Woman Workers in the Indian Coal Mining Industry: A Gender History of Wage Strategies and Wage Structures, 1920-1967

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Abstract

Between the early 1900s and 2000, the percentage of women among mineworkers in Indian collieries fell from around 50 per cent to 3.3 per cent. During the 20th century, with the decreasing percentage of women in the mining workforce, the increasing masculinisation of the mining space, and the international interventions and influences, Indian collieries witnessed changes in the conceptualisation of wages of men and women mineworkers. This thesis chronologically traces and analyses the development of major wage strategies that permeated the wage structures of the Indian coal mining industry in the 20th century, discussing wages based on individual productivity and needs, family wages, and minimum wage and equal pay. The thesis argues that the prohibition of women mineworkers from belowground mining was a crucial factor impacting the development and legitimisation of the (male-breadwinner) family wage among the unskilled manual workers in the Indian collieries as it changed the conceptualisation of women workers from co-providers (along with their husbands) to dependents. In doing so, the thesis also looks at the similarities between the conceptualisation of men's rights as workers and women's work, as well as the merging of child and female work in the (male breadwinner) family wage model and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining. The thesis establishes that the wage discrimination (based on social, geographical and sex differences of the workers) that permeated into the wage structures of the Indian collieries made the different sections of the same class of unskilled workers prone to varying degrees of vulnerability. It also traces and analyses the development of the nation-standardised wage structures of the Indian coal mining industry for the unskilled manual worker of the

lowest category from a wage structure based on a gendered minimum wage to a wage structure based on a minimum wage following the principle of equal pay for equal work. It also discusses the difference in incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers.

Introduction

Labour, Wages, and Gender in the Colonial Indian Collieries

A Short History of the Prohibition of Women from Belowground Mining

The Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 excluded women and children under ten from underground work in the mines in Great Britain.[1] Kuntala Lahiri Dutt notes that during the 1920s and 1930s, the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted Conventions to restrict women's labour in the mining industry and used the above act as the prototype. [2] Urvi Khaitan points out that the formation of the ILO in 1919 and a Labour government in Britain in 1924 created transnational pressures on the Indian colonial government to enact protective legislation.[3] She notes that the parliaments and the press saw mining women as an embodiment of the "exaggerated adverse effects of industrial working spaces on women's birthing, mothering, and domestic practices."[4] A series of legislations between 1929 and 1946 stopped women mineworkers, commonly known as Kamins, from working below ground in the mines in colonial India.[5] The Indian Mines Act of 1923 prohibited children from belowground mining and increased their employable age to 10 years old in

[1] Miguel Á. Pérez De Perceval Verde, Ángel Pascual Martínez Soto, and José Joaquín García Gómez, 'Female Workers in the Spanish Mines, 1860–1936', *International Review of Social History* 65, no. 2 (August 2020): 233–65. p.237.
[2] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, 'The Act That Shaped the Gender of Industrial Mining: Unintended Impacts of the British Mines Act of 1842 on Women's Status in the Industry', *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 2020): 389–97. p.390.
[3] Urvi Khaitan, 'Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War', *War & Society* 39, no. 3 (2 July 2020): 171–88. p.173.
[4] Ibid. p.173.
[5] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948'." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute* 2 (2015): 1-36. p.2. Women mineworkers who were doing manual work in the mines were commonly called 'Kamin', cited from Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, 'Kamins Building the Empire: Class, Caste, and Gender Interface in Indian Collieries', in *Mining Women*, ed. Jaclyn J. Gier and Laurie Mercier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006), 71–87. p. 71.

the colonial Indian collieries.[6] In 1929, the British Government of India amended the Indian Mines Act of 1923, prohibiting women from being employed below ground in the mines.[7] The amendment of 1929 provided regulation for the gradual removal of women from below-ground mining over the next ten years so that it wouldn't cause sudden disruption in the mines.[8] In 1935, the International Organization of Labour adopted Convention No. 45, which prohibited women of all age groups from engaging in manual work belowground in the mines. After this, the (British) Government of India adopted another regulation in 1936 which demanded the complete removal of women from belowground mining by 1937.[9] From 37.9% of the workforce in 1921, their employment fell drastically in the next 15 to 16 years, and by 1938 they formed 11.7% of the total workforce.[10] Urvi Khaitan argues that the enforcement of the prohibition of women from belowground mining was disruptive and dehumanising as it removed 40,000 women from the workforce without providing for any rehabilitation.[11] She further notes that the situation became worse as there were very few alternative sources of livelihood because of the isolation of mining settlements.[12] She also notes that the above prohibition jeopardised single women's survival and drastically reduced the family incomes by over one-third.[13] However, when the Second World War resulted in a severe coal crisis for the Allied forces, in 1943, the ban was lifted in British India.[14] However, the coal crisis ended with the war; women were

[6] Ibid. p.12
[7] Ibid. p.12.
[8] Ibid .p.12.
[9] Ibid. p.12.
[10] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940). p.128.
[11] Urvi Khaitan,"Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War," *War & Society*, 39:3 (2020): 171-188. p.174.
[12] Ibid. p.174.
[13] Ibid. p.174.
[14] Ibid. p.174.

again prohibited from being employed in belowground mining.[15] In 1946, 77,294 women were working in the British Indian collieries both above and below ground, and by 1947, around 22,517 women were removed from employment due to the prohibition.[16]

There is ample literature on legislation prohibiting women from mining below ground. However, the above literature doesn't discuss its effect on the change in the conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers in Indian collieries. There is also hardly any literature on the close relationship between the prohibition of women workers from below-ground mining and the development and legitimisation of the (male-breadwinner) family wage model.

Women Workers in the Colonial Indian Collieries

B.R. Seth noted that women from the Bauri community were the first among the local communities to accompany the men to work in the coalfields.[17] He also notes that later, like the Bauris, the local workers from the Dhangar, Kora, and Santhals also came with their mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters to the coalfields to be able to generate a collective family income from the paid work of both men and women in the family.[18] Seth pointed out that with every increase in the number of male workers in these communities, there was a multiplication in the number of women in the workforce.[19] Not only the locals but also the first settled immigrants in the eastern Indian collieries, like the workers from Bilaspur (referred to as Bilaspuris) from Central Province, brought their families, and the

[15] Ibid. p.174.
[16] Ibid. p.187.
[17] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(134-135) p.128.
[18] Ibid. p.128. Bauris, Dhangar, Kora and Santhals are now categorised as Scheduled Tribes communities in India.
[19] Ibid. p.128.

entire family worked together in the coal mines.[20] B.R. Seth also pointed out that during the time of his inquiry, the majority of women belonged to the low castes along with the 'aboriginal' and 'semi-aboriginals.'[21] These low-caste women were chiefly recruited from Bengal, Bihar, and Central Province.[22] Women from the lower castes communities like the Dom and Beldar even numerically exceeded men from their communities in the coalfields.[23] Women from the higher castes who were very few in numbers were either widows or women whom B.R. Seth described as "socially undesirable." [24] He maintains that men from higher castes did not usually permit their women to engage in manual work unless they were financially afflicted.[25] Lindsay Barnes mentions that Muslim miners also did not work with women in the mines.[26] She further maintains that in the 1920s, there was growing caste consciousness, especially amongst the upper ranks of the Shudras (a lower caste community), and essential social movements took place in Bihar and the Manbhum district, which changed the attitude of the women's manual work among some castes.[27] She cites a Government of Bengal report stating that evidence shows that when a miner rises on a social scale, he doesn't like to send the women of his community to

[20] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.65. The Central Provinces was a province of British India. They were geographically located in the central part of British India and covered parts of the present-day Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Chattisgarh.
[21] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(128).
[22] Ibid. p. 129.
[23] Ibid. p.129.
[24] Ibid. p.129. I am not completely sure which women were seen as "socially undesirable" by B.R. Seth.
[25] Ibid. p.128.
[26] Lindsay Barnes,"Women, Work and Struggle: Bhowra Colliery, 1900-1985." *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, New Delhi* (1989). p.110.
[27] Ibid. p.118.

the mines.[28] B R Seth pointed out that men from western United Provinces, Punjab, and the North West Frontier Province, did not bring their womenfolk to the coalfields.[29]

B.R. Seth noted that according to the Census Report, in 1911, females were exceeding male unskilled workers in the Indian collieries.[30] He noted that in 1915, there were 5.6 women for every 10 men in the colonial Indian coalfields and by 1921, the number of women further rose, and there were 6 women for every 10 men in the colonial Indian collieries.[31] As discussed in the above section, the first drastic fall in the percentage of women in the Indian colliery workforce happened after the removal of women from belowground mining. However, even after the prohibition, the percentage of women in the workforce in the Indian collieries continued to decrease. By 2000, women mineworkers formed 3.3 per cent of the workforce in the Indian coal mining industry.[32]

Wages in the Indian Coal Mining Industry

B R Seth noted that the average monthly earnings of a female worker were the lowest among manual workers as women were paid lower wage rates than male workers for even the same category of work.[33] He further noted that women were either paid individually for their labour or paid in pairs with their male family members, and the gender

[28] Ibid. p.121.
[29] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(134-135) p.129. Immigrants from these regions came as single male immigrants. United Province referred to a Province in British India that comprised a large part of present-day Northern India. It roughly covered the parts of present-day Uttar Pradesh and Uttrakhand. The Punjab Province was also a province in British India. It included parts of Punjab across the present-day India-Pakistan border and the states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh of present-day India. The North West Province, which is now a region in Pakistan was a administrative region in British India.
[30] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940). p.128.
[31] Ibid. p.128.
[32] Directorate General of Mines Safety. *Statistics of Mines in India.* Volume I (Coal). Delhi: Secretariat Press, 2001.
[33] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(67).

wage gap existed in both systems of payment.[34] Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that in the 1920s, individual workers' wages were very low, and only combined family earnings enabled these workers to maintain minimum subsistence.[35] Between 1923 and 1936, due to the economic crisis and the withdrawal of women from belowground mining, the average earnings of the households of different categories of workers in the colonial Indian collieries fell between 40 to 80 per cent.[36] The worldwide economic depression in the 1930s also led to wage cuts and underemployment, which also added to the further fall of household incomes.[37] However, among the unskilled manual workers, single male immigrants dominated the trade unions, and along with the clerical and technical staff in the collieries, they were proponents of male breadwinner wages [38]

Urvi Khaitan points out that, during 1943-1945, when the prohibition of women workers from belowground mining was lifted, the gender wage gap had rapidly narrowed, and the female underground loaders were earning more than male underground loaders.[39] However, in 1946, after the ban on women working underground in the mines was reimposed, a fact-finding committee was set up by the government of India to go into the issue of granting the granting of monetary benefits and concessions to colliery workers in Central Provinces, Berar and Orissa.[40] In 1947, the Board of Conciliation was

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[34] Ibid. p.138.
[35] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.91.
[36] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.62.
[37] Ibid. p.59.
[38] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948," *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.15,16,17.
[39] Urvi Khaitan,"Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War," *War & Society*, 39:3 (2020): 171-188. p.182.
[40] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Socio - Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines,* M.A.M. Rao. Delhi: Controller of Publication Civil Lines, 1978. p.41.

constituted to make recommendations regarding the wages of colliery workers of Bengal and Bihar.[41] The Board of Conciliation recommended that the wages of women workers should be fixed at 75 per cent of that of their male counterparts.[42] With the independence of India in 1947, efforts were directed towards creating a standardised wage structure in several collieries. As part of these efforts, several Committees were set up like the Award of the Coal Mines Enquiry Committee, 1949 for the Collieries of Hyderabad, the Rewa Award of 1948 for Vindhya Pradesh, and the Talcher Award of 1948 for the Collieries of Orissa.[43] These Committees followed the recommendation of the Award of Conciliation Board and fixed women's minimum wage to be 75% of the men's minimum wage.[44] Later, the Committee of the All-India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes) was set up to create the first national-level wage structure for the Indian coal mining industry.[45] For the unskilled manual worker of the lowest category, the same minimum wage was fixed for both male and female piece-rated workers, but for the time-rated workers, the minimum wage of female workers was fixed at 75% of that of the male worker.[46] Later, in 1957, the Government set up the Labor Appellate Tribunal to look into the appeals against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes), which stated that female workers in all categories (both piece-rated and time-rated) were entitled to receive the

[41] Ibid. p.28.
[42] Ibid. p.28.
[43] Ibid. p.29.
[44] Ibid. p.29.
[45] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.1. After Independence, the All-India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes) was set up in 1954 by the Central Government of India consisting of representatives of the workers, employers, and government for adjudication of industrial disputes between the employers and the workers in the coal mines to develop the first national-level wage structure in coal mines in Independent India.
[46] Ibid. p.98,99,107,108. The wage rate of a piece rated worker is fixed based on it's output and the wage rate of a time rated worker is fixed based on the number of hour of work.

same wages as male workers. [47] In 1962, the Ministry of Labour and Employment Department of the Government of India set up a Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry, which also held the same view, and this wage structure was made effective in the Indian coal mining Industry from 1967.[48]

After the Independence of India in 1947, the principle of "equal pay for equal work for both men and women" was accepted as a Directive to State Policy in the Constitution of India.[49] In 1958, India ratified the ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951).[50] In 1975, the President of India promulgated the Equal Remuneration Ordinance, which the Equal Remuneration Act replaced in 1976.[51] The Act was implemented in mines and plantations in 1977.[52] However, as mentioned earlier, the Indian coal mining industry has been implementing the principle of equal pay for equal work since 1967.[53] By implementing a national-level standard wage structure based on the principle of 'Equal Pay for Equal Work for men and women workers' in 1967, the Indian coal mining Industry became a pioneer among Indian industries to implement the principle of "Equal pay for Equal Work". Despite this, there is hardly any literature on the process of construction of a wage structure in the Indian coal mining Industry based on

[47] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal of India on Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, Delhi: Manager of Publication, 1957.p.1,39.The Labour Appellate Tribunal was set up by the Government to look into the Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes) where workers represented by the trade unions were the appellants and the employers were the Respondents.
[48] Ibid. p.137.In 1962, the Government of India in the Ministry of Labour and Employment set up a Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry. It consisted of two independent members, two members representing employers and two members representing workers. It had the task of working out a wage structure based on the principles of fair wages as outlined in the Report of the Committee on Fair Wages.
[49] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Socio - Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines,* M.A.M. Rao. Delhi: Controller of Publication Civil Lines, 1978.p.41.
[50] Ibid. p.41.
[51] Ibid. p.41.
[52] Ibid. p.41.
[53] Ibid. p.43.

the principle of the ILO Convention No.100 (Equal Remuneration Convention). However, the existing literature discusses the effect of the prohibition of women workers from belowground mining on household earnings. No literature discusses the wage discrimination that existed in the colonial Indian collieries among the same class of unskilled manual workers on the geographical, social, and sexual differences. The literature discussed above contains scattered information on wage rates or payment systems. However, no study examines the wage strategies that developed in the Indian collieries and permeated into the wage structures of the Indian coal mining industry over the 20th century.

