

Coal Miners of Burdwan District: Characteristics of Employment During 1870 -1972

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Abstract:

This research paper, "Coal Miners of Burdwan District: Characteristics of Employment during 1870 -1972" examines the evolution of women's employment in Indian coal mines. Historically, women from communities like the Bhuinyas, Santhals, and Dhangars, kora migrated to coalfields and worked alongside their families. Following a government ban on underground work for women, their employment was restricted to surface operations. This led to a significant decline in the female mining work force from 77,800 in 1946 to 20,100 in 1971. The paper scrutinizes the recruitment systems for women, including the role of the Coal Field Recruiting Organization and Employment Exchanges, and analyses their lives, occupational patterns, skill levels, and employment status. It also discusses issues such as their absence from the workplace, and the deprivation they faced. The study is particularly relevant as it details the socio-economic conditions and the systemic exploitation of women workers in the coal industry during this period.

Keywords: Coal Miners, Occupational Characteristics, Coalfield Recruiting Organizations, Employment Exchange, Migration.

Introduction:

A review of economic role played by women in India in the past reveals that they had been helping male folk in household cultivations and household industries. Wage employment of women outside their homes was not considered as graceful by most of the higher castes. However with the increasing pressure of population on land, decline of household industry and growing economic needs and social awakening due to spread of education this prejudice against wage employment of women has now more or less vanished with the result that women are today taking up employment in non-traditional field also. The high cost of living and consequent increasing economic necessities have made it obligatory for almost all grownups to seek or perform gainful jobs for supplementing their family kitty.¹ The socio-economic impact of the jute, cotton and even tea industries has been extensively analysed in research circles, but the comparative failure to discuss the coal industry is tempting for new research. Labour power is at the core technology of the coal mining industry, and an important part of this labour force was women. Even before the 19th century, Bengal had developed a complex network of labour migration from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and other regions. The focus of the discussion of the present article is the women coal mine workers of Burdwan district. Some questions become relevant when discussing the women workers in these coal mines. What specific tasks did women perform in and around coal

mines before 1972? What was the demographic and social profile of these women? The reasons for the arrival of migrated women workers and the type of recruitment process, and finally, how did major historical events, such as the two World Wars, influence the employment of women? The article discusses a detailed analysis of what were the important factors behind the marginalization of women in coal mines.

Literature Review:

Chittaranjan Sengupta (Bed Side Coal) describes the wage structure of Eastern Coalfield Ltd. at all levels of workers. The recruitment process of women workers has not been seriously discussed, although their financial weakness has been highlighted as a cause of social degradation. Saroj Mukhopadhyay (Bharoter Communist party O Amra) and Binay Krishna Chowdhury (Atiter kichu Avigota) Shahedullah (Bardhaman Jellar Communist Andoloner atit Prosongo) discusses only the Communist Party and its mass organizations. The role of these mass organizations towards women workers is not discussed. Nirban Bose (Politics and Protest: A Comparative Study of Four Major Industries in Bengal) carefully analysed the activities of the trade unions, but the fact that women workers were exploited and marginalized by using the negative mindset of the trade unions was not discussed. Rakhi Roychowdhury (Gender and Labour in India: The Kamins of Eastern Coal Mines, 1900-1940), while depicting the social conditions, does not analyse in depth the collective exploitation of the leadership of owner-capitalists and trade union leaders. Geraldine Forbes (The New Cambridge History and India: Women in Modern India) Although the method of hiring external women workers, the Government's restrictions on the work of underground women workers and the response of women's organizations were discussed, but she did not discuss about the migration process of the coal miners.

Methodology of Study:

Government and private data have been used as primary sources. Census, district gazetteers, and coal mining-related government reports have been used as the official sources. Historical books and newspaper articles have been given special importance as secondary sources. On the basis of all these data sources, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the crisis of women workers in coal mines by analysing the history of the bottom floor.

Objective of the study:

Studying the characteristics of employment in coal mines in India before 1972 is crucial for understanding the historical context and challenges that led to the nationalization of the coal industry. The primary objectives of such a study would be to analyse the nature of employment. A key objective would be to examine the employment practices of these private owners, which were often criticized for being unscientific and exploitative. This includes investigating the types of labour contracts, the prevalence of unorganized labour, and this would involve studying the demographics of the workforce, including their regional origins, caste, and community. It's essential to understand the structure of labour recruitment and management.

