ABSTRACT

This research work entitled ‘Nationalism and Labour: The Coal Mining Industry of Bihar till 1947’, is an attempt to study the nature of emergence of labourforce in coalmine industry of Bihar including modern Jharkhand generally situated in the sparsely populated areas of the state. This study tries to trace the history of the coal mine industry of Bihar and its expansion, the labour supply and its expanding catchment area to cater to the ever expanding need of the industry. The system of recruitment, condition of works both underground and on the surface, their extent of incorporation in the emerging capitalist system and their resistance to their exploitation in the existing capitalist system. The work has been divided into five chapters excluding the Introduction. A brief summary of the five chapters are given below.

Chapter one deals with the emergence and growth of coal mining in India. The chapter is primarily concerned with stages of development of the coal mining industry. For simplification it has been divided into three major landmarks, the development of coal mines in pre-railway phase, post railway phase preceding opening of the Jharia mines and the rapid development after opening of Jharia mines and the ‘coal rush’

In the first phase the development was very slow and halting. It had its own litany of problem like transportation, the necessity of ghat (river banks) near the mines and problems associated with overland transportation of coal to the nearest ghat, the problem of lease of lands and legal tangle that followed
after. We have also tried to study the development of mineral study undertaken by the Government during the period with the appointment of D. H. Williams possibly the first qualified geologist appointed as Geological Surveyor on 5th February 1846 for five years. It was during this time that Geological Department assumed a distinct entity, with a permanent headquarter at Calcutta with its own publication of its findings in, *Memoirs of Geological Survey of India,* and *Annual Report of the Geological Survey of India,* and establishment of the Museum of Geology during 1858-59.

The second phase starts with the entry of the railways into the Raniganj coalfield. This phase also saw: the formation of large coal companies, the floatation of the Equitable Coal Company, which was registered in the year 1863, the Raneegunge Coal Association Ltd., founded in 1873 and the role of managing agent in 1870s and 1880s as a hired manager. This phase also saw the expansion of coal mining to new areas. Dr. T. W. H. Hughes was deputed in 1868 to study the Giridih Coalfield and mapping of the coalfield area. The transportation of coal was a great problem for the mining industry and this phase saw some private initiative to built their own railway lines.

The third phase started with the opening of the Jharia field. The firms which helped in the development of the Jharia coalfield were an outgrowth of the Agency Houses. This phase showed how the managing agencies became the paramount power for the development of the coal industry, its stress on profit, and expansion of the mining industry.
The second chapter deals with issue of the labour supply. It deals with the changing composition of the labour force with the evolution of the coal mining industry. This chapter deals with various forms of recruitment followed by the mining industry and underlines the short comings of the various methods of recruitment pursued to meet the fast expanding requirement of the coal industry. It also deals with the expanding catchment area of the coalmine workers and gender division of labour. An attempt has been made to chalk out the involvement of women labour in the coal mines, the various works done by them, their exclusion from underground work and their re-employment and and how they eventually excluded from underground working. The chapter highlights the exploitation of female workers at the work places, and the material condition of the female workers due to their low wages and web of exploitative structure built around them.

The third chapter deals with the duality of workers opting for working in mines and their simultaneous dependence on agriculture. It tries to show the unchanging pattern of labour supply impacting shortage and fluctuation of labour supply during the reaping and sowing seasons and the failure of the creation of a labour force completely divorced from agriculture for their livelihood.

The second section deals with the hours of work. The hour of work was the most unregulated aspect of the mining industry. The issue of hours of work varied from mine to mine and area to area. It was only with the adoption of
Indian Mines Act, 1923, that some concerted efforts were made to regulate the hours of work to 60 hours for surface workers (above ground) and 54 hours for underground with a weekly holiday. Along with this, other legislation dealing with the hours of work had been discussed in the section under consideration.

The next section deals with the wages paid to the mine workers. There were two methods of payment: first was piece rate and second was time-rate. Piece rate was more prevalent among the miners as they were considered ‘notorious’ for being ‘idle’, ‘careless’ and ‘unsteady’. The skilled workers were paid time rates. This section deals with the gradual movement of the wages during our period of study and the forms of reduction to which it was exposed.

The fourth chapter deals with the initiatives undertaken by the coal companies to secure a settled labour population around the collieries. It also explores the residential facilities provided by the mining companies, the deplorable sanitary conditions, the extent of overcrowding and the periodic occurrences by the epidemics like plague, cholera, malaria etc. The second section deals with the underground working condition in the mines. The lack of sufficient light, the smoke from kerosene kulis, the smoke due to explosions, and the ever present hookworms, the unscientific method of working all compounded to make the underground working as dangerous too demanding for the workers. The next section deals with accidents in mines. It
tries to study the accident by classifying under various head and then trying to seek the general cause of such type of accident as grouped under the heading.

The last chapter deals with the forms of resistance offered by the workers against their exploitation. These are studied under two phases. The first phase deals with the early resistance offered by the miners at individual level or in small groups against dangerous working condition, unsanitary residential facility and exploitation by the superior officers. The second phase deals with the organized resistance offered by the mine workers against their exploitation by the capitalist class. I.B. Sen, who had then come to Dhanbad to defend certain clerks involved in a criminal suit for assaulting a colliery manager, became the first President of the Indian Colliery Employees Association was formed in the year 1920 itself with headquarters in Dhanbad. The swing in the intensity of the labour movement during various phases and the coming up of new organizations, the linking of the miners resistance with the national movement are also highlighted.