Gender and Wage Strategies in the 20th Century: Family Wage, Minimum Wage and Equal Pay

Equal Pay for Equal Work and Minimum Wage

Silke Neunsinger points out how the discourse of equal pay in relation to gender has changed over time.[54] She argues that in the 19th century, Trade unions used equal pay as a strategy to further marginalise women by decreasing competition between men and women in the labour market.[55] Then, by the late 19th century, equal pay was categorised in the discourse on special rights for women.[56] Scholars like Lubin and Winslow maintain with the First World War, the women working in jobs and positions previously held by men and feminists lobbying for the principle of "equal pay for equal work," equal pay entered into the Treaty of Versailles.[57] Neunsinger argues that during the interwar period and after the Second World War, "equal pay became central to the discourse on discrimination in employment and equality of opportunity."[58] She further maintains that it became part of gender mainstreaming in the mid-1980s.[59]

Dorothy Sue Cobble argues that labour feminists' debates over the definitions of an "equal" and a "just " wage transformed the gender ideology of wages. The advocates

[54] Silke Neunsinger, 'The Unobtainable Magic of Numbers: Equal Remuneration, the Ilo and the International Trade Union Movement 1950s–1980s', in *Women's ILO*, ed. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman (BRILL, 2018), 121–48.
[55] Ibid. p.122.
[56] Ibid. p.123.
[57] Carol Riegelman Lubin and Anne Winslow, *Social Justice for Women: The International Labor Organization and Women* (Duke University Press, 1990).
[58] Silke Neunsinger, 'The Unobtainable Magic of Numbers: Equal Remuneration, the Ilo and the International Trade Union Movement 1950s–1980s', in *Women's ILO*, ed. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman (BRILL, 2018), 121–48.
[59] Ibid. p.123.

of equal pay pointed out that it is essential to understand that “equal to” should not be confused with “same as” and argued that women deserved equal pay based on “comparability,” not just “identity.”[60] Many labour feminists used the “rhetoric of rights that linked women’s claim to wage equity with their rights as equal producers, citizens, and consumers.”[61] Cobble maintains that for the labour feminists by the 1940s, wage justice meant recognising “human need as well as gender equity.”[62]

Alice Kessler Harris points out how the larger culture constructed the notions of wage fairness and how employers set wages have always been influenced by the ideological concerns for family and social stability.[63] Cobble argues,” wages have never been a construct solely of the market or of “marginal productivity.”[64] She further maintains that employers believed that “productivity” or the market is the sole determiner of wages, whereas most labour feminists believed the market could not be the sole determiner of wages.[65] She notes that collective bargaining for wages and state wage regulations emerged due to the inadequacies of the “so-called market wage.”

Dorothy Sue Cobble points out that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the labour intellectuals in the United States asserted workers’ right to a “living wage” and an “American standard of living.”[66] The Labour feminists, by the mid-20th century, promoted these ideas.[67] They demanded that wages paid to a worker should ensure that an

[60] Ibid. p.114.
[61] Ibid. p.114.
[62] Ibid. p.115.
[63] Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences; [the Blazer Lectures for 1988]* (Lexington, Ky: Univ. Pr. of Kentucky, 1990).
[64] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.115.
[65] Ibid. p.115.
[66] Ibid. p.115.
[67] Ibid. p.115.

American could consume a certain level of goods that every American has a right to expect and that women's wages, just like the men's wages, "should at the very minimum allow economic self-sufficiency and self-support."[68] The gender bias continued even as the wage structures moved away from the calculation of "fair wages" based on "services provided" towards the calculation of wages based on "cost of living". Cobble points out that after 1937, many state wage laws in the United States were calculating a "fair wage" based on the "cost of living approach" rather than the "service rendered" approach.[69] She noted that despite the movement towards a "cost of living approach," minimum wage for women continued to be "defined as less than what was needed for self-maintenance."[70] She argued that even according to the cost of living approach, the minimum wage of men was calculated as higher than women's wage as it was claimed that single men needed to purchase household services.[71] In contrast, women could do those services for themselves.[72] Dorothy Sue Cobble maintains that labour feminists completely opposed this idea and argued that there was little net difference between the cost of living of a single man and a single woman.[73] She further pointed out that most minimum wage settings in the United States used vague "cost of living" or "self-sufficiency standards" so that they could be frequently manipulated to disadvantage women.[74] However, labour feminists often turned these vague formulations to their advantage.[75] Dorothy Sue Cobble further argues that both men and women needed a wage beyond self-support as both

[68] Ibid. p.115.
[69] Ibid. p.115.
[70] Ibid. p.115.
[71] Ibid. p.116.
[72] Ibid. p.116.
[73] Ibid. p.116.
[74] Ibid. p.116.
[75] Ibid. p.116.

needed a wage sufficient to support their dependents, which led to the emergence of the "family wage". "Family wages" is "labour's oldest and most effective alternative to a market-oriented, productionist wage."[76] The conceptualisation of family wage then transformed over the years from a gendered minimum wage to a (de)gendered minimum wage.[77]

Gender, Family Wage and Minimum Wage: From Gendered Minimum Wage to (De)Gendered Minimum Wage

Cobble notes that Larry Glickman, in his study, *A Living Wage*, points out that labour unionists did not use the term "family wage" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; instead, they relied on "living wage"—a more gender-neutral term.[78] In the Progressive Era, middle-class reformers primarily used the term "family wage."[79] Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, historians started to use the term "family wage" to refer to the "living wage traditions of labour union reformers."[80]

Laura Frader points out that British and American historians working on working-class history have debated the broader significance of the family wage in working-class history.[81] Cobble notes that some scholars saw "family wage" as a "patriarchal wage-setting mechanism" that was used to lower women's wages and raise men's wages.[82]

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[76] Ibid. p. 116.
[77] Ibid. p.116.
[78] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.266.
[79] Ibid. p.266.
[80] Ibid. p.266.
[81] Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., '5. Engendering Work and Wages: The French Labor Movement and the Family Wage', in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 142–64. p.144.
[82] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.115.

These scholars also pointed out that family wage "explicitly entitled a man to a dependent service-providing wife".[83] For example, Heidi Hartmann has argued that the family wage or the male breadwinner wage was a means to reinforce both male workers' privileged position in the labour market and at home.[84] Martha May, on the other hand, argued that both American men and women workers jointly pursued the family wage in the 19th century based on class solidarity" and only in the early— 20th century did "strategic concerns" lead workingmen to base their claims on gender and especially on the exclusion of women from the labour force.[85] In the American context, Ron Rothbart also shows "family wage" as a patriarchal wage setting mechanism.[86] Cobble notes that some scholars differed from the above arguments and defended family wages as a "rational class strategy" as it controlled labour supply and raised the overall income of working-class families.[87] For example, Harold Benenson has strongly criticized the argument of Martha May.[88] Jane Humphries has argued that the support for a family wage was an effort to protect the working class family from the incursions of capitalism and that the ideal of the family wage was based on class solitary, not on individual workers' interest in higher wages.[89] Scholars like Rothbart, Greenwald, and Creighton argue that working-class men and women supporting demands for a family wage as male breadwinner's

[83] Ibid. p.116.
[84] Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 3, Part 2 (April 1976): 137–69.
[85] Martha May, "Bread before roses: American workingmen, labor unions and the family wage." In *Women, Work, and Protest*, pp. 1-21. Routledge, 2013.
[86] R. Rothbart, '"Homes Are What Any Strike Is About": Immigrant Labor and the Family Wage', *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 2 (1 December 1989): 267–84.
[87] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.116.
[88] Harold Benenson, 'The "Family Wage" and Working Women's Consciousness in Britain, 1880-1914', *Politics & Society* 19, no. 1 (March 1991): 71–108.
[89] Jane Humphries, 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working-Class Family', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 1, no. 3 (1977): 241–58.

wage did not believe in excluding female workers from wage work or in the female subordination in the home.[90] They show that many married and unmarried women supported "family wage" even when they were defined as male breadwinner wages, as it effectively raised their overall family income and allowed some women to reduce their long hours of wage work.[91] Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh also defend family wage as a rational class strategy.[92] Cobble argues that the "family wage" functioned as both a "patriarchal wage setting mechanism" and a "rational class strategy".[93]

Frader points out that the proponents of the family wage ideal "removed the wage from the domain of the individual and tied it to the interests of the collectivity, the family," but did so in a gendered manner.[94] She notes that the proponents of family wage argued that male workers shouldn't be paid wages only based on their labour but also based on their status as fathers and family providers.[95] Cobble points out that family wage was based on the idea that "capital owed labour a wage return great enough to compensate for the effort of the individual worker in the wage realm as well as those in the home whose labour helped reproduce and replenish the wage worker."[96] She further maintains that by doing the above, family wage became a powerful alternative to wage structures

[90] R. Rothbart, '"Homes Are What Any Strike Is About": Immigrant Labor and the Family Wage', *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 2 (1 December 1989): 267–84 ; Maurine Weiner Greenwald, 'Working-Class Feminism and the Family Wage Ideal: The Seattle Debate on Married Women's Right to Work, 1914-1920', *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 1 (June 1989): 118 ; Colin Creighton, 'The "Family Wage" as a Class-Rational Strategy', *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 2 (May 1996): 204–24.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Michèlle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, 'The "Family Wage": Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists', *Capital & Class* 4, no. 2 (June 1980): 51–72.
[93] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.116.
[94] Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., '5. Engendering Work and Wages: The French Labor Movement and the Family Wage', in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 142–64. p.143.
[95] Ibid. 143.
[96] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.117.

based on individual productivity in a job.[97] She further notes that by the mid-20th century, although the United States continued its commitment towards a "living wage" (meaning wage based upon family needs rather than individual needs or productivity), the labour movements in many industrialised countries moved away from family wage.[98] For example, she points out that the labour movements across Europe, Canada, and elsewhere supported the idea of "state family allowance" or "state wage supplements" based on the number of children of an individual.[99] Likewise, Frader also notes that in France, between the world wars, the demand for a family wage as a demand of French male workers had disappeared.[100] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon also argue that during the mid-20th century, the wage structures increasingly determined wages based on an individual rather than a household basis as more married women entered the workforce, leading to the "decentering of the ideal of family wage." [101]

Cobble notes that though in the post-war United States, the demand for a "living wage" continued along with an increasing number of female-headed households, the male worker continued to be seen as the family head in the minimum wage debates.[102] She further pointed out that in this period, most working-class American men still justified the demand of paying a higher minimum wage to men than women.[103] They did so by "pointing to their family status and responsibility for supporting a wife and other

[97] Ibid. p.117.
[98] Ibid. p.117.
[99] Ibid. p.117.
[100] Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., '5. Engendering Work and Wages: The French Labor Movement and the Family Wage', in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 142–64.
[101] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (January 1994): 309–36.
[102] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.118.
[103] Ibid. p.118.

dependent."[104] Cobble notes that women labour reformers were divided over wage arguments relying on family wage rhetoric.[105] She maintains that some labour feminists wanted to "de-gender family wages and extend them to women as well as men."[106] For these labour feminists, it was essential to acknowledge that women support families too, so a woman's wage was not just a "man's wage" but a "provider's wage."[107]

Neunsinger points out that the literature on the development of the campaign of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers has been dominated by developments in the Global North. Silke Neunsinger has analysed the challenges of implementing an international agreement like equal pay in varying contexts.[108] Her analysis mainly focuses on how labour feminists navigated the struggles to ratify and enforce the Equal Remuneration Convention.[109] She also gives an overview of the different definitions of equal pay used in international agreements and the different methods used by international organisations between the 1950s and the 1980s to increase the ratification and implementation of Convention No.100.[110] Paula Maatta has also analysed how the Convention No. 100 changed national politics because, between the 1980s and 2000s and how employers' and workers' organisations became instrumental in implementing it nationally.[111] In the Indian context, Neunsinger and

[104] Ibid. p.118.
[105] Ibid. p.118.
[106] Ibid. p.118.
[107] Ibid. p.118.
[108] Silke Neunsinger, 'The Unobtainable Magic of Numbers: Equal Remuneration, the Ilo and the International Trade Union Movement 1950s–1980s', in *Women's ILO*, ed. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman (BRILL, 2018), 121–48.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Paula Määttä, *The ILO Principle of Equal Pay and Its Implementation* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2008).

Warrier's study focuses on the struggles of implementing Equal Pay Remuneration.[112] Neunsinger has argued elsewhere that the Equal Remuneration Convention and the strategies for its implementation have been modelled on the working conditions in the industrialised sectors of the Global North, which explains a part of the Convention's limitations in the Global South.[113] There is also a range of literature on the impact of the equal pay legislation on gender in India.[114]

The literature on equal pay, family wage, and minimum wage discusses the development of a living wage or minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage, the development of minimum wage as a provider's wage, the effect of equal pay on wage structures, the effect of equal pay legislation, and the making of equal pay legislation in different countries. However, existing literature doesn't trace the development of the minimum wage for unskilled manual workers in a physical labour-intensive industry from a (male breadwinner) family wage to a provider's wage. The existing literature also doesn't discuss the close co-relationship between a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work and the de-gendered calculation of an earner's consumption units for a worker's minimum wage calculation.

[112] Silke Neunsinger and M. V. Shobhana Warrier, 'Transnational Activism and Equal Remuneration in India During the Twentieth Century', in *The Internationalisation of the Labour Question*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Holger Weiss, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 329–50.
[113] Silke Neunsinger, 'The Unobtainable Magic of Numbers: Equal Remuneration, the Ilo and the International Trade Union Movement 1950s–1980s', in *Women's ILO*, ed. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman (BRILL, 2018), 121–48.
[114] Preet Rustagi, "Understanding Gender Inequalities in Wages and Incomes in India," *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 48 (2005): 319–334; V. Nirmala et al., "Genderwise Minimum Wages, Wage Differentials and Determinants: A Micro Analysis of Agricultural Labourers," *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 41 (1998): 339–349; Sita Divakaran, "Gender Based Wage and Job Discrimination in Urban India," *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 39 (1996): 234–257; I. Narenda Kumar et al., "Gender Discrimination in Agricultural Wages: A Case Study in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh," in T*owards Gender Equality: India's Experience,* ed. N. Linga Murthy (New Delhi: Serials Publication, 2007): 260–278;

Aim and Structure of the Thesis

In this thesis, I aim to trace the development of the major wage strategies that became part of the wage structures in the Indian coal mining industry in the 20th century: from wages based on individual needs to (male-breadwinner) family wage to minimum wage based on equal pay for equal work for women and men workers. I also aim to examine the co-relationship between the prohibition of women from belowground mining and the development and legitimisation of a wage structure based on a (male-breadwinner) family wage. I aim to look further at similarities between the conceptualisation of men's rights as workers and women's work, as well as the merging of child and female work in the (male breadwinner) family wage model and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining. I also aim to trace and analyse the construction of the national standardised wage structures based on calculating minimum wage rates of the unskilled worker of the lowest category from a minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage to minimum wage as a provider's wage. In doing so, I aim to discuss the debates about constructing a minimum wage based on calculating the consumption units per earner for a worker and the difference in the calculation of consumption units per earner for a male and a female worker.