General thoughts about women labour:

Women are a fascinating subject for study. Some audience that primitive society evolved from a primordial state of mother right. The trace the incidence of matrilineal social forms in the primitive world where social groups were defined by relationship trust through the mother which provided also a certain degree of female dominance. The other hand other emphasizes the almost universal subordination of women in primitive and ancient societies. In pursuing the subject of male or female dominance in primitive times one can easily get lost in conflicting hypothesis and confusing theories. In primitive society we could have distinguishing a fundamental division of labour under which men fought, hunted and went to see and women engaged in less dangerous and more circumscribed occupations.² Marx declared that social progress can be measured with precision by the social position of the female sex when the prevailing spirit of an Era has been liberal humanitarian and rationalistic. Women's rights have been extended and in period of counter revolution restriction are intensified. Especially in modern times political and economic revolutions have impressed or have been reflected in the struggle for women's right.³

In Great Britain for example in the economy by which the family was provided with food and clothing before the industrial revolution women's share was definite and visible.⁴ Women spun and of in their house brewed the ale, looked after the pigs and fowls; their functions if different from those of their husbands were not less important.⁵ The labor which the industrial revolution brought to a relatively small number of women of the upper class was made possible in part by the labor in the women of the proletariat.⁶ The factory system destroyed a significant body of neither significant custom throwing the workers into an unfamiliar world where they had neither experience nor tradition to help them.⁷

Coal miners and early stage of the coal industry:

In the earliest stage of development of coal mining industry, some of the important community workers like Bhuiyas, Santhals, Dhangars and Koras migrated to the coalfield along with their families and worked in family groups underground. Besides, the underdeveloped communities of the lower classes who worked in the coal mines were, Muchi, Kora, Rajwar, Kamar, Dasad, Beldar, Baghdi, Teli, Goala and Muslim communities.⁸ According to the census report of 1911, most of the coal mining workers came from the adjacent districts of the coal production center. More than one-third of the workers working in the Raniganj coal mine were home to different rural areas of Burdwan district and one-sixth female workers came from the neighboring Bihar districts. According to this clause, Asansol, Raniganj coal mine has 56.5 percent local labour, resident of the surrounding district and 33.9 percent labour came from Bihar. Normally workers came from other provinces other than Bengal, Bihar, whose percentage rate was 2.5 percent. Excluding local workers in the Jharia coal mine in Bihar and those who were mostly in the Central Pradesh, the United State, and Punjab.⁹

The miners used to work in pairs the malkats and his kamin – the former cutting the coal and the latter loading the tubs. In 1919 women formed 38.1% of the colliery labour force and for every 10 men employed underground there were working about 7 women for the same job.¹⁰ They come to the collieries for work irregular period when they are own holds do not

require attention. They may work for 2 or 3 days in the mine and then is done to their own homes. A number of workers are willing to remain longer at the minds to work for 5 days a week, and for them housing is provided. Such workers return to their fields for sowing and harvest and obtained at all the times as well. The proportion of labour permanently settled on colliery is very small. Additional workers are badly needed but cannot be obtained. It is easy at to get surface labour for loading etc., above ground then workers will cut and caricol in the mine. It is especially difficult to get workers during the Seasons when agriculture work requires attention.¹¹

Aboriginal workers often come to work in a small group of men and women, near relatives or from the same village. Physically they are healthy and well developed. They would not come to work if ill and those living on collieries are return home when sick.¹²

Trends of women employment in coal mines:

The year 1929 the Government of India laid down that there should be a progressive reduction in number of women working underground and promulgated regulations under section 29 (j) of the Indian mines act prohibiting employment of women underground in collieries. In Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and CP which came into effect from July 1939 as a result of this the percentage of women to total employment in coal mines dropped to 11.4 in 1939. During the period 1939 to 1942 women were not employed underground. However as stated earlier during the Second World War as a result of shortage of labour in coal mining areas government had to permit employment of women underground under certain conditions. During 1944 1945 the employment of women in coal mines attend the level of 1929 and women formed about 24.7% of the total labour force. With the end of the war the ban was reimposed by the government from first February 1946. During the period 1948 – 1950 the employment of women in coal mines remained more or less stationary and their number fluctuated round about 55000. Compared to 1946 which was the peak year of employment of women there has been a reduction about 24000 in the number of women workers in coal mines during the period 1947 -49.

