-9-4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: S.R. Deshpande Labour Investigation Committee, Govt. of India, Gold Mining Industry, 1946. pp 9,10

Among the company employees working in the underground, the highest wage earners were the Machine Mestries with a basic average daily wage of, 1 Rupee 3 Annas 4 paise (1-3-4). Total earnings including all allowances was Rs. 21-75-0. Allowances included attendance bonus and dearness allowance. Pack walling Coolies were the least paid. Their basic wage was Rs.0-9-4 daily and the fortnight’s earning including all allowances was Rs.13.5 - 0 - 0.

There was no system of graded or time scale promotions. In case of daily rated workers the rates are increased biennially up to the scheduled maximum. Increments are granted subject to satisfactory work.
Attendance bonus was paid to the workers to encourage regular attendance. Both company and contract labour were eligible if certain conditions were satisfied. Bonus was paid twice a month. In order to qualify for the bonus no worker could remain absent for more than two shifts. About 90 percent of the company labour and 60 to 70 percent of the contract labour used to qualify for the bonus. Contract labour qualified in lesser numbers because of the irregularity of work provided to them by the contractor. Other special bonuses for good work done, like pack wall bonus, hoist bonus etc. too were paid. No definite rules governed these payments. The companies were paying a cash DA since 1942. No extra allowances were paid for over time work and for the additional number of hours worked the wages were paid pro rata. Mysore Mines Act 1906 does not provide for payment of over time allowance. Wages were paid monthly until 1932 and from then onwards fortnightly.41

**Indebtedness**

Indebtedness was very high in case of both the categories of workers. A 1930 survey on indebtedness conducted on 50 families revealed that 48 of them were indebted and the average indebtedness was Rs.199 per family-around six months earnings.42 Absenteeism had a telling impact on the family budgets of the workers. The 1946 Report of SR Deshpande found that more than half of the workers were in debt. Greater indebtedness was found in the
income group below Rs. 35 per month. The reasons cited for this large scale indebtedness were:

1. Large size of the family, which was on an average 5.25 persons per family.

2. There was only one earning member in the family and there was no scope for the employment of women or children in the family.

3. High cost of living.

4. Addiction to toddy where one third of the income was spent.

5. Social customs

Money lenders dominated by Marwaris were the main suppliers of credit. They had a well established net work involving commission agents among the labourers who bring the needy to the Marwari lender. The rate of interest ranged from 75% to 100%. The recovery in case of defaulters was ensured through court attachments from their wages. Courts even attached the service gratuity. During 1920s itself the Companies had taken a decision to dismiss employees against whom attachments were frequent.
Housing

Housing of the mine workers presented a pathetic picture. To begin with they were tents as revealed by some old photographs. As time advanced permanent structures came up. The company accommodation was provided only for the company workers. They were located in different coolie lines spread out all over the mines. These lines were clusters of single room huts made of bamboo matting (thatti) walls and corrugated sheet roofing. Some were masonry huts with tiled or sheet roofs which were generally occupied by clerical or supervisory staff. A few huts were built entirely of corrugated sheets. The size of these huts differed in different mines with a standard size of 9 feet by 9 feet. In this single room hut the family has to live, eat and sleep.

Even as late as 1936 the housing provided by the companies was insufficient. The following table substantiates this view.

Table 4.8
Housing Position of Indian Labour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Mysore</th>
<th>Champion</th>
<th>Oorgaum</th>
<th>Nundy Droog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7631</td>
<td>4657</td>
<td>5057</td>
<td>6359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of huts</td>
<td>2816</td>
<td>2201</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: JTSC Special Meeting Minutes. 13.2.1936.
Shortage of accommodation is clearly explained by the data provided above. In none of the mines the coverage of accommodation reached 50%. Thus there was a clear shortage. The contract labour who were not eligible for company houses and those company workers who could not get the company accommodation lived in private rented houses in the neighbourhood of the mining area. Such dwellings were called coolie colonies and there were eleven such colonies. These colonies consisted of an assortment of houses mostly with mud walls, few with tiled roofs, some roofed with corrugated sheets and a large number of them made out of old kerosene tins, either fully or partially.

The surroundings were filled with dirt, filth and cess pools. Sanitation on the whole was grotesque and the atmosphere was filled with stench. The main difference between these dwellings and the company huts were that the living area in the former was larger. With a standard hut size area of 18ft. by 12ft. the occupants were able to extend the living space by adding extensions. Such extensions were shared by the dwellers for bathing storage etc. Even though the Mysore Mine Regulation stipulated that the Medical Officer shall be responsible for the proper sanitation of the Mine and of any camps or coolie colonies outside the mining area the companies ignored it.
Unionisation

Deprivation, misery and exploitation to which the Kolar gold miners were exposed from the formative years of the mine worsened as time advanced. Oppressive conditions lead to resistance from the workers. These resistances, manifested in various forms can be traced as the embryo of the workers unions. Lenin in his work, “On Trade Unions”, explains how strikes put up the demand that workers organise. He stated that exploitation enmeshed in medieval forms, various political, legal and conventional trappings put the workers on a spot. Workers for long cannot fail to see to the fact that he is oppressed. He senses the need for struggle. Such struggle is aimed at satisfying his immediate economic needs and improving his material conditions. Such struggles inevitably demand that workers organise.43

Conclusion

Accumulation of labour started during the 1880s itself. The labour was mostly from the South Indian states and mainly from Tamil Nadu. The workers who migrated were mostly from the Scheduled Castes. They were poor illiterate peasants. They gave up their agricultural work and migrated to KGF in search of a better future. A large number were directly employed by the company while the others were employed through contractors. These
workers were coolies and constituted the major section of the employees of the mine. They came with their families and made KGF their home.

The wages were poor. There existed a high degree of wage disparity between the wage of the European workers and Indian workers. The work atmosphere was very hostile. Accidents, and out break of epidemics were common. The underground workers were exposed to the risk of the dreaded occupational disease, silicosis. The workers lived in make shift huts amidst unhygienic surroundings. By and large the condition of the workers was miserable.
References


4. Ibid. P.71.


6. Ibid. P.83.


8. Ibid. p.1470.

9. Superintendent’s Report, Nundydroog Minig Company, KGF, 8.2.1892.


12. Ibid. p.11.


18. Ibid.


27. Ibid. p.56.


29. Ibid. p. 36.


31. Ibid. p.78.

32. Ibid. p. 112.


34. Ibid.


36. Ibid. p.1471.


39. Ibid. p.96.