The time period of the analysis is from 1920 to 1967. The first legislation that prohibited women from belowground mining was implemented in 1929. Starting the analysis from 1920 onwards enables me to look at the pre-existing wage structure, labour organisations, workforce composition, and labour control process before the prohibition of women from belowground mining. In 1967, the national wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work was implemented in the Indian coal mining industry,

so my analysis ends with 1967. So, starting the analysis from 1920 and ending it in 1967 allows me to trace the development of the major wage strategies that became part of the wage structures first in the colonial Indian collieries and then in the national standardised wage structure after independence in the Indian coal mining industry.

To analyse the wage rates and wage structures that prevailed in colonial Indian collieries, I rely on the Reports by two contemporaries (B.R. Seth and S.R. Deshpande): S.R. Deshpande's *Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Coal mining Industry in India* published by the Government of India in 1946 and B.R. Seth's *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* published by a private publication in 1940.[115] I rely on the above report by B.R. Seth for my analysis of the discrimination in the wage rates of the same class of unskilled manual workers based on geographical, social, and sex differences in the colonial Indian collieries. With the help of the above two Reports, I also analyse the effect of the prohibition of women workers from belowground mining on different sections of the workforce and the co-relationship between the prohibition of women workers from belowground mining and the development and legitimisation of the (male breadwinner) family wage model in the colonial Indian collieries. For my analysis of the difference in the incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers through the interaction of the Government of India and the

[115] The Labour Department of the colonial government of India had appointed a committee known as the Labour Investigation Committee in 1944 to conduct ad hov surveys on the labour conditions and wage census in the coal mines. The Labour Investigation Committee headed by S.R. Deshpande, the director of the Cost of Living Index Scheme of the Colonial Government of India, investigated the colonial Indian collieries in 1945. B.R. Seth was a Professor of Economics at D.A.V College, Dehra Dun, when he published his Survey. He was also formerly a Labour Investigator to the Bihar Government and a member of the Labour and Mining and Metallurgy Sub-Committees of the National Planning Committee. He published his survey in 1940 after four years of field investigation in different coal fields of colonial India.

International Labour Office, I rely on the digitised reports by the ILO: *Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value*, Report V (1) published by the ILO in 1949 and *Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value*, Report VII (2) published by the ILO in 1951. For my analysis of the conceptualisation of a fair wage for men and women manual workers and the calculation of their minimum wages in the newly independent country of India, I rely on the report of the Committee on Fair Wages made in 1949, quoted in the *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry,* Volume I published by the Ministry of Labour, employment and Rehabilitation of government of India in 1967. For my analysis of the influence of the above conceptualisation in the first national-level standardised wage structure of the Indian coal mining Industry, I rely on *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I, published by the Ministry of the Government of India in 1956. For the analysis of the conceptualisation of a gendered minimum wage based on the gendered calculation of the consumption units for an earner and making of the first national standardised wage structure of the Indian coal mining Industry based on minimum wage as (male-breadwinner) family wage, I also rely on the above report. Lastly, for my analysis of the construction of the first national-level wage structure of the Indian coal mining Industry based on the principle of equal pay for equal work by the construction of minimum wage based on the principle of equal pay, I rely on the document of the *Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal of India on Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)* published by Ministry of Labour of Government of India in 1957.

I have divided the thesis into three chapters that proceed chronologically to discuss the major wage strategies that permeated the wage structures of the Indian coal mining industry between 1920 and 1967. In the first chapter, I discuss how, between the 1920s and 1930s, the changing composition of the workforce, the system of work allocation, and the labour recruitment system, along with the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining, contributed to changes in labour organisation, process, and control. This discussion forms the basis for discussing wage strategies, changes in the conceptualisation of wages, and wage structures in the Indian coal mining industry that unfolded in the 20th century, which I discuss in the next two chapters of the thesis. In the second chapter, I examine the close relationship between the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining and the development and legitimisation of the (male-breadwinner) family wage model in Indian collieries. I also analyse the wage discrimination that existed in the colonial Indian collieries based on geographical, social, and sexual differences among the same class of unskilled manual workers and how this made them prone to varying degrees of vulnerability that would arise due to the prohibition of women from belowground mining. In the third chapter, I trace and analyse the development of the minimum wage for the unskilled manual worker of the lowest category from a minimum wage as a (male breadwinner) family wage to a minimum wage as a provider's wage based on the principle of equal pay for equal work in the national level standardised wage structure in the Indian coal mining industry work. I also discuss the difference in incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers.

Chapter 1. The Changing System of Labour Organization, Process, and Control in the Indian Collieries; 1920-1940

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the coalfields in Bengal and Bihar witnessed changes in the labour organisation system, process and control.[116] This led to changes in the conceptualisation of the wages for female and male workers and the wage structures in the Indian collieries, which I will discuss in the following two thesis chapters. This chapter traces the changes in the labour organisation system, process, and control due to the changes in the composition of the workforce, the work allocation system, and the labour recruitment system. The first section of the chapter discusses the breaking up of the family gang system of labour organisations and its effect on women's employment in the collieries due to mechanisation and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining. The second section of the chapter discusses the change in the social composition of the workforce from the initial days of the collieries until the 1930s. The third section discusses the familial groups in the Indian collieries, the work allocation and payment system in the 1920s and 1930s and the changes in the work allocation system with the introduction of new machines. It also traces the changing system of labour recruitment.

[116] B.R. Seth notes that more that 85% of the total coal produced in colonial India came from collieries in Bengal and Bihar so a large percentage of labour in the colonial Indian collieries worked in the collieries of Bengal and Bihar.

The Prohibition of Women from Belowground Mining and the Breaking Up of the Family Gang System of Labour

Urvi Khaitan notes that the prohibition of women from belowground mining initially received strong resistance from the capital: British and Indian mine owners in India.[117] She further pointed out that it was because of their resistance to investing in labour-saving machinery.[118] However, unlike the Indian mine owners, the British mine owners in India could afford mechanization due to their larger mines and considerable capital.[119] She notes that when the pressure for the prohibition of women from belowground mining from the British colonial state became stronger, the British mine owners in India started to support prohibition as they saw it as an opportunity to outdo their Indian competitors.[120] Dhiraj Kumar Nite argues that capital preferred to employ family labor rather than paying a 'family wage' and opposed legislation restricting the employment of women and children until the mid-1920s.[121] Peter Alexander points out that around 1923, both the European and Indian mine owners opposed the ban on women in belowground mining but by 1929 when the legislation was passed, the opinion of the European mine owners had reversed.[122] Peter Alexander and Lidsay Barnes maintain that this shift in the attitude of the European mine owners happened around 1925.[123]

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[117] Urvi Khaitan, 'Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War', *War & Society* 39, no. 3 (2 July 2020): 171–88. p.173.
[118] Ibid. p.173.
[119] Ibid. p.173.
[120] Ibid. p.173.
[121] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.90.
[122] Peter Alexander, "Women and coal mining in India and South Africa, c1900-1940." *African Studies* 66, no. 2-3 (2007): 201-222. p.208.
[123] Ibid. p.208.

Alexander argues that in the early 1920s in India, the coal mine owners were pressured to make changes.[124] This was due to the increase in wages paid to the workers as a result of the strikes in the 1920s, which squeezed profits.[125] The new European mines that were opening also had modern production relations.[126] However, at the same time, the labour supply increased drastically by 1925.[127] It was easier to recruit labour, mainly migrant labour, and this made the mines less dependent on family gangs.[128] This further allowed the mine owners to increase their control over production.[9] To get a return on their investment in machines, the owners wanted to use the labour more intensively than family production permitted, and larger mines attempted to use labour more efficiently than the family system allowed.[129] The employment of women was primarily associated with family production.[130] So, the employment of women in the European-owned big mines was also reduced with the decrease in employment of family gangs.[131]

Lindsay Barnes points out that the coal-cutting machines brought with them a wave of up-country immigrants and changes in the gender allocation of work in certain regions.[132] The coal-cutting machines were introduced from the mid-1920s in both Bhowra and Jharia coalfields.[133] One machine would cut 100 tons of coal daily, and 50

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[124] Ibid. p.208.
[125] Ibid. p.208.
[126] Ibid. p.208.
[127] Ibid. p.208.
[128] Ibid. p.209.
[129] Ibid. p.209.
[130] Ibid. p.206.
[131] Lindsay Barnes, "Women, Work and Struggle: Bhowra Colliery, 1900-1985." *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, New Delhi* (1989). p.140.
[132] Ibid. p.112,113. Upcountry labour referred to the labour from the west of Jharia. They came from the United Province.
[133] Ibid. p.112,113. “The Jharia coalfield is a shallow sickle- shaped basin – about 22 miles long and 14 miles broad – in the district of Manbhum (present-day Dhanbad, Eastern India) and is located 170 miles west of Calcutta. From 1895-1906, it developed as the largest coal-producing zone in the Indian subcontinent. As early as 1919-20, coal raisings in the region touched 12 million tons a year and the

loaders would be needed to load the amount of coal cut.[134] For the same amount of coal, when it was done through hand cutting, 60 miners would be needed to cut the coal, and 60 to 70 loaders, who were mostly women, would be needed to load them.[135] She argues that the introduction of coal-cutting machinery had a different effect on women's employment as loaders in the coalfields of Bhowra and Jharia.[136] She argues that in the case of Bhowra, where 'unattached' women formed an overwhelming percentage of women workers, a large number of women continued to work as loaders even after the introduction of coal-cutting machines.[137] But in the case of Jharia, with the introduction of coal-cutting machines, the number of women working underground as loaders decreased.[138] She points out that in the 1920s when such machinery wasn't widespread, around 21,000 women worked belowground in Jharia as loaders.[139] However, by 1926 and 1927, fewer than 16,000 women worked as loaders belowground when these machineries became widespread.[140] Whereas the total number of men employed in Jharia increased from around 27,000 to 30,000 in the same period.[141] She points out that in Jharia, even if loaders for machine-cut coal were paid more, they preferred to load the hand-cut coal with their husbands or other male relatives.[142] This also highlights the

workforce was about 100,000." as quoted in Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948," *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. Bhowra coalfield is one of the largest coalfield in colonial India and was located in the present day Jharkhand state of Eastern India.

[134] Ibid. p.112.

[135] Ibid. p.112.

[136] Ibid. p.111-117

[137] Ibid. p.112. Unattached women referred to single women who either widow or deserted. Married women worked with their husbands and other single women also worked with their father or other male relatives.

[138] Ibid. p.113.

[139] Ibid. p.113.

[140] Ibid. p.113.

[141] bBid. p.113.

[142] Ibid. p.115.

dependence of their household on the combined earnings of both male and female family members. Women workers in the Jharia coalfields did not want to load the machine-cut coal because if she did so, her male family member would find it difficult to find a job for himself as a coal cutter. Meanwhile, for 'unattached' women who were numerically higher in the Bhowra coalfields, the introduction of coal-cutting machines did not have the same adverse effect on their household earnings as their households depended on just their own earnings. Lindsay Barnes also notes that as traditionally mostly women were employed for loading, gradually 'loading' began to be considered as a 'women's job', particularly among locals.[143] But with the introduction of coal-cutting machines, the management needed more regular labourers as loaders, and the breaking of the family as a unit of production (earlier coal cutters and loaders who were part of a family worked together as a unit of production) due to the job of coal cutters been taken over by machines led to the employment of many 'upcountry' single male immigrants as below ground loaders.[144]

So, mechanisation and the new changes it brought, along with the increasing availability of single male migrant labour and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining, laid the groundwork for the politics of breaking up the family gang system of labour organisation. All these factors together led to changes in the labour process and control.

[143] Ibid. p.114,115.
[144] Ibid. p.111-117.

The Changing Composition of the Workforce by geographical and social origin

Peter Alexander pointed out that in 1930 analytically, three types of workers could be distinguished among the colliery workers of the Indian mining industry: locals, settled immigrants, and long-distance oscillating migrants.[145] The locals were the first workers in the mines, and even in the 1920s, nearly half of the workforce in Jharia came from Manbhum (the district where Jharia is located) and the neighbouring districts.[146] They were mostly 'Adivasis'.[147] In the 1930s, the term 'Adivasi' started to be used to refer to South Asian communities that were distinct from the caste Hindu society.[148] Most of them worked as family labourers in the collieries.[149] These locals worked in the mines that were very close to their villages, which allowed them to maintain agricultural production in their villages.[150] Lindsay Barnes points out that some of them could walk or sometimes take the train to work daily, and others could return home at least once a week.[151] The influx of workers migrating from relatively distant areas started in the early twentieth century.[152] Due to the efforts of the employers to stabilise the workforce, these immigrants begun to

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[145] Peter Alexander, "Women and coal mining in India and South Africa, c1900-1940." *African Studies* 66, no. 2-3 (2007): 201-222. p.204.

[146] Ibid. p.201.

[147] Dilip Simeon, *The Politics of Labour under Late Colonialism: Workers, Unions, and the State in Chota Nagpur, 1928-1939* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995). p.25.

[148] Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Introduction: Reading the Archive, Reframing "Adivasi" Histories', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 1 (January 2016): 1–8. p.2.

[149] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.84..

[150] Peter Alexander, "Women and coal mining in India and South Africa, c1900-1940." *African Studies* 66, no. 2-3 (2007): 201-222. p.204.

[151] Lindsay Barnes, "Women, Work and Struggle: Bhowra Colliery, 1900-1985." *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, New Delhi* (1989).p.108.

[152] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.84.

be settled directly in the mines' spaces.[153] The first flush of immigrants, like the Bilaspuris from Central Province who came in 1905-1906, also had the trend of family labour like the locals.[154] Many of these immigrants returned 'home' periodically in April, July, and the winter months to assist with agriculture in their 'home' villages in the Central Province of colonial India.[155] In 1910, single male immigrants from Central and Western Bihar and United Province migrated to the coal fields in Bengal and Bihar, and by 1930, they constituted about 40 to 50 per cent of different coal mines in Jharia.[156] They did not come with their families and followed the 'Umji' tradition of maintaining the family and other agrarian possessions in the village.[157] They were also known as the Paschimas (up-country labourers).[158] B R Seth notes that between 1911 and 1921, their percentage in the total workforce in the Bengal and Bihar coalfields grew from 2% to 11% and increased more drastically in the next decade as contractors continued to pay attention to the recruitment of miners in the Central Provinces and the United Provinces.[159] The 1931 Royal Commission on Labour in India refers to them as 'miners', workers who were solely

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[153] Ibid. p.84.

[154] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. P.84; Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.5.

[155] Ibid. p.5.

[156] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.15

[157] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.65 ; Dhiraj Kumar Nite,"Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.84

[158] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948," *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.7; 'Paschimas' was used to refer to the people from the west of Jharia.