An examination of the figure for 1950's shows that the largest concentration of women worker was in coalfield in Bihar where they formed about 20% of the total labour force. In the cold field of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh the percentage of women worker was about 14 and 12 respectively. In Vindhya Pradesh it was slightly above 10 and Assam Odisha and Hyderabad it was generally of the order of 5.¹³ Due to the Ban imposed by the government on employment of women underground, women are at present employed in the open working and on the surface only. On the surface the most important occupations of women workers is loading. According to the senior personal officer of the Indian mining Association "it is General opinion of employers in coal Industry that there are certain jobs for which women are more suitable than men. This is job like sand loading and Wagon loading." Other occupations in which women are employed in coal mines are as cleaning, palate making surface trimming, carrying a break sanitary and conserving work, shale picking on the mechanical loading screening plants etc.¹⁴

Among the various minerals the largest decline in employment of women was in coal mines where this decreased from 77.8 thousands in 1946 to 20.1 thousands in 1971 as against the increase in total employment from 3.24 lakhs in 1946 to 3.82 lakhs in 1971. However during the period 1972-75, there was a spurt in the number of women workers in coal mines as women employment increased from 22.8000 in 1972 to 45.3 thousand in 1975. An attempt was made in the course of the present study to ascertain the reason for this sudden rise in women employment in coal mines. It was observed that employment in coal mines increased immediately after the nationalization done in two stages viz., October, 71 and January 73. The decision with the authorities of Coal India Limited revealed that no major recruitment of workers was made in coal mines after the takeover by the government. The increase in employment was mainly due to the fact that before nationalization the private colliery owners used to under report employment in respect of their units by not showing certain workers India records. After nationalization search workers were taken on rolls of the management and their services were regularized. This was the main factor responsible for the sudden rise in employment in coal mines after the nationalization.¹⁵

Employment status and length of service:

Workers can be regarded in advantages position as they are entitled to benefits like provident fund, retrenchment compensation, etc., which are normally not available to temporary and casual workers. The present study made a comparative assessment of the extent of permanent and non permanent male and female worker in the Mining industry. The classification of worker by employment status viz, permanent, temporary, casual etc, was done according to the standard definition laid down in the model standing orders formed under the industrial employment.

Table – 1

Percentage distribution of women workers in the selected mines by employment status.

Sl. No .	Mineral/ Mineral Group	permanent		Temporary		Casual		Badli		Contract labour	
		Me n	Wome n	Me n	Wome n	Me n	Wome n	Me n	Wome n	Me n	Wome n
1	Coal	89.8	71.1	0.0	0.2	5.7	28.6	4.4	0.1	0.1	----
2	Manganese	71.6	63.8	11.9	21.2	16.4	15.0	----	----	0.1	----
3	Iron ore	60.8	19.9	1.5	0.1	9.7	13.3	----	----	28.0	66.7
4	Stone	54.1	31.8	45.9	68.2	----	----	---	----	----	----
5	Limestone & dolomite	53.0	20.4	37.8	67.9	0.5	0.8	----	----	8.7	10.9
6	China clay, fire	24.5	32.7	2.4	5.8	67.2	46.3	----	----	5.9	15.2

	clay& gypsum										
7	Other Minerals	48.9	22.8	15.6	21.3	21.1	24.6	----	----	14.4	31.3
	All minerals	78.5	43.6	5.1	23.2	8.8	18.4	3.0	X	4.6	14.8

X = negligible

Government of India, Ministry of Labour, labour Beauru, Economic Condition of Women Workers in Mines (Chandigarh: 1978),30.

The table gives the percentage sex wise distribution of workers in the sampled mines by employment status. It is evident from this table that in almost all the mines started, Proportion of women who were found to be permanent was appreciably low as compared to men. Taking all sample reminds together as high as 56% of women workers were holding a non permanent status proportion of 21% in the case of male worker. The position was found to be slightly better in manganese and highly organized coal mining units where permanent women from 64 and 71% respectively total women employment. In the remaining mines, the percentage of permanent women worker was very low forming only one fifth to third of the total women working force. In iron, ore limestone and dolomite mines and the group other Mines only 20 - 23 percent of women were found to be single women was found to be holding a permanent status. The proportion of such unit was particularly high in manganese, stone, China clay, fire clay and Gypsum and the group other mines.¹⁶

The practice of recruitment of casual labour was found prevalent in all mines accepting stone limestone and dolomite mines. Casual worker were found employed mostly as wagons loader in coal mines and general mazdoors duck out earth removers loaders and aur processors in China clay, fire clay and Gypsum and the group other mines.¹⁷

Length of service:

Table 2

Percentage distribution of women workers in the selected mines by the length of service:

Mineral	Employment Status	Percentage distribution of women workers by system length of service				
		Under year	1 year to less than 5 years	5 years to less than 10 years	10 years to less than 15 years	15 year and more
Coal	Permanent	0.6	46.5	28.5	12.2	12.2
	Non Permanent	7.1	82.7	3.6	6.6	----

	Total	2.5	56.9	21.3	10.6	8.7
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Government of India, Ministry of Labour, labour Beauru, Economic Condition of Women Workers in Mines (Chandigarh: 1978), 36.

