Kolar Gold Mines was the leading organised industry in Mysore State till early 1950s and the second most important mining activity in the subcontinent. Organised mining started in the year 1880 under the ownership of the British mining firm, M/S. John Taylor & Sons.

The development of the mining industry attracted a huge migrant labour from the South Indian states, mainly from Tamilnadu. The labour force numbered up to a maximum of 35000 during 1907. The labour employed in the mine exhibited all the characteristics the industrial labour in the other industrial areas of India possessed. These labourers were engaged in performing physically demanding jobs.

The British owners extracted their maximum out of these workers. Remuneration and conditions of work were bad. The workers for a long period were not in a position to question these hardships. The trade union movement of the Kolar Gold Mines evolved out of this grim situation. The study analyses the conditions and environment that contributed to the birth of the trade union movement. It examines the accumulation of labour and the conditions under which the workers during the earlier years existed. Besides, formation of the unions, their functioning, struggles, politicisation etc. are taken up in the study. It evaluates the contributions of the unions towards the maximization of
the workers welfare and improving their socio-economic status and also the factors that led to the degeneration of the trade unions.

It is observed that the trade union movement in Kolar Gold Mines not only helped the workers of the mine in improving their economic position from the miserable state experienced prior to 1940 but also played a prominent role in formulating the labour movement of the Mysore State. The movement, however, started its decline from the 1970s. This fact is analysed in the study.

The study makes use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected from the selected workers using a structured schedule. The list of workers on the roll, obtained from the Company, contained 3500 workers as during 2005-2006 and a sample of 10%, i.e. 350, was chosen on random basis for the purpose. Primary data have been used to assess the socio economic conditions of the workers and their perception of the functioning of trade unions. Before the commencement of the final survey, a pilot survey was conducted to pretest the schedule.

Secondary data have been gathered from the Annual Reports of the Mining Company for the period from 1881 to date, i.e., 2007-08. Reports of Governmental and non governmental agencies, the mining company, files and documents maintained by the major unions, reports published in news papers
and journals, court proceedings, hand bills, publications and news letters brought out by the unions spanning from 1940 to 2008 were also used.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The First Chapter is the introduction chapter. It contains statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, methodology, limitations, period of study and chapter scheme. In the Second Chapter, Survey of Literature is covered. It lists literature on trade unions and the KGF mining industry. The literature includes books, reports, journals etc. In Chapter III, the origin of the mining operations in KGF, their growth and present state of affairs are stated. Chapter IV contains the accumulation process of labour in the mines. It covers the problems the workers in the early stage of the industry had to face. Their miserable conditions and exploitation by the employers form the subject matter of this chapter. Chapter V covers the evolution of the trade union movement in the Kolar Gold Mines. It examines the factors that aided the birth of the union. Struggles in this direction put up by the workers constitute the main theme of this chapter. Chapter VI studies the functioning of the unions. A detailed analysis of the performance of the unions and the causes that lead towards the weakening and deterioration of the unions are done in this chapter. Further it covers the present socio economic conditions of the workers. Chapter VII is the concluding chapter. It gives a summary of the findings and some
recommendations. These recommendations state the role which the trade unions may have to play in the changed circumstances of the world.

It is expected that the study will benefit various functionaries of other unions in drawing lessons for modifying and adopting the right course of action to safeguard the workers’ interest in conformity with that of the companies wherein they work. In the modern era of globalisation when the trade unions find it difficult get a foothold, the experiences of Kolar Gold Mines will be of immense help.

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