[159] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co,1940. p.27.

dependent on mining for their livelihood.[160] The Commission of Labour notes that they were not usually agriculturalist in the same sense as the “Aboriginals” (primarily locals) even if they retained some connection with land and agriculture.[161] They were also known as “Paschimas” and were thought to be more stable and reliable workers and much better suited for the new jobs opened in the mining industry than the locals, who had strong village ties.[162]

By the 1930s, the increasing percentage of immigrants from Central and Western Bihar and the United Provinces not only transformed the workforce into increasingly male-dominated labour but also into a workforce with labour mainly dependent on mining as their primary source of livelihood. By the 1930s, the colonial Indian collieries also witnessed a transition towards increased control of labour.

The Changing System of Work Allocation and Labour Recruitment

Dhiraj Kumar Nite notes that in the 1920s and 1930s, ***five forms of familial groups*** could be identified amongst the colliers: (1) the typical ‘monogamous’ household constituted by the husband, wife, child and some other kin; (2) the cohabitational union of a male and female miner with, possibly, children of either of the two; (3) a single woman miner (either a widow or deserted) with or without a child; (4) a single male collier with the rest of his

[160] A.B. Ghosh, *Coal Industry in India: An Historical and Analytical Account.* Part 1 (pre-Independence Period). New Delhi: Sultan Chand and Sons,1977. p.131.
[161] Ibid. p.131.
[162] Lindsay Barnes, "Women, Work and Struggle: Bhowra Colliery, 1900-1985." *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, New Delhi* (1989).p.108-111. p.109.

family members back in the bastees; (5) a single male collier in a cohabitational union with other single women who is not a miner, with or without child.[163]

Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that the management organised colliers to allocate their tasks and pay wages in two ways: gang system and individual system.[164] In the case of the gang system, popularly known as the 'family gangs' system, payment was made to the gang headman (sirdar) or head of the family in the household-based gang rather than to each member in terms of the amount of coal they cut, loaded and hauled.[165] In the second system, mineworkers who were also part of a family in a particular colliery were allocated different jobs alongside other single workers, and each worker was paid separately for their labour.[166] Apart from these, there were also single male and female workers who were paid independently.[167] In Jharia and Raniganj coalfields, the 'family gang' unit was a predominant work unit in the 1920s.[168]

Dhiraj Kumar Nite notes that in the 'family gang' system, the familial nexus between the members shaped the manner of task allocation and payment distribution in a gang.[169] In a family gang, men were the gang heads and generally worked as coal cutters, whereas women and children usually worked as loaders, hauliers, and water

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[163] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.84.
[164] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.6.
[165] Ibid. p.6.
[166] Ibid. p.6.
[167] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.89.
[168] Ibid. p.89.
[169] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.6.

bailers.[170] Each gang consisted of six to twelve colliers.[171] For underground work, male workers dug and blasted coal, and the Kamins carried baskets weighing around 60-80 lbs on their heads or clutched at their waist to tubs on a trolley line or to bullock carts at a distance. After loading the coal in the tubs, they pushed them to the bottom of the pit, where the gin girls pulled them up to the surface. In quarries, they carried baskets on their heads up to the surface. When the family gang worked on the surface, they were involved in digging and removing the earth together as a group.[172] The male members dug in this case, whereas the women and the children carried the coal. When members of the mining family worked separately, men usually worked below ground as 'timber workers' and 'railway line workers' and women and children worked as loaders, wagon loaders, shale-pickers and wooden ginners in the same coal mine.[173] Nite also points out that the ties between men and women in the family gang were not exclusively marital; instead, the gang was composed of men and women from a broad socio-familial grouping.[174]

Lindsay Barnes points out that between the 1920s and 1930s in the Bhowra and Jharia coalfields, the composition of the workforce, the work allocation and the system of labour recruitment among the workers in the mines changed.[175] She argues that a part of this transition happened because the new machinery and evolving methods of mining necessitated a more stable workforce.[176] She points out that by 1931, the system of labour recruitment in Bhowra had undergone a change, and the recruits were predominantly

[170] Ibid. p.6.
[171] Ibid. p.7.
[172] Ibid. p.7.
[173] Ibid. p.7.
[174] Ibid. p.6
[175] Lindsay Barnes, "Women, Work and Struggle: Bhowra Colliery, 1900-1985." *Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, New Delhi* (1989).p.108-111.
[176] Ibid. p.109.

non-locals.[177] By then, 50 per cent of the skilled and 30 per cent of the unskilled miners were settled at Bhowra and visited their villages only once or twice a year.[178] In Bhowra, all coal-cutting machine operators were Punjabis, and each machine needed 3 to 4 operators to operate them.[179] So, as the number of coal-cutting machines increased, their numbers also increased. Similarly, the Paschimas were also given the job of handling explosives.[180] By the 1930s, immigration from the United Provinces and Central Provinces had risen by 30%.[181] So, not only the legislation prohibiting women from below-ground mining but the introduction of the new machinery was breaking the family gang system of production. The new process of labour recruitment also ensured increased labour control.

Conclusion

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the changing composition of the workforce, the system of work allocation, and the labour recruitment system, along with the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining, led to changes in labour organisation, process, and control. These changes formed the basis of changes in the conceptualisation of wages of female and male workers, as well as wage strategies and wage structures in Indian collieries, which I will discuss in the following two chapters of the thesis. We will see in the next chapter how the conceptualisation of wages for workers based on individual productivity and needs transformed into one based on family needs. The breaking up of

[177] Ibid. p.109.
[178] Ibid. p.109.
[179] Ibid. p.109. People from the Province of Punjab of the colonial India were called Punjabis.
[180] Ibid. p.110.
[181] Ibid. p.111.

the family gang system of labour gave way to the conceptualisation of an unskilled male worker's wage, where the minimum household's subsistence should be achieved only by the earnings of a male worker. The next chapter encapsulates the transition from the conceptualisation of wages for unskilled workers in the Indian collieries where wages of the male and the female miners together could achieve the minimum household subsistence to the wages of a male worker as (male-breadwinner) family wage.

Chapter 2. The Prohibition of Women Workers from Belowground Mining in the Indian Collieries and the (Male Breadwinner) Family Wage, 1929-1946

Neunsinger and Warrier point out that the British colonial power followed ILO recommendations for colonised areas, and the British colonial administration in India aligned the laws with these recommendations when making legislation.[182] They argued that through this process, the concepts of male breadwinner models were transferred through protective legislation for women workers and working mothers.[183] Along with the changing process of labour organisation, process and control discussed in the previous chapter, the prohibition of women from belowground mining led to changes in the conceptualisation of wages of male and female unskilled manual workers in the Indian collieries. The prohibition of women mineworkers from belowground mining destabilised the old conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers and the wage structure in the Indian collieries where the minimum household subsistence of the unskilled manual workers was achieved through combined earnings of both male and female members of the household. The development and legitimisation of the idea of the (male-breadwinner) family wage model was unleashed among the majority of the unskilled manual workers in the colonial Indian collieries with the prohibition of women from belowground mining. The time period of the chapter begins in 1929 as the legislation for the prohibition of women from belowground mining was first implemented in the colonial Indian collieries in 1929.

[182] Silke Neunsinger and M. V. Shobhana Warrier, 'Transnational Activism and Equal Remuneration in India During the Twentieth Century', in *The Internationalisation of the Labour Question*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Holger Weiss, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 329–50. p.346.
[183] Ibid. p.346.

The chapter ends in 1946, as the prohibition on women mineworkers, which was lifted in 1943 due to the Allied coal crisis, was again reimposed in 1946, and since then, the above prohibition has been in place in the Indian coal mining industry. The first section discusses the wages of unskilled manual workers from different geographical, social and sex backgrounds. It also discusses how these different households of unskilled manual workers achieved the minimum subsistence for their household. The second section discusses the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining and its effect on the different sections of unskilled manual workers in Indian collieries. The last section discusses how the above prohibition was crucial in developing and legitimising the idea of (male-breadwinner) family wage among the unskilled manual workers of the Indian collieries.

Individual Wages, Combined Household Earnings, and Minimum Subsistence of the Different Sections of the 'Unskilled' Manual Workers

This section discusses the wage rate discrimination that existed between the same class of unskilled manual workers on the basis of geographical, social and sex differences in the colonial Indian collieries. It analyses the wage discrimination of immigrants and locals and among unskilled male and female manual workers. It also analyses and discusses wage discrimination among immigrant workers from different communities. It analyses how these combined constellations and processes created new hierarchies within the workforce based on not only gender but also on the regional and social backgrounds of the workers. It also analyses how these different workers achieved minimum subsistence in their households. It further traces how this made different sections of the workforce

within the same category of unskilled manual workers prone to varying degrees of vulnerability that would arise due to the loss of earnings of women workers due to the prohibition of women from below-ground mining.

Discrimination in wage rates and earnings between different workers

Discrimination in wage rates existed between workers based on their social and geographical backgrounds and sex. BR Seth noted, “The problem of wages is far more difficult and intricate in the coal industry than in many other manufacturing industries because of the wide variations not only in the earnings but also in the rates of wages paid to the same class of workers and for the same kind of work.”[184]

BR Seth noted in the 1930s that the immigrants were paid higher wages compared to the local labourers for the same work.[185] He pointed out that, in Jharia, the local unskilled labourers were paid annas 6 to 7 or 8 a day, and Punjabi unskilled coolies are getting 8 annas to 14 a day.[186] Similarly, in the Central Provinces, Peshawari workers were paid higher wage rates than the locals.[187] Seth further noted that Jharia had more imported labour than Raniganj, and the earnings of the imported workers were unquestionably higher than those of local labourers.[188]

The earliest surveys of the monthly family budget and costs of living by the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhanbad in 1923 showed that, on average, workers spent over 72 per cent of family budgets on food purchases (mainly boiled rice with salt,

[184] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(61)
[185] Ibid. p.71.
[186] Ibid. p.71. The Indian Rupee is the official currency of India. A Rupee is subdivided into 100 paisa. An anna was an currency unit formally used in British India. A anna was equal to 16 of a Rupee.
[187] Ibid. p.71. Peshawari is a term used to refer to people from the Peshawar region which is in the northern region of present-day Pakistan.
[188] Ibid. p.72.

chilli, and occasional fish or mutton) and 10-12 per cent on liquor and tobacco, etc.[189] In 1938, according to the Family Budget Enquiry, it was found that in Bihar coalfields, an average family of colliery workers with an income of Rs.A.p 17/11/2 per month spent more than 70% of its income on food.[190] As the wages of the colliery workers were among the lowest in the Indian industries, a substantially high percentage of the income of the colliery workers was spent on food.[191] So this makes it quite evident that a group of workers who could spend more to get more quantity and better quality of food compared to the other group of workers earned more than the other group of workers. B R Seth pointed towards the differences in quantity and quality of food consumed among workers from different social and geographical backgrounds in colonial Indian collieries.[192] Regarding the quantity of food consumed by different workers, he noted:

> "Variations are not only found in the character but also in the quantity of food taken by miners in different provinces. A miner from Punjab consumes more food than a miner from the United Provinces, and he, in turn more than one from the Central Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. Not only in different coal-fields but also in the same coalfield workers coming from different places are found taking different quantities of food. For instance, in the Jharia coalfield a Punjabi surface cooly was found taking daily 69 ozs of food against 38.71 ozs of a Chamar from the Central Provinces, 31.21 ozs of a Kahar of Manbhum district, and 30.34 ozs of a local Bauri coal-cutter."[193]

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[189] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.58.
[190] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(229)."Rs.A.P" refers to Rupees. Anna. Paisa.
[191] Ibid. p.229.
[192] Ibid. p.224-229.
[193] Ibid. p.225,227. ozs refers to ounces of food. 1 ounce is equal to 28.35 grams.

Regarding the quality of food consumed among the different workers, he noted:

> "On the whole, the food of a local labourer is somewhat inferior to that of ones from Bilaspur and Raipur in the Central Provinces. Their staple diet is also rice and oil, but they take things of a better quality, consume more vegetables, sugar and milk. They take meat but not beef, and drink less than the local labourers. The labourer from United Provinces, especially one from the west, takes a better diet than even the Bilaspuri men from the Central Provinces. He consumes more wheat than rice, and ghee instead of oil. Milk and milk products and sugar form a considerable portion of his diet. The best diet is that of the Punjabi and Peshawari labourers. As compared to the workers from the United Provinces, they use more ghee, milk, milk-products and vegetables….Even among the local labourers we find men with high earnings and few dependants resorting to milk, milk products and sugar. However, most of them cannot purchase nourishing food even if they desire to do so, because they have to support many dependents whom they have left behind in their villages, and have to discharge many other financial obligations and liabilities such as their ancestral debts and land revenue."[194]

B R Seth's observations during his field visits in the different collieries in British India. He noted that the quality and the quantity of food that different workers consumed in the collieries was largely determined by their earnings.[195] From the above quotes, depending on the quality and quantity of food consumed, it could be said that in the 1930s, the local workers were earning less than immigrants in the Indian collieries. Among immigrants,

[194] Ibid. p.224,228.
[195] Ibid. p.228.

workers from the Central Province were earning less than the immigrants from the United Province, and the earnings of the immigrants from Punjab and Peshawar were the highest. The local labourers consumed less quantity and inferior food compared to labourers of Bilaspuris (who also worked with their female family members in family gangs) and Central Province, whose food was, in turn, inferior to that of labourers from the United Provinces. The best diet was the one of the workers from Punjab and Peshawar.

B. R Seth notes that the earnings of the immigrants were more than those of locals in the Indian collieries partly because of their great regularity and partly because they are given higher time rates than local workers.[196] He further notes that the immigrants were offered better wage rates and better opportunities to increase their weekly or daily earnings as they were more regular and settled compared to the local labourers.[197] So, to increase the control over production by increasing control over labour, the groups of workers who had more dependence on mining for their livelihood were given better rates. As discussed in the first chapter, the single male immigrants from the United Province and Punjab were the most dependent on it for their entire livelihood, followed by the family immigrants from the Central Province, which, in turn, was followed by the local labourers.

However, the attempt to increase labour control was not the only reason for higher wage rates paid to immigrants compared to local workers and even within the immigrant communities, certain groups received better wage rates than others. The references in the explanations in B R Seth's Study for the justification of the higher wage rates for certain groups of workers show how the colonial ideas of race and racial discrimination

[196] Ibid. p.72.
[197] Ibid. p.73.

have permeated into the wage discussions in the colonial Indian collieries. B.R. Seth quoted ideas of Robert Mc Carrison and Lt. Col D. McCay to refer to the ideas of 'masculinity' and ' physical efficiency' among the people from different regions of colonial India and its relation to the food they consumed.[198] B.R. Seth referred to the findings of Sir Robert Mc Carrison and noted that "Sir Robert Mc Carrison found that the physical efficiency of the Indian workers was greatest among the wheat eaters, least in the rice eaters and immediate in those living on one of the millets."[199] Seth also referred Lt.-Col. D. Mc Cay and quoted him.[200] Mc Cay argued, "As we pass from the North-west regions of the Punjab down to Gangetic plain, to the coast of Bengal, there is a gradual decline in stature, body-weight, stamina and efficiency of the people. In accordance with this decline in manly characteristics it is of the utmost significance that there is an accompanying gradual fall in the nutritive value of the dietaries, and more especially in the average level of protein metabolism attained by the people of Punjab, the United Province, Bihar and Bengali."[201] So, immigrants were considered more efficient and muscular than the locals as they came from the north for the collieries located in eastern colonial India. Among immigrants, the workers' wage rates decreased as their geographical origins moved from north and north-west towards eastern colonial India.