It shows that a large number of women worker continued to be temporary even after putting in more than 1 year of service. Some non permanent women worker was found to be having even more than 5 years of service. In coal mines some women who are recruited as casual workers more than 10 years back were still found holding the same status. In stone limestone and dolomite mines about two third of women workers were temporary and a majority of them had more than one year of service. Employers deprived temporary women workers the benefit of permanent by restoring to breaks in their service.

In so far as permanent female workers are concerned a considerable amount of stability in their service was observed in almost all mines except manganese and the group other mines.¹⁸

Recruitment Method and the Role of the Sardars:

The system of recruitment of labour in mines is normally the same for male and female workers. Coal mining in Raniganj was labour-intensive. The local Bauri and Santal Kuli kamins played a leading role in the early stages. But they were mainly agricultural labourers.¹⁹ Hence, mining production would have failed due to the absence of work in the farming season. Attempts were made to keep the production system running by purchasing land adjacent to the mine and distributing it to the miners for cultivation. But In no way do the labourers claim occupancy.²⁰ The owners of the coal mines entered into contracts with the 'zamindar', besides hiring labourers on their own initiative. In particular, the local zamindar agreed to provide 107 Santals in return for one thousand rupees and a commission.²¹ Still; this arrangement began to relax after 1920 due to some movements as various sources of labour power were opened up due to the comparatively more excellent use of machinery, electricity, and steam power.²² There was a labour shortage as the Santals were sent to the British colonies for war. Again, due to the rapid development of railway communication, the demand for coal increased when modern industry developed. In this situation, when the First World War started, the deficit of labour became extreme.²³

When the land-based system failed, the mine owners took the initiative to procure workers through contractors, jamadars, sirdars. Raising contractors in coal mining areas, labour contractors, contractors for coal workers at specific underground locations, and contractors for loading coal in this system was prevalent in Raniganj, Jharia, etc. The Sardars had small pastures. Northern India was called them as "Mistry".²⁴ From a recruitment point Of view, contractors always ensure labour supply according to the labour demand. Caste, communities and villages, especially Sardar, understood the importance of their likes and dislikes in recruiting and supplying workers, so a network of social relations of mutual dependence was created around them. Morris D. Morris felt that labour contractors in western India had unrestrained power to supervise labour discipline; joining the work would not have been the responsibility of the contractor but would have retained the role of the Sardar.²⁵ Sardar's labour procurement system peaked just before the start of the second purge as demand for

coal increased. At this stage, 75 per cent of workers come mainly from Bihar, Orissa, and the United Provinces.²⁶

Coalfield recruiting Organization:

During the Second World War due to the difficulties of securing adequate labour there came into existence a system of recruitment under which workers mostly from the eastern district of UP were recruited at Gorakhpur labour report of the CRO. This system of recruitment continued after the second world war even though the exigencies created by the Warhead ended the system was strongly criticized by the workers representative as according to them, it amount it to indentured labour. A type a tight committee under the chairmanship of Shri Vishnu Sahay, then secretary Ministry of Labour was set up to enquiry into these complaints. This committee submitted its report on September 29th 1954, which was accepted by government. Hindi report the committee recommended inter alia, continuity of service for workmen recruited through this organization, freedom of movement and Association, opinion to live in quarters with families, and provision of the same term and conditions of service as for other workers. At the time petite meeting held in New Delhi on December 21, 1963, a decision was taken to evolution all together the system of recruitment through CRO. Worker's representative have alished that this decision to have not been implemented yet and unauthorized miners camp and hostels continue to exist. It is further report it that the number of workers recruited to CRO and employed in the coal mining industry in the state of West Bengal Bihar Madhya Pradesh Orissa Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir was 19301 on 31.01.1968.²⁷

The fact that changes in the system were made from time to time and these changes were accepted by the industry indicates that the system had sort inherent evils. It appears that do to some extend the able of the system have been migrated the major complaint still persist and continue to be an retend in employer employee relations. The study group fails that in order to create healthy employer employee relations; it is time that the system is completely abolished.²⁸