The discrimination of wage rates existed not only among male workers but also among male and female workers. The average monthly earnings of a female worker were the lowest among manual workers.[202] B.R. Seth noted that in the Bihar and Bengal

[198] Ibid. p.227.
[199] IBid.p. 227.
[200] Ibid. p.227.
[201] As quoted in B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(227).
[202] Ibid. p.67.

coalfields in 1938, on average, a miner was earning Rs. 10/14/9 per month, a loader was earning Rs. 10/2/0 per month, a skilled worker Rs. 12/5/5 per month, an unskilled cooly Rs. 8/14/6 per month – all of the above were male workers – and a female worker was earning Rs. 5/5/11 per month.[203] He further noted that women workers were paid lower wage rates compared to male workers for even the same category of work.[204] He also pointed out that in Bengal and Bihar, the coal cutters and loaders were paid in pairs, and in Central Province, they were paid individually.[205] However, the disparity in wages existed in both systems.[206] B R Seth also notes that women's food and clothing bear testimony to the "abnormally low standard of living" of the women workers in the colonial Indian collieries.[207]

The changing social composition, work allocations, and new recruitments discussed in the first chapter, along with discrimination in wage rates and earnings among the workers, were creating new hierarchies within the same class of unskilled manual workers in the workforce in the Indian collieries in the 1930s. Better earnings and increased numerical strength made single male immigrants a powerful section of the workforce in the 1930s. Dhiraj Kumar Nite notes that among the unskilled manual workers, the single male immigrants dominated the trade unions apart from the clerical and technical staff in the collieries.[208] This is further evident in the statement of S.K. Bose,

[203] Ibid. p.67.
[204] Ibid. p.67.
[205] Ibid. p.138.
[206] Ibid.p.138.
[207] Ibid.p.135,136. However, more research needs to be done to find the difference in diet between women and men workers in the colliers and whether the diet differed even between women who were sole earners of their households and women with other male members who contributed to the household earnings.
[208] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948," *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36. p.15.

who was the general secretary of the ICLU in the annual general meeting in 1933, quoted by Dhiraj Kumar Nite: "...if colliery owners needed to get rid of the workforce of his colliery, he should get rid of the Dehatis (the local peasant-miners) first and only after that retrenchment of the Paschima workers should take place."[209] Dhiraj Kumar Nite also to the complaint raised by the Indian Colliery Labour Union (ICLU) in 1933.[210] He points out that the above complaint noted that the real producers in the Indian coal mining industry, who were mostly categorised as unskilled labour, like coal cutters, loaders, trammers, timber-mistries, linesmen, and wagon-loaders, received very little wages.[211] Simultaneously, the managerial and supervisory staff continued to get much higher salaries.[212]

Combined Family Earnings, Minimum Household Subsistence, and the Negotiation for Improved Wages of Different Unskilled Manual Workers

Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that in 1923, on average, the daily earnings of a man and woman working together varied from Rs.1 to Rs. 1.8.[213] He argues that though the wages were very low, a collective family earning could nonetheless provide for minimum subsistence of the household.[214] He further notes that single women who were working as loaders, trammers, and shale-pickers in the mines found it much more difficult to manage the household as they were not even able to provide for even minimum

[209] Ibid. p.16
[210] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.94.
[211] Ibid. p.94.
[212] Ibid. p.94.
[213] See footnote number 36 in Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation: Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s'." *Marcel van der Linden and Prabhu Mohapatra, Labour Matters: towards global histories. Delhi* (2009): 82-105. p.102.
[214] Ibid. p.91.

subsistence.[215] In the early 1920s, during the strikes in several collieries by the workers, though they demanded improved wage rates, regulation of work time, and against maltreatment, there were no demands raised for a family wage or a bread earner wage for a worker.[216] He further points out that the local mineworkers like the Sathals, the Buaris, the Ghatwalla, and the Mahtos-Kurmis, who formed around half of the workforce in 1921 in these mines, did not join the above strike.[217] He argues that it was because these local groups, unlike the settled immigrants, regularly travelled to the collieries from their bastees (villages) and had access to small plots of land and common resources like the jungle, water bodies, and pasture land for cattle.[218] During the strike, the settled immigrant Bilaspuris mine workers tried to negotiate for a wage that could sustain the family within the tradition of the family labour economy without the help of any supplementary earnings outside mining.[219]

Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that the labourers from the neighbouring districts of the collieries who were landless, land poor, and workless artisans travelled to the coalfields in quest of earnings sometimes only slightly higher than what they received in the locality they lived.[220] They did not always work on jobs that secured the highest earnings.[221] They preferred to work on the surface for lower wages, which was comparatively safe from hazards and catastrophic experience, than underground work,

[215] Ibid. p.91.
[216] Ibid. p.90.
[217] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.66.
[218] Ibid. p.69.
[219] Ibid. p.69.
[220] Ibid. p.64.
[221] Ibid. p.64.

which offered higher wages.[222] However, the single male immigrants known as Paschimas looked for a higher wage. Before the prohibition of women from belowground mining, the demands for family wages or male breadwinner wages started to be raised only among single male immigrants. Unlike immigrants such as the families of coal miners from Bilaspur from Central Province, who stuck to the tradition of the family labour economy and preferred to work in underground blasting, coal cutting, loading, and tramming, these single male immigrants wanted to work on technical and mechanical jobs and avoided coal loading and pick mining and negotiated for a family wage and did not want their women and children to work in the coal mines.[223]

So, unlike the single male immigrants from the United Provinces and Punjab, the households of local workers and the family immigrants from Central Provinces depended on the combined earnings of the male and female members of their household to achieve the minimum subsistence. The wages of the female and male workers were conceptualised as dependent on individual needs and productivity rather than on the idea of a wage for a worker that would provide for him and his family.

[222] Ibid. p.64.
[223] Ibid. p.65.

The Prohibition of Women Workers from Belowground Coal Mining and its Effect on the Different Sections of Manual Labour and their Reaction Towards it

This section discusses the origin of the legislation for prohibiting women workers from belowground mining. It also discusses the difference in the participants in the debate of the above prohibition in colonial India between when it was first implemented in 1929 and in 1946. Taking an example from Britain and colonial India from the already existing literature, it also discusses how the prohibition of women from belowground mining denied women workers their entitlement to employment opportunities. This section then analyses the effect of the above prohibition on the different sections of the workforce (particularly unskilled manual workers) and their reaction towards it.

The Prohibition of Women from Belowground Mining: Women Workers and the Paradox of Entitlement

In 1842, the well-known survey "– "The Condition and Treatment of Children Employed in the Mines and Collieries of the United Kingdom" was conducted to inquire into the conditions of children working in underground mines.[224] The study's descriptions of conditions and characteristics of life in the mines impacted policies and public opinion.[225] The study also found that apart from children, a significant number of women worked in

[224] Miguel Á. Pérez De Perceval Verde, Ángel Pascual Martínez Soto, and José Joaquín García Gómez, 'Female Workers in the Spanish Mines, 1860–1936', *International Review of Social History* 65, no. 2 (August 2020): 233–65.
[225] Ibid. p. 240.

underground mining as part of the family labour system.[226] In the same year of the study, the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 excluded women and children under ten from underground work in the mines in Great Britain.[227] Kuntala Lahiri Dutt points out that the above report led to public outrage over women's labour in mining and underground mining spaces.[228] She further notes that the British Social Reformers in the British Parliament and the Religious leaders strongly proposed the prohibition of women along with children from belowground mining.[229] Remarkably, these studies did not mention any physical inconveniences to women working underground.[230] Yet, after adopting legislative measures that had excluded women from underground mining, by 1887, debate was being waged about restricting women from working in surface tasks in Great Britain.[231] Like in Great Britain in the 1880s and subsequently in the international labour forums at the turn of the century, total expulsion of women from the mines, underground and on the surface, became one of the workers' demands. [232]

Khaitan notes that as the Allied coal crisis increased and the British Indian government suspended the prohibition of women from belowground mining in 1943 in the colonial Indian collieries, the British Labour Ministry and the Foreign Office were very concerned about the backlash it would generate for setting a precedent for neglecting an

[226] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, 'The Act That Shaped the Gender of Industrial Mining: Unintended Impacts of the British Mines Act of 1842 on Women's Status in the Industry', *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 2020): 389–97. p.391.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid. p.391.
[229] Ibid. p.391.
[230] Miguel Á. Pérez De Perceval Verde, Ángel Pascual Martínez Soto, and José Joaquín García Gómez, 'Female Workers in the Spanish Mines, 1860–1936', *International Review of Social History* 65, no. 2 (August 2020): 233–65.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.

international obligation.[233] Urvi Khaitan notes that in this situation, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, Leo Amery, sent a Telegram to Delhi that ILO would have to be informed: ' You might consider giving public recognition in some way to the fact that such a retrograde measure could not be justifiable except under imperative necessities for war.'[234] Khaitan pointed out that despite the situation of war and the acute coal crisis, the British government did not lift the prohibition of women from belowground mining for the coal mines in Britain.[235] She further argues that this offers us explicit evidence of the othering of colonised women.[236]

Khaitan notes that in India, during the prohibition of women from belowground mining before the Second World War, the debates on prohibition had remained confined to mostly just states and capital.[237] However, after the lift of the ban on women working belowground in 1943 -1946, the debates on the prohibition had many participants.[238] Khaitan notes that the British Government in Great Britain and the British colonial Government in India received several letters of protest between 1943 and 1946 from individuals and organisations.[239] Khaitan notes overwhelming opposition to lifting the prohibition of women from belowground mining mainly came from women's organisations.[240] She notes that Christian religious organisations also condemned it as "barbaric" and "intolerable." [241] She points out that organisations like the National Council

[233] Urvi Khaitan, 'Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War', *War & Society* 39, no. 3 (2 July 2020): 171–88. p.175.
[234] As quoted in Urvi Khaitan, 'Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War', *War & Society* 39, no. 3 (2 July 2020): 171–88. p.175.
[235] Ibid. p.176.
[236] Ibid. p. 176.
[237] Ibid. p.173.
[238] Ibid. p.177.
[239] Ibid. p.177.
[240] Ibid. p.177.
[241] Ibid. p.177.

of Women of Great Britain, All India Women's Conference (AIWC), and the National Council of Women in India also expressed their strong objection to lifting the prohibition.[242] She argues that unlike the first prohibition, where the debates on the ban had remained confined to state and labour, between 1943 and 1946, the diversity of participants in the discussion of the prohibition of women from belowground mining had increased tremendously.[243] She further notes that as the Independence movement was at its peak during this time, and the much greater participation of women in public life during this time was one of the primary reasons why the debate on the prohibition of women from belowground mining attracted diverse participants.[244] She also notes that the opposition to the lifting of the prohibition of women from belowground mining became a double-edged sword for the British Government as the supporters of Indian nationalism used it to attack the British Indian colonial government, and the British Labour Party in Britain used it to criticise the Conservative government.[245]

Lahiri notes that when the Mines and Collieries Act came into place in 1842 in Great Britain, working-class men welcomed state legislation to protect their rights and integrity and sheltered them from workplace exploitation.[246] So, the above Act is also widely celebrated and seen as the victory of the working class against unsafe work practices and exploitative labour conditions.[247] However, for the women workers working in the belowground mines, belowground mining was their livelihood and means of

[242] Ibid. p.178.
[243] Ibid. p.179.
[244] Ibid. p.179.
[245] Ibid. p.179.
[246] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, 'The Act That Shaped the Gender of Industrial Mining: Unintended Impacts of the British Mines Act of 1842 on Women's Status in the Industry', *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 2020): 389–97. p.391.
[247] Ibid. p.391.

survival. Hence, their prohibition from it without alternative employment opportunities meant that struggles for survival loomed large on them. In Great Britain, Horrell and Humphries have shown that the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 offered no financial compensation for women and placed them in precarious situations, so women often wore men's clothes to pass as men in the pits.[248] A century later, in the case of colonial India, Khaitan shows that when the ban on women workers working in belowground mining was lifted between 1943-1946, women in large numbers flooded the mines.[249] These examples make it quite evident the willingness of women miners to work in belowground mining when the prohibition of women from belowground mining was imposed without a lack of alternative employment opportunities for women workers. Hence, the prohibition denied women workers their entitlement to employment opportunities.

The Prohibition of women from belowground mining and The Different Sections of the workforce in the Indian collieries and

This section discusses the effect of the legislation prohibiting women from below-ground mining on three sections of the workforce: women workers, male workers from the local and settled family immigrant community, and single male immigrants. It also discusses their reactions to the ban.

[248] Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male-Breadwinner Family, 1790-1865', *The Economic History Review* 48, no. 1 (February 1995): 89.
[249] Urvi Khaitan, 'Women beneath the Surface: Coal and the Colonial State in India during the Second World War', *War & Society* 39, no. 3 (2 July 2020): 171–88. p.172.

Women Workers

The crisis became more critical for women workers and their households as the prohibition was executed during the period of economic crisis in the industry between 1923 and 1936.[250] The worldwide economic depression in the 1930s had also led to wage cuts and underemployment, which also added to the further fall of household incomes of the workers in the Indian collieries.[251] In the B.R. Seth noted that in 1938, in every colliery that he visited, the number of women workers who wanted to work in the collieries greatly exceeded the number of those who could be recruited, and their wage rates were very low.[252] He also pointed out that the competition among women workers for limited job opportunities increased as the number of jobs in which women can be employed decreased significantly in the Indian collieries.[253] He further noted that very few women were found to be getting work for all six days of the week without bribing the timekeeper and other members of the subordinate staff.[254] Regarding the situation of increased competition and decreased wage rates for women workers in the collieries due to the prohibition, B.R. Seth states:

> "Not only the women working underground but also those working on the surface were faced with unemployment on account of the substitution of women by men. There was a keen competition between men and women for jobs, and it brought down the daily earnings of surface women workers to as low a figure as three to four annas a day as

[250] Ibid. p.62.
[251] Ibid. p.59.
[252] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(144)
[253] Ibid. p.144.
[254] Ibid. p.152.