Employment exchanges:

The recruitment of labour in collieries has now to be done through employment exchange as in other industries. The employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act 1959, which came into force in 1960, request that vacancy should be notified to Employment Exchanges. To facilitate the the implementation of this measures in the coalfield areas, seven colliery exchange have been set up _ two in West Bengal 3 in Madhya Pradesh and one each in Bihar and Odisha. The principal object of a regulating the recruitment of leave through the implement exchange was to avoid worst of manpower to effect speedy reemployment experienced surplus labour and two eliminate malpractices in recruitment²⁹

Table -3

The table shows the number of registrations and placement effected by the Colliery Employment during the period July, 1966 to June1967and number of applicants on the live register of this exchange as on 30.6.1967

Name of the State Exchange	Registrations effected during July 66 to June 67	Placement Effected during July 66 to June 67	Vacancies notified during July 66 to June 67	Submission made during July 66 to June 67	No. on live registers as on 30-06-67
Jharia, Bihar	10,592	2983	2695	10472	3822
Burhar, M.P	2800	932	1064	2583	570
Junnerdeo, M.P.	2439	1476	1697	2091	416
Manendragarh, M.P.	1835	92	226	813	899
Talchar, M.P.	4491	666	701	2658	1961
Raniganj, W.B.	11,380	3915	4632	10298	5587
Sitampur, W. B.	7311	1683	2442	8012	3315

Government of India, Minister of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Report of the Study Group for Coal: National Commission on Labour (New Delhi: Manager of Publication,1968),16.

The proportion of workers who were recruited through employment exchange was found to be very low recruitment through employment exchange was restored to buy the employers mostly for clerical administrative technical and professional personnel. The Semi skilled or unskilled workers were taken in employment either directly by the employees or through contractors or intermediaries. The system of recruiting clerical professional and other supervisor staff through advertisement or through manpower directorates of the mines was also found to be in Bhog in some of the mines like coal, iron ore, mika, etc. However the fact remains that at present the liver requirements of the mining industry are mostly met by the residence of the nearby villages surrounding in mining areas.³⁰

Table -4

Percentage distribution of workers in the selected mines by system of recruitment

Sl. No.	Mineral/Mineral group	Percentage distribution of workers in the selected mines by system of recruitment.					
		Employment Exchanges		Directly by employer at mines premises or through dept. of mines.		Through intermediaries or other agencies.	
1	Coal	11	3	69	75	20	22
2	Manganese	17	6	83	94	----	----

3	Iron ore	x	----	70	36	30	64
4	Stone	1	----	99	100	---	----
5	Limestone & dolomite	14	14	78	79	8	7
6	Chaina clay, fire clay & gypsum	x	--	92	77	8	23
7	Other minerals	14	1	71	67	15	32
	All minerals	10	5	71	72	19	23

X=Negligible

. Government of India, Ministry of Labour, labour Bauru, Economic Condition of Women Workers in Mines (Chandigarh: 1978), 34.

Problem of migration and absenteeism:

The term migration and migratory labour seem to have been wrongly applied to colliery labour, since the worker do not so much change their place to work but return to their land seasonally for short period during the year of agriculture operations and again report back to their employer in due course. Seasonal draft of a large number of workers from coal mines to the land take place twice a year, once in May – August for sowing and transplanting and again in October – November for harvesting. The Peculiar socio – economic structure of the rural population causes this seasonal fluctuation in the labour force in colliery and this has to be reckoned with. Other factor like the prevailing scarcity of food grains and their high price, evolution of cash and food concessions after the award in 1957 also contribute to the seasonal draft.

The table below giving the rate of absent for the period 1951 to 1964 in the indicating that the rate of absent among colliery workers had long remained almost constant. During 1965-1966, this rate has recorded a decline which is a healthy sign.

Table-5

year	All India
1951	13.31
1956	13.83
1957	13.66
1958	13.21
1959	13.11
1960	13.27
1961	13.53

1962	12.85
1963	12.70
1964	13.06
1965	12.67
1966	11.18
1967	11.75

Source: Directorate general of mines safety, 23.