> compared to 6 to 11 annas for underground and surface male workers. Now the total exclusion of women workers from underground work has increased competition, not only among males but also among females themselves. The lower earnings are affecting not so much the economic conditions of married women as those of widows who have one or two children to support. The latter have to accept starvation wages. Otherwise, they are liable to be replaced by married women or young unmarried girls. One meal a day is better than no meal. So, besides the competition between men and women, there is a competition between married and unmarried girls on the one hand and widows on the other. In short, the labour market in the collieries is glutted with wives and daughters who are willing to work for pocket money on wages on which no independent single woman or widow can possibly subsist."[255]

The above quote points towards the economic crisis that loomed over the women workers. Women workers faced increased competition not only because they were prohibited from belowground mining but also because men in surface jobs replaced them due to the economic crisis. This competition lowered the wage rates of the women workers as they feared being replaced by the male workers. The wage rates of the women workers were further affected by increased competition among married women or women. All this pulled the women workers' wage rates to starvation levels where, with only their earnings, they could not afford more than one meal a day. This makes it evident that the women workers, particularly the single women workers, would have been the worst hit section of the workforce in the colonial Indian collieries due to the prohibition of women from belowground mining.

[255] Ibid. p.139.

Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that in 1934, many of the colliery workers who were local and settled immigrants who worked with their families in the collieries protested strongly against the ban and organised demonstrations to demand the removal of the ban and reemployment of the removed ones.[256] Many of these demonstrations were led by women workers.[257] Later, when they were disappointed by the adamant attitude of the management, they shifted their demand to alternative jobs for women aboveground and improved wages, among other demands.[258]

Male Workers from Local and Settled Family Immigrant Community

As discussed earlier, the earnings of male workers from local and settled family immigrants were lower than that of single male immigrants. Unlike the households of the single male immigrants, the earnings of female members were essential to attaining minimum subsistence for the households of these unskilled manual workers. So, these male workers were also adversely affected by the reduction and loss of earnings of female workers in the Indian collieries. B.R. Seth, who visited the colliers during the first series of legislations prohibiting women from belowground mining, noted that the exclusion of women miners from belowground mining had reduced the family income to deficient levels.[259] This also resulted in the reduction of the proportion of local and family immigrants who worked with their female family members in the workforce. Dhiraj Kumar Nites points out that many male and female pairs of coal cutters, loaders, and haulers

[256] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute* 2 (2015): 1-36. p.15.
[257] Ibid. p.21.
[258] Ibid. p.15.
[259] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(134-135). p.148.

who belonged to the Santhal, Bauri, Bhuiyan, and Bilaspuri groups left the coal mines in 1931 as a result of the ban on women's underground work in search of other works where they could work together.[260] B.R. Seth referred to the Family Budget Enquiry in July and August 1938, which mentions that the immigrants from the Central Province who came to the coalfields with their whole families, particularly the Bilaspuris and the local workers like the Santhals who also worked with their families had considerably reduced since the total prohibition.[261] This shows that the earnings of their adult female members were crucial for the survival of their households. When the coal industry failed to provide adequate employment opportunities to their female and male members, they ceased to travel to the collieries in search of wage work.

Dhiraj Kumar Nite points out that in some collieries in Jharia, colliers raised demands for alternative jobs in the mines for women workers who were being removed from belowground mining.[262] In contrast, in some other collieries in Jharia, they raised demands for wage increases.[263] He maintains that the difference in the demands between these collieries was based on the fact that in some collieries, the mining establishments had organised cottage and household industrial activities like rice-husking, rice-shunning, wheat-grinding, cane-weaving, hat-weaving, and sewing.[264] He argues that some employers recognised that if the female folk were forced to sit idle or return to their villages due to a lack of employment opportunities in the mines, the male folk would be unable to manage their household economy based on just their individual earnings and would

[260] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute* 2 (2015): 1-36.p.15.
[261] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(151).
[262] Ibid. p.17.
[263] Ibid. p.17.
[264] Ibid. p.17.

frequently visit their villages and this would lead to instability of the workforce so some mining establishments organised cottage and household industries and employers used their products in the mines and for mineworkers.[265] So, where the cottage and household industries were established, colliers raised only the demands for a wage increase, whereas, in other collieries, they raised the demand for alternative jobs.[266]

S R Deshpande conducted his investigation of the collieries in 1945 when the ban was lifted, but there were already discussions about the reimposition of the ban. He also raised serious concerns about a considerable fall in household earnings for households that depend on the earnings of adult female members. He noted that in around 57% of the families in Jharia and Raniganj, the wife of the male worker was also employed in the collieries.[267] Regarding the dependence on the earnings of a woman's worker for the minimum subsistence of her household, he noted:

> "Of the worker's family income in Jharia, about 29.11% accrues from the earnings of the women workers. It is doubtful whether as a result of the ban on the employment of women underground the men will be able to earn more. That being so, unless all these women find equally remunerative jobs or there is an increase granted in the present level of wages to the men, the inevitable result will be a fall in the income of the family and the deterioration of the family's standard of living which is already very low." [268]

[265] Ibid. p.17.
[266] Ibid. p.17.
[267] Government of India, *Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Coal mining Industry in India*, S.R. Deshpande. Delhi: The Manager of Publication, 1946. p.80,82.
[268] Ibid. p.20.

S R Deshpande also refers to the Report of the Labour Commission, which captures similar concerns regarding the reimposition of the ban on underground work for women. It states: "First and most obvious is the loss of wages to the women, for whom alternative employment is not available and, where these are the wives or connections of the male workers, a corresponding reduction in the family income…"[269] So, the prohibition affected the not only the women workers but also the male workers from the local and settled family immigrants as a considerable proportion of their family earnings which was essential for the minimum subsistence of the household of these workers came from the earnings of the female members of the family who were workers in the collieries. The ban deprived the families of these workers of the earnings of the women workers and made the survival of their families critical.

Long-distance settled Single Male Immigrants

As already discussed, the Paschimas did not bring their female folks to work with them in the collieries, so the prohibition of women workers from belowground mining did not affect them adversely; instead, they spoke in favour of the prohibition and used it as an opportunity to advance their demands for male breadwinner wage for male workers. Nite points out that these single male workers believed that the prohibition of women from belowground work would bring about ostensible 'social (safety and home life) and moral (sexual chastity and prohibition on promiscuity) reforms in the life of mining community and industrial progress (efficiency).[270] The single male immigrants were taking up the jobs

[269] Report of the Labour Commission as quoted in Government of India, *Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Coal mining Industry in India*, S.R. Deshpande. Delhi: The Manager of Publication, 1946. p.19.

[270] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-Oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948," *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute*, Volume 2 (2015): 1-36.p.15.

vacated by the women in underground pits and competed with them for jobs on the surface.[271]

Towards the demand for (male breadwinner) family wage for male workers

This section discusses how the prohibition of women from belowground mining was important in conceptualising male workers' wages as the breadwinners. It was crucial to move away from the earlier conceptualisation of wages based on individual productivity and needs towards the conceptualisation of wages as a (male-breadwinner) family wage among the unskilled manual workers of the Indian collieries.

Both the investigators B.R. Seth and S.R. Deshpande strongly recommended an increase in the wages of male workers so that it can compensate for the loss of the earnings of adult female members of the household due to the prohibition, without which it won't be possible for the worker's families to maintain even the minimum subsistence. B.R. Seth pointed out that if the coal mining industry wants to remove women from belowground mining, it has to pay higher wage rates to the male workers to make up for the deficiency in the family earnings, as without it, their households will not maintain even minimum subsistence level.[272] He also maintains that cheap female labour is a subsidy to the industry, so if the industry has to give up this subsidy, it has to cover the costs.[273] S.R. Deshpande also warned that to avoid the deterioration of the worker's standard of living due to the prohibition, which is already very low, equally remunerative employment opportunities must be provided to all women who would lose their employment due to the

[271] Ibid. p.15.
[272] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940),(151).
[273] Ibid. p.151.

prohibition.[274] He maintained that the male workers must be given an increase in their wages so that it compensates for the loss in family earnings and provides for his un-waged wife and children.[275] For both investigators, removing women from the below-ground mining without adequate alternative employment opportunities necessitated a change in the conceptualisation of wages of the male workers. They recommended the conceptualisation of the wage of a male unskilled manual worker of the Indian colliery as a wage that can provide for his unwaged wife and children and compensate for the loss of earnings of the adult female member of the household.

Dhiraj Kumar Nite quoted the statement of Bansi Kurmi, a male coal loader from Bilaspur who reported to the Whitley Commission in 1930 regarding the law of 1929, which prohibited women from underground mining.[276] Bansi Kurmi stated:

> "Our women work because our earnings are not sufficient for us; they work in order to fill our stomachs. I intend to go back to my home when I have got enough money. I am in debt in my country to the extent of Rs. 100, which I borrowed for a wedding…Will the Government feed the women when they are excluded? I have two wives: they are both working here…A man from Sitapur collects a few boys and teaches them. I send my boy to that teacher and pay one rupee a month. There are 10 to 12 boys studying now. We will welcome a school and many of us will send our children…If our women are excluded from working underground, how can we live?" [277]

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[274] Government of India, *Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Coal mining Industry in India*, S.R. Deshpande. Delhi: The Manager Of Publication,1946. p.20.
[275] Ibid. p.20.
[276] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.69.
[277] As quoted in Dhiraj Kumar Nite, 'Reproduction Preferences and Wages: The Mineworker in Jharia Coalfields, 1895–1970', *Studies in History* 30, no. 1 (February 2014): 55–87. p.69.

Bansi Kurmi, a male worker from the community of the settled family immigrant, noted that the earnings of the female adults in their community are essential for the survival of their households. He raises concerns about who will feed their wives if they are excluded from wage work due to the prohibition of women from belowground mining and how they would survive as a family without her earnings. Belonging to the community of settled family immigrants in the collieries where historically the earnings of both men and women together achieved the minimum household subsistence, he was alien to the conceptualisation of the wage of a male worker as a wage that would provide for his unwaged wife and children. So, when the legislation prohibited women from belowground mining, he, rather than demanding a (male-breadwinner) family wage, asked if the government would feed the women if they had no earnings due to unemployment. It shows how his ideas of wages were based on the conceptualisation of wages based on individual needs and productivity.

Conclusion

The prohibition of women from belowground mining destabilised the old conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers, where wages were paid to the workers based on their productivity and needs. The prohibition of women from belowground mining played a crucial role in the development and legitimisation of the (male-breadwinner) family wage model among the unskilled manual workers in the Indian collieries. Wage discrimination among workers based on social, geographical, and sex differences permeated the wage structures in the colonial Indian collieries. Local workers who were mainly from Adivasi

and lower caste backgrounds in the eastern Indian collieries were paid lower wages compared to immigrants. Among immigrants, the workers' wage rates decreased as their geographical origins moved from north and north-west towards eastern colonial India. This was because the colonial ideas of race (such as decreasing masculinity and efficiency among men from north and north-west parts to east and north-eastern parts of colonial India) had permeated the wage structures in the Indian collieries. The wage discrimination made the different sections of the same class of unskilled workers prone to varying degrees of vulnerability due to the prohibition of women mineworkers from belowground mining. The single male immigrants from the United Province and Punjab were hardly affected by the above prohibition as they didn't work with their female members in the collieries. Women workers suffered the most due to the prohibition. However, among the women workers, single women (widows or deserted) suffered more than married women as they had no one to fall back on for the survival of their household. The families of local workers and the family immigrants from the Central Province who worked with their female family members were the most vulnerable to the prohibition of women from belowground. As the prohibition of women mineworkers from belowground mining led to the loss of earnings of the female members of their households, they questioned the wage structure of the collieries based on the conceptualisation of minimum household subsistence of the unskilled manual worker to be achieved with the combined earnings of male and female members of the household. The next chapter discusses how the idea of a male breadwinner wage permeated into the first national standard wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry in calculating the minimum wage for the workers.

Chapter 3. Towards Minimum Wage based on Equal Pay for Equal Work: From Male-Breadwinner's Minimum Wage to Provider's Minimum Wage in the Indian Collieries, 1947-1967

As early as 1919, the principle of equal pay for equal work entered into international agreements by entering into the Treaty of Versailles and the Constitution of the International Labour Organization.[278] After the Second World War, it became prominent in the agenda of International Organizations like the United Nations (1948), the ILO (1951), and the European Economic Community (1957).[279] This led to the formation of international resolutions, conventions, and treaties, which made it a "truly global standard."[280] Neunsinger and Warrier argue that though India ratified the ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951) only in 1958 and it became law with the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976, the principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work was part of India's legal structure long before that.[281] They note that even before India's Independence, "the principle of complete equality between men and women" was adopted as part of the Fundamental Rights Resolution in the Karachi Congress in 1931 and became part of Congress's Constitution.[282] After the Independence of India in 1947, the principle of "equal pay for equal work for both men and women" was accepted as a

[278] Silke Neunsinger and M. V. Shobhana Warrier, 'Transnational Activism and Equal Remuneration in India During the Twentieth Century', in *The Internationalisation of the Labour Question*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Holger Weiss, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 329–50. p.329.
[279] Ibid. p.329.
[280] Ibid. p.329.
[281] Silke Neunsinger and M. V. Shobhana Warrier, 'Transnational Activism and Equal Remuneration in India During the Twentieth Century', in *The Internationalisation of the Labour Question*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Holger Weiss, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 329–50. p.338.
[282] Ibid. p.338.

Directive to State Policy in the Constitution of India.[283] In 1958, India ratified the ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951).[284] In 1975, the President of India promulgated the Equal Remuneration Ordinance, which was replaced by the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976.[285] The Act was implemented in mines and plantations in 1977.[286] Neunsinger and Warrier note, "The Equal Remuneration Convention refers to rates of remuneration without discrimination based on sex and covers equal remuneration for work of equal value." They also note, "Remuneration refers to any ordinary, basic, or minimum wage and any additional emoluments payable directly or indirectly in cash or kind by an employer to the worker."[287]

Neunsinger and Warrier note that "Minimum wages in India were modelled on the living wage in Britain and were part of the constitutional goal of providing a living wage."[288] The minimum wage, particularly for manual workers in India, was initially modelled to provide a living wage for only a male worker. The idea was to pay different minimum wages for male and female manual workers. The wage structures recommended a (male breadwinner) family wage as minimum wage for male workers, enabling them to provide for themselves and their wives and children. In contrast, the minimum wage of a female worker was calculated as one that would enable her to provide for herself and have fewer

[283] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Socio - Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines,* M.A.M. Rao. Delhi: Controller of Publication Civil Lines, 1978. p.41.
[284] Ibid. p.41.
[285] Ibid. p.41.
[286] Ibid. p.41.
[287] Silke Neunsinger, 'The Unobtainable Magic of Numbers: Equal Remuneration, the Ilo and the International Trade Union Movement 1950s–1980s', in *Women's ILO*, ed. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman (BRILL, 2018), 121–48. p.122.
[288] Silke Neunsinger and M. V. Shobhana Warrier, 'Transnational Activism and Equal Remuneration in India During the Twentieth Century', in *The Internationalisation of the Labour Question*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Holger Weiss, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 329–50. p.338.

dependents compared to the male worker. After the independence of India in 1947, several wage-fixing machinery, along with different committees, were set up by the government of India to inquire about wages in different industries and recommend standardised wage structures.[289] These committees recommended different minimum wage rates for men and women manual workers in the Indian coal mining industry.[290] The first national-level wage structure for the Indian coal mining industry was recommended by the Award of All India Labour Tribunal, which fixed the same minimum wage rates for piece-rated unskilled female and male manual workers and different minimum wage rates for time-rated unskilled female and male manual workers.[291] Later, in 1967, based on the principle of equal pay for equal work, a nation-level wage structure with the same minimum wage rates for both men and women unskilled manual workers (both piece-rated and time-rated) was implemented in the Indian coal mining industry.[292]

This chapter traces the development of the minimum wage for the unskilled manual worker of the lowest category from a minimum wage as a (male breadwinner) family wage to a minimum wage as a provider's wage based on the principle of equal pay for equal work in the national level wage structure in the Indian coal mining industry work between 1954 and 1967. The chapter covers the period from 1947 to understand the influence of different Industrial Tribunals and Committees that were set up by India's government after India's independence in 1947(to inquire into the wage situation in different industries and

[289] Ministry of Labour, employment and Rehabilitation of government of India, *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry,* Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1967.p.35; Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Socio - Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines,* M.A.M. Rao. Delhi: Controller of Publication Civil Lines, 1978. p.28,29,36.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.

to recommend wage structures) on different national level wage structures in the Indian coal mining industry. The chapter ends in 1967 when the wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work was implemented in the Indian coal mining industry in the same year. The first section discusses the difference in incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers. It also discusses the relationship between consumption units, minimum wage and the principle of equal pay for equal work and how it unfolded in the Indian coal mining industry. The second section discusses the development of the national-level wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry based on the same minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female piece-rated manual workers and different minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female time-rated manual workers. In doing so, it analyses the debates on the development of the minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage in the wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry. In doing so, it also analyses the gendered calculation of the consumption units per earner for the calculation of minimum wage. This section also discusses the similarities in the conceptualisation of men's rights as workers, women's work, and the merging of child and female work in the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining and the (male breadwinner) family wage model. The final section of the thesis discusses the making of the wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry based on the principle of equal pay for equal work by fixing the same minimum wage rates for male and female workers for all categories (and both piece-rated and time-rated work). It discusses the calculation of the minimum wage of both male and female workers as provider's wage but calculates the same consumption units per earner for workers irrespective of their sex.

Manual Work, Consumption Units and Minimum Wage

This section discusses the difference in incorporating the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers. It also analyses the relationships between consumption units, fair wage, minimum wage, and the principle of equal pay for equal work for manual workers. It also examines how these relationships unfolded for unskilled manual workers of the lowest category in the Indian mining industry. In the process of preparing Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951), first, the International Labour Office prepared a questionnaire about various aspects (form of the regulations, definition, scope, and methods of application and measures to facilitate application) of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value and sent it to the Governments of the State Members of the ILO in September 1949.[293] Governments had to respond to it by December 1950. The Government of India opposed the adoption of the Convention but supported it as a Recommendation.[294] As the reason for this decision, it stated:

> "The principle of equal pay for equal work has been embodied in Article 39 (d) of the Constitution as one of the directive principles of State policy. It was accepted by the Central Pay Commission and the Fair Wages Committee and was incorporated in the Fair Wages Bill 1950. It has also been followed in practice by a number of industrial tribunals and the Central and State Government Departments so far as non-manual workers are concerned…Disparities however exist in the wage rates of men and women workers in

[293] International Labour Conference, *Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value*, Report V (1). Geneva: ILO, 1949. p.122.
[294] International Labour Conference, *Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value*, Report VII (2). Geneva: ILO, 1951. p.6.

> factories, mines, plantations and agriculture, though the tendency in factories is towards a progressive elimination of such disparities and State Governments under the Minimum Wages Act 1948. The disparities in rates appear to be primarily due to differences in average performance between men and women. In the absence of an objective study it is not possible to determine to what extent, if any, the existing disparities in wages between men and women workers' constitute a violation of the principle of equal remuneration. While the Government of India accepts the principle underlying the Convention, they are not in a position for want of adequate machinery to ensure and enforce its immediate application in full form to all workers."[295]

So, in 1950, in response to the International Labour Office, the Government of India stated that industrial tribunals and the Centre and State governments followed the principle of equal pay for equal work in determining the wage structures of non-manual workers. However, this was not the case for manual workers in factories, mines, plantations, and agriculture. It further stated that though the Government of India accepts the principle of equal remuneration because of the lack of adequate machinery, it can't enforce its immediate application in "full form to all workers". As the principle for equal pay was already ensured in the wage settings of the non-manual workers, "all workers" in the above quote referred explicitly to the manual workers. This makes it evident that gender bias permeated further in the conceptualisation of a living wage for the manual worker compared to the non-manual worker.[296]

[295] Ibid. p.4.
[296] The reason behind this difference between the conceptualization of wages and wage structure between manual and non-manual worker is beyond the scope of this chapter.

In the context of the United States, Cobble argues that the equal pay campaign encouraged women to analyse and question the differential wage payment systems based on the ideology of sexual difference.[297] Earlier, these differences were thought of as natural gender differences and inequities.[298] She maintains that earlier women's low wages were often justified by employers by pointing to "women's inferior skills and their supposed inability to equal men in the quality and quantity of work."[299] She further points out that the notion of women workers as inferior producers began to be challenged among employers and the workforce with technological innovations, which lessened the need for strength and women taking men's jobs in wartime and economic crises.[300] The technological innovations enabled women in non-manual work to secure equal wages. However, as seen in the above Reply of the Government of India to the International Labour Office, in the case of manual work, which needed physical strength, the struggle to secure equal pay continued for longer than in the case of non-manual work.

The Committee on Fair Wages, a high-powered Tripartite Committee that was appointed in November 1948 after the Independence of India to enquire into and report on fair wages to labour.[301] Regarding conceptualising what should constitute a 'fair wage' for manual workers, there was complete agreement among the members of the Fair Wage Committee that the fair wage of a worker should enable the worker to maintain not just themselves but a standard family but there was a difference of opinion among them

[297] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.114.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ministry of Labour, employment and Rehabilitation of government of India, *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry,* Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1967. p.35.

as to how many consumption units should constitute the standard family.[302] A consumption unit is defined as the coefficient of an individual's energy requirement based on their calorie requirement. The Fair Wage Committee finally decided that if the standard family were reckoned to require three consumption units and provisioning one earner, the decision would follow the results of the family budget enquiries.[303] In the 15th Indian Labour Conference in July 1957, a tripartite body consisting of representatives of Central and State Governments, employers and employees met and decided that in the calculation of minimum wage, the standard working-class family should be taken to comprise 3 consumption units for one earner, the earning of women and children and adolescents being disregarded.[304] They made this decision as they accepted that minimum wage was 'need-based', so it should ensure the minimum human needs of the industrial worker should be met.[305]

In the list of demands of the ICLU's annual meeting in Jharia in 1933, a demand for a minimum wage was raised by the trade union, which stated:

> "A minimum wage sufficient to maintain the worker and his family in reasonable comfort and to meet his other expenses necessary to maintain his position according to the standard of a civilised society." [306]

[302] Ibid. p.38.
[303] Ibid. p.38.
[304] Ibid. p.42.
[305] Ibid. p.42.
[306] As quoted in Dhiraj Kumar Nite,"Wo/men Mineworkers and Family-oriented Labour: Indian Collieries (Jharia), 1895-1948'." *Indian History: Journal of Archive India Institute* 2 (2015): 1-36. p.16.

So, by 1933, trade unions of the collieries like the Indian Colliery Labour Union (ICLU) were already raising demand for a minimum wage, where the wage was no longer tied to the domain of an individual but to a family. The minimum wage was conceptualised as a family wage. The mention of "the worker and his family" in the quote explicitly constructs a male worker as 'natural' in the mining industry and the wage as a (male breadwinner) family wage. In 1954, when the Award of All India Industrial Tribunal set up the wage structure, it referred to the recommendation of the Committee of Fair Wages to finalise the minimum wage for unskilled manual workers of the lowest category in the Indian coal mining industry.[307] For piece-rated work, the Award decided that there would be the same minimum wage rates for both men and women workers, and workers would be paid according to the output generated.[308] However, for workers employed in time-rated work, it decided that the minimum wage rate for the women worker would be 75% of that of the male worker based on her "requirement" of a smaller standard family irrespective of the fact if the output produced is equal or equivalent to the output produced by the male worker.[309] The Award of All India Industrial Tribunal fixed the minimum wage for men and women piece-rated unskilled manual workers of the lowest category based on 3 consumption units for one earner.[310] For the unskilled time-rated manual worker of the lowest category, the minimum wage of male workers was also based on 3 consumption units for one earner.[311] However, for the time-rated female worker manual worker, the

[307] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.107.
[308] Ibid. p.98.
[309] Ibid. p.98,108.
[310] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.108,115. The calculation of how this consumption units is reached is discussed in the next section.
[311] Ibid.

minimum wage was based on 2.25 consumption units for one earner as the consumption units of a female worker were calculated to be 75% of that of a male worker.[312] So, the gendered family wage discourse recommended by the Committee of Fair Wages was used by the Award of All India Labour Tribunal to construct the minimum wage rates in the Indian Coal mining Industry. The minimum wage rates for women and men manual workers in the Indian coal mining industry depended on how the consumption units for a worker were calculated. When the same consumption units for an earner were used for both men and women workers, it led to the same minimum wage rate for both men and women workers. So, for the construction of a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work for both women and men workers, the minimum wage rate for both men and women workers had to be calculated based on the same consumption units for an earner irrespective of the gender of the worker.

Minimum Wage as (male breadwinner) Family Wage by the Award of the All India Tribunal

This section discusses the development of the national-level wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry based on the same minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female piece-rated manual workers and different minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female time-rated manual workers. In doing so, it analyses the debates on the development of the minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage in the wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry. It also analyses the gendered calculation of

[312] Ibid. p.98,99,107,108.

the consumption units per earner for the calculation of minimum wage. It also discusses the similarities in how the two models (the male breadwinner family wage and the legislation for the prohibition of women from belowground mining) conceptualise women's work, the idea of conjoining women and children, and the right of a provider as a men's right.

The Award of All India Tribunal stated that to calculate the requirements of a worker to formulate a wage structure based on minimum wage, it is essential to look at the following two questions.[313] First, it was essential to decide whether there should be any allowance for the earnings of women and children when calculating the consumption unit of a worker in the provision.[314] The Second question was, what should be the number of consumption units for a worker's family, and for which provision should be made in the wage structure?[315] Regarding the first question, the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal decided that when calculating the consumption unit of a male worker for calculating his minimum wage, it will not take into account the earnings of women and children.[316] The Award further stated that it would be doing an injustice to a considerable number of worker's families just because one out of seven families had a female earner.[317] The Award also decided that the earnings of children would not be taken into account when calculating the minimum wage of a male worker.[318]

[313] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.101.
[314] Ibid. p.101.
[315] Ibid. p.101.
[316] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.105.
[317] Ibid. p.105.
[318] Ibid. p.105.

Regarding the question of whether there should be any allowance for the earnings of women and children when calculating the consumption unit of a worker in the provision, the Committee mentioned that though it relied on Sri Deshpande's Report to understand the wage requirements of the workers' family, it was logical not to depend on it completely as women were not prohibited from belowground mining when Despande wrote his report, and since then due to the prohibition, the proportion of female labour to male labour has reduced drastically in the Indian coal mines.[319] The Award further stated that, more importantly, it is the responsibility of a male worker to earn for his family, unlike a female worker.[320] By making this gendered assumption about family responsibility, the Award gives legitimacy to the social and cultural norm that, unlike women, it was the responsibility of men to provide for their families and reinstated the necessity of the minimum wage for a male worker to be a (male breadwinner) family wage. Based on the same social and cultural norm, it set a lower minimum wage for a female worker based on the gendered assumption that she doesn't need a breadwinner wage as it is not her responsibility to provide for her family. Frader argues that the family wage ideal was based on the belief that "the right to subsistence to a family was a male right."[321] She also points out that family wage is also one example of how differential concepts of rights and structures of gender inequalities contribute to the different conceptualisation of rights.[322] The Award of the All India Labour Tribunal further stated:

[319] Ibid. p.103.
[320] Ibid. p.103
[321] Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., '5. Engendering Work and Wages: The French Labor Movement and the Family Wage', in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 142–64. p.143.
[322] Ibid. p.144.

> "Assuming that a very small percentage of women work, it is not for intellectual recreation but for sheer necessity; because the male member does not earn enough. Can the employer who does not pay the minimum wage turn round and deny the employee's right to have the minimum wage by quoting the very circumstance which is driving the women to take to manual work. It is well known that even in a working family the woman does not normally work. If her husband earns enough, she prefers to stay at home and that is the Indian tradition…Even in countries where women are much more advanced and social customs grant greater freedom of movement and professional women are not a rarity as in India, it is the male member who is required to earn for the family. The woman may or may not earn. If she does, it is not for the benefit of the employer who can take advantage of that fact and deny her husband what he ought to be paid to maintain himself and his family."[323]

In the above quote, the All India Labour Tribunal uses the gendered assumption that, unlike male manual workers, female manual workers worked out of "sheer necessity" and not "intellectual recreation". It is quite amusing that the case of "necessity" and "intellectual recreation" is referred to while discussing the case of the unskilled manual workers of the lowest category in the Indian mining Industry. It is quite obvious from the nature and the rank of the job that both men and women who worked there worked out of necessity to sustain themselves and their families. In her study on post-war America, Cobble points out that the demands for wage settings where a wage paid to females was sufficient for "self-support" destabilised the larger gender status quo, so the Women's Bureau in the 1940s and 1950s were obsessed with "establishing that most women

[323] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.103.

worked out of economic need."[324] She argues that this underestimated the "liberatory role of employment in many women's lives."[325] She further points out that, however, "their emphasis is understandable, given the persistence of the myth of women as secondary or "pin-money" earners and the deeply embedded practice of setting wages according to the desired family form (male head and dependent women and children) rather than the actual household forms that existed."[326]

Regarding the question of calculating allowances for women and children for calculating the consumption units of a male worker, the Award All India Labour Tribunal also refers to the discussions of the Bombay Textile Labour Enquiry Committee and Fair Wages Committee.[327] In the discussions in the Bombay Textile Labour Enquiry Committee, it was maintained that going by the proper interpretation of the term living wage standard, a wife should be spared for the duties of the household and for looking after the children.[328] The Bombay Textile Labour Enquiry Committee argued that the wife cannot be and should not be expected to supplement the husband's earnings with extra paid work.[329] The Award of the All Indian Labour Tribunal also refers to the Australian interpretations of the basic or living wage, where the wife's earnings are always excluded from the calculation. The Fair Wages Committee made similar arguments while dealing with the same question referring to the Queensland Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1932, the decision of the South Australian Industrial Court from 1920 and the New

[324] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.115,266.
[325] Ibid. p.266.
[326] Ibid. p.266.
[327] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.103.
[328] Ibid. p.103.
[329] Ibid. p.103.