The rate of absent is in the Indian Coal industry does not compare unfavorably with that of Aadhar countries when do Alliance is given for the various socio – economic factors that operate in the case of Indian colliery labour. With suitable wages, bonus provident fund benefits better living condition greater security of service absent is not likely to serious problem in the Coal industry. Measures like provisions of ration at a reasonable price to company operated stores would prove further useful. With a view to reducing absent in coal mines, the board of conciliations (1947) recommended the payment of attendance and production bonus. But the payment of bonus under the coal mines bonus scheme (1943) has played a limited part, if at all, in reducing absenteeism.³¹

Absence in the workplace is another reason for women's financial crisis. It is seen that they were sometimes absent at work. As a result, it was financially damaged. Wages were determined on the basis of daily work. Not only was that, many workers deprived of the status of permanent workers as they did not work continuously due to absence. The stress and complexity of the mining of the objects made their body and mind burdened. Workers were occasionally absent from the workplace to get temporary release. But the financial crisis was intensified as the wages did not get in the days of absence. Drinking alcohol in the name of fairy would increase. Excessive drinking day by day, the workers' bodies and minds became weak. So they were absent in the workplace. One of the major causes of absence is physical illness, religious festivals and wages asymmetry. Apart from some large companies, such as the Bengal Coal Company, Equitable Company, etc., most companies were not provided maternity leave to women workers in coal mines. On the other hand, wages were deducted during the days of absence. In order to perform religious rituals, they had to be absent for several days of the year.³²

In 1952, the percentage of female workers in Bengal coal mines fell to 12 percent. In 1962, it fell further to 7.5 percent. Since 1965, it has been 5 percent. The question is what is the reason for the decrease in the number of women workers? Coal is the main source of fuel to increase the production of coal. Positive recommendations of various government laws, wages committees have a negative impact on women workers. Mines Act 1952, mines prohibit women workers in the womb. The purpose of the government was to protect women from risky and dangerous. But as a result, a large number of women workers working in the mines were deprived. The Labor Applet Tribunal recommends a major role in the decline of

women workers. The tribunal advocates for women and male wages in the same kind of work. But the owners strongly opposed the wage equality. Men can work efficiently compared to female workers. Male workers are better than paying the same wage. At this time, when the production process begins to become instrumental, the fields of women workers are gradually shrinking. The mechanization of the industry to move away from the industry to them gives them a great opportunity for women workers. At the same time, they are often absent due to religious festivals. As a result, the production process is disrupted. They cannot do any heavy acts like men because of physical adversity. Men gradually become irrelevant in the coal industry. Restriction on their employment during right, maternity leave, and provision of crèches.

The scope for employment of women in the Coal industry seems to be extremely limited. Only in certain jobs such as those of doctors nurses, matrons, ayahs, teachers, social worker and quarry loaders and wagon loaders, Women May continue to find employment and, to the extent there is a expansion of their activities, Small addition in the number of such employees maybe possible.³³

Promotional prospects of women workers and insufficient welfare activates:

Lack of proper education and training are some of the main which come in the way of women forgetting job at higher level of production. Information collected in the course of the study revealed that Prospect of women graduating from unskilled two semi-skilled or supervisory jobs where particularly non-existent. However, most of the employers were found to be slightly biased regarding employment of women in supervisory jobs.³⁴

After independence, women coal miners still faced significant deprivation because the capitalist mindset of private mine owners remained unchanged. Even though 20,665 houses were built in the Rangang area, very few women workers were able to secure housing, and they were also denied other benefits.³⁵ The irregular supply of wagons created job insecurity and made it difficult for women to find consistent work.³⁶ This instability was often exploited by owners to keep workers in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, the health of women workers was neglected.³⁷ Despite the construction of two regional hospitals, diseases like tuberculosis, silicosis, and pneumoconiosis were common. Workers often hid these illnesses for fear of being fired for medical unfitness.³⁸ Mine owners also ignored international labor standards, denying women pre- and post-natal leave. The lack of childcare facilities further exacerbated their difficulties, ensuring that the exploitation of female miners continued well after independence.³⁹

Conclusion:

In India, women were involved in coal mining from the beginning. As the demand for coal grew, owners secured labour through agreements with local landlords and by recruiting workers through contractors and "Sardars." Both the colonial and post-independence governments established organizations like the Coal Field Recruiting Organization and Employment Exchanges to manage labour supply, but these were often less effective for unskilled workers, who continued to be hired through intermediaries. Women were typically employed as temporary or contract workers and were denied permanent status and a full salary. Despite the formation of government committees after independence to improve their conditions, little changed in practice. The government's focus on heavy industry and desire to

maintain good relations with mine owners meant that women coal workers remained exploited and deprived both before and after India's independence and the nationalization of the mines.

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