Zealand Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act 1936.[330] In all the above conceptualisation of the minimum wage, it is conceptualised as the (male breadwinner) family wage of a male worker who provides for himself and his unwaged wife and children so that his wife can deliver the unpaid household labour.

Cobble argues that despite the problematic impact of family wage on "women's wages and female autonomy," it implicitly recognised the "necessity and value of domestic labour" as it was based on the idea that wages were a "payment for reproductive as well as productive labour."[331] She points out that family wage was based on the idea that "capital owed labour a wage return great enough to compensate for the effort of the individual worker in the wage realm as well as those in the home whose labour helped reproduce and replenish the wage worker."[332] She further maintains that by doing the above, family wage became a powerful alternative to wage structures based on individual productivity in a job.[333] Cobble notes that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to raise wages, workers often argued that the wages paid to an individual should be high enough to sustain family life as this had become the most culturally compelling argument.[334]

After the Tribunal decided that when calculating the consumption unit of a male worker for calculating his minimum wage, it would not take into account the earnings of women and children, the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal proceeded to discuss the second question of what should be the number of consumption units for a worker's family, and for which provision should be made in the wage structure. In assessing the wage of

[330] Ibid. p.104
[331] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.117.
[332] Ibid. p.117.
[333] Ibid. p.117.
[334] Ibid. p.117.

a male worker, the Award noted that a standard family of the worker was considered to be one consisting of a man (worker), his wife (dependent) and two other dependents who would ordinarily be children under 14.[335] Then, the total number of members in the family was converted into standard consumption units by adding the coefficients of an adult male, female and two children.[336] The coefficient of each category was calculated according to the calorie requirement of each category using Dr Aykroyd's formula.[337] It is enunciated in Dr. Aykroyd's Health Bulletin No. 23, "Nutritive Value of Indian Foods and the Planning of Satisfactory Diets". It is as follows:

Members and their age in years	Coefficient	Calorie requirement
Adult male(over 14)	1.0	2600
Adult Female (over 14)	0.8	2100
Children (12 and 13)	0.8	2100
Children (10 and 11)	0.7	1800
Children (8 and 9)	0.6	1600
Children (6 and 7)	0.5	1300
Children (4 and 5)	0.4	1000

[335] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.105.
[336] Ibid. p.105.
[337] Ibid. p.105.

The coefficient of a male worker was taken as 1, his wife as 0.8 and for his two children under 14, the mean coefficient of 0.8 and 0.4 was taken, which is 0.6, and multiplied by 2.[338] By adding the coefficient of an adult male, adult female and two children the total consumption units was reached at 3 (1.0 + 0.8 + 1.2 = 3 consumption units) for a male worker.[339] The Award of All India Industrial Tribunal fixed the minimum wage for both men and women, piece-rated unskilled manual workers in the lowest category based on 3 consumption units for one earner.[340] For time-rated workers, the Award fixed 3 consumption units for a male worker for one earner. However, the Award decided that the consumption units of a time-rated female worker should be 75% of that of a male worker, so the consumption units of a female worker were calculated to be 2.25 consumption units.[341] However, the Award also states that unlike in the case of male workers, there had not been any scientific investigation to assess the requirements of a female worker in terms of consumption units.[342] It is quite evident here how gender discrimination permeated into even the scientific calculations in the construction of the wage structure that was recommended by the Award of All India Labour Tribunal, where the calculation of the consumption units for a male manual worker working in the mines was calculated through a scientific formula taking into consideration the nutrition requirements of a male adult body for the energy required to do the hard work of mining. Whereas for female labour, there was no scientific investigation to assess the requirement of a female worker

[338] Ibid. p.105.
[339] Ibid. p.105.
[340] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.108,115.
[341] Ibid. p.108.
[342] Ibid. p.108.

in terms of consumption units, and the consumption units were fixed at 2.25 consumption units. It stated that the lower minimum wage was due to the "assessing their requirements based on smaller consumption units." [343]

To decide the above consumption units of a male and female worker, the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal referred to the recommendation of the Fair Wages Committee regarding calculating the minimum and fair wages of a female worker.[344] In the report of the Committee on Fair Wages made in 1949 regarding manual work, it is recommended:

> "Where employment is on piece rates or where the work done by men and women is demonstrably identical, no differentiation should be made between men and women workers regarding the wages payable. Where, however, women are employed on work exclusively done by them or where they are admittedly less efficient than men, there is every justification for calculating minimum and fair wages on the basis of the requirements of a smaller standard family in the case of a woman than in the case of a man. The Committee, however, made it clear that this recommendation is not of general application to all cases where women are employed but is confined to a small field where the fact that they are so exclusively employed will have to be proved before the wage fixing machinery."[345]

[343] Ibid. p.99.
[344] Ibid. p.107.
[345] Ministry of Labour, employment and Rehabilitation of government of India, *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry,* Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1967. p.35.

The above recommendation by the Committee on Fair Wages first recommends equal wages to both men and women workers where the output they generate is the same or of similar value. However, in the case where women are exclusively employed, it suggests that it is justified to calculate the minimum wage and fair wages based on a requirement of a smaller standard family for a woman worker. Hence, it recommends a (male breadwinner) family wage for male workers while denying the same breadwinner wage for female workers. Based on this recommendation of the Fair Wage Committee, the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal fixed the same minimum wage rate for piece-rated unskilled manual workers of the lowest category, but for the time-rated workers, it fixed the minimum wage rate of an unskilled female worker of the lowest category to be 75% less than of the male worker based on "the requirements of a smaller standard family" for a woman worker.[346] So, though the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal moves towards calculating the minimum wage as a breadwinner wage for a female worker, it does so in a qualified gendered manner. In the case of piece-rated workers, though the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal goes for equal pay, it does so implicitly based on the same gendered assumption of family needs differentiated by gender. It was based on the idea that women need a lower breadwinner wage because they have smaller families, and women getting equal piece-rate wages and producing less (pieces) will also arrive at the same gendered unequal breadwinner wage. The Award of All India Labour Tribunal further stated:

[346] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal(Colliery Disputes)*, Volume I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1956. p.99,108.

> "In the absence of any satisfactory evidence that the output of a female worker is demonstrably lower than that of a male worker, they won't be justified in denying the right of a female worker to equal wages. The decision to fix the minimum wage of a time-rated women worker as 75% of the male worker is not a question of denying their rights to equal wage, but is one of assessing their requirements on the basis of a smaller number of consumption units end quote mark where."[347]

The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal tried to further justify the 2.25 consumption units for the time-rated unskilled female manual workers in the following ways. Firstly, the female worker generally belongs to a family group with at least one male earner as its head.[348] This is again another problematic assumption by the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal. It has already been discussed that when Deshpande wrote his report, women were not prohibited from belowground mining and by the time the Award of All India Labour Tribunal was making the recommendation of the wage structure, women had been banned from belowground mining and the percentage of women had not only drastically declined after the prohibition but also gradually declined over the years. As family labour declined after the prohibition, it is quite possible that the statistics of female-headed households might have changed, and it can't be simply assumed that most female workers belonged to a "family group" and were part of male heads and had a male breadwinner. Secondly, the Award states that for most female workers, the basic wage is about 75% of what is fixed for male workers in other industries.[349] Finally, the Award also

[347] Ibid. p.99.
[348] Ibid. p.108.
[349] Ibid. p.108.

mentions that special amenities women enjoy, like maternity benefits, provision of creches, etc., should compensate for the deficiency.[350]

The decisions on constructing the minimum wage for male and female unskilled manual workers by the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal show that the Award calculated the minimum and fair wages for unskilled manual workers as breadwinner wages. However, it did so in a qualified gendered manner, and part of the wage construction was based on imagined gendered biased assumptions rather than scientific calculations.

Like the conceptualisation of the minimum wage of a male worker as a (male breadwinner) family wage, which is based on social and gender norms that assumed the right to provide for family subsistence was a male right, the legislation for the prohibition of women workers from below-ground mining was also based on the primacy of the male breadwinner. Apart from this, both the models (male-breadwinner family wage model and the legislation for the prohibition of women from belowground) also conjoins women with children. In the (male-breadwinner) family wage model, the wives of the male workers were clubbed along with children and seen as dependents. The legislation prohibiting women workers from belowground mining also conjoins women with children and merges child and adult female work together. Kuntala Lahiri Dutta noted that the Mines Act of 1842, which prohibited women with children below 10 years of age from being employed belowground, “was the first legislation that excluded women from a specific occupation and grouped them with children”.[351] There are further similarities in the conceptualisation

[350] Ibid. p.108.

[351] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, ‘The Act That Shaped the Gender of Industrial Mining: Unintended Impacts of the British Mines Act of 1842 on Women’s Status in the Industry’, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 2020): 389–97. p.391.

of women's work in the case of both models. The discussions in the above paragraphs show that the minimum wage as (male-breadwinner) family wage recognised the need and the value of unpaid domestic labour for household and care work. The legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining had a similar conceptualisation of women's unpaid work. Jane Humphries explores the theoretical explanations behind "protective legislation," such as the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining.[352] She refers to the Marxist analysis of the reason behind enacting "protective legislation" as "capital logic".[353] She points out that the "capital logic" suggests that despite the requirement of the "capitalist industrialist production" of cheap labour provided by women and children, they also recognise the pressure to reproduce workers for the future.[354] So, the capital logic recognised that to reproduce the labour-power, women must be realised from manual paid work.[355] The "capital logic" further suggests that as industrial capital cannot be trusted to ensure restricted hours of work or certain kinds of labour, the state intervenes to establish rules.[356] So, behind this is the assumption that for the reproduction of the labour, women should stay at home and engage in unpaid domestic labour for household duties and care work.[357]

[352] Jane Humphries, 'Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State, and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act', *Feminist Review* 7, no. 1 (March 1981): 1–33.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.

Minimum Wage based on the principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work in the Indian Coal Mining Industry

This section discusses the conceptualisation of minimum wage as "provider's wage" and constructing a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work for the first time in the Indian collieries. I borrow the term "provider's wage" from Dorothy Sue Cobble's scholarship to refer to an idea of a gender-neutral idea of family wage.[358] The term "provider's wage" is used by Cobble in describing the demands of the working class women in the 1940s in the United States who rejected the "artificial" and "non-overlapping" categories of "breadwinner" and "homemaker".[359] The call for provider's wage by these women was an effort to maintain the moral framework of "family wage" as well as "productive labour".[360]

Negating the decision of the Award of All Indian Labour Tribunal, the Labour Appellate Tribunal concluded that a female worker is entitled to the same minimum wage as her male counterparts in the same category, i.e., the same class of work.[361] It further stated that this view is endorsed by the employers themselves as there is no wage disparity between a piece-rated male and female worker, negating the argument that female workers should be paid less based on needs.[362] So, male and female workers'

[358] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). p.119.
[359] Ibid. p.119.
[360] Ibid. p.119.
[361] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal of India on Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, Delhi: Manager of Publication, 1957.p.39.
[362] Ibid. p.39.

needs should be calculated based on the same consumption units for an earner irrespective of the gender of the worker.[363]

The Labour Appellate Tribunal mentioned broadly three arguments on why it would be unfair to calculate different consumption units for male and female workers. These arguments negated the justification given by the Award of All India Labour Tribunal for having 2.25 consumption units for female workers and 3 consumption units for male workers as "fair".[364] The Labour Appellate Tribunal stated:

> "It is not that every working woman has an earning husband. There must be heaps of cases where women work because bereft of male support, they have to bring up their children, and also dependents, a father or a mother or younger sisters and brothers to be looked after. Should the employer be allowed to turn round and say that the female worker should be paid less wages just because in some cases a woman may have a lesser number of dependents ? It must be appreciated that even in the case of three consumption units of a man, there must be many cases where the male worker is unmarried or has no dependents or is otherwise entirely alone. Must then the whole class of male workers be given less than 3 consumption units just because a certain proportion of male workers may not have 3 consumption units to support? In the absence of more evidence on a subject of this character, it is not possible to hold that the female worker should get less simply because women workers as a whole are alleged to have a lesser number of dependents to support. The next argument that because in the majority of cases the existing wage is fixed at about 75% of what the male workers are given, the female workers should not have parity with men, is in our opinion unsustainable. It is no argument

[363] Ibid. p.39.
[364] Ibid. p.37.

> at all to those who are familiar with the Indian scene. The female worker has always been placed at a disadvantage in the matter of wages, and her wages have always been kept below the wages of the male for equal industrial work done by her. We ourselves have had occasion to observe female workers engaged in strenuous work, and it is monstrous to suggest that in work of that kind, she does lesser work than the male; and yet we are aware of the lamentable fact that for that very work she has been given in the past a lesser wage as a matter of "tradition"; that tradition mist go with the upsurge of a social conscience." It is lastly mentioned by the Tribunal that special amenities such as maternity benefits, provision for creches etc., should make up for the difference between 75% and 100%. Comment is futile on arguments of this character; these women are the mothers of the nation; and the observations of the Tribunal have validity only if we accept the implied suggestion that female workers are in a state of perpetual maternity or their children permanently in creches."

In the above quote, it can be seen that the Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal questioned the recommendation where a consumption unit of 3 for one earner was given for all male workers irrespective of whether they were married or not or how many dependents they had to provide for whereas, for a female worker irrespective of her family responsibilities, the consumption units per earner for her was fixed at 2.25. In doing so, the decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal questioned the gendered underpinning of the minimum wage when it was calculated as the minimum wage based on the (male breadwinner) family wage. Cobble points out that in most instances, regardless of family responsibility, the family wage system boosted the wages of all men, single and married, and lowered that of all women.[365] She refers to early feminist critics like Sophonisba

[365] Ibid. p.116.

Breckinridge and Eleanor Rathbone, who pointed out that the family wage system disadvantaged not only women but also children.[366] Cobble notes that on the one hand, not all married men shared their higher income with their families, and on the other, children with female heads of families lived in poverty.[367] As the family wage entitled a man to a "service-providing wife," it encouraged the idea that all women should spend more time in the domestic sphere of their homes.[368] She further points out that as family wage went to men, the family wage system denied women not only higher wages but also decreased leisure as they had to spend more time doing unpaid work in the private sphere of their homes.[369]

The Labour Appellate Tribunal concluded that a female worker is entitled to the same minimum wage as their male counterparts in the same category, i.e., the same class of work and moved away from the conceptualisation of minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage. It conceptualised minimum wage as a provider's wage. In 1962, the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry also held the same view, and this wage structure was made effective in the coal mines from 1967.[370]

Conclusion

India ratified the ILO's convention on equal pay for equal work in 1958, and the Equal Remuneration Act was passed in India in 1976 and was implemented in 1977 in the mines

[366] Ibid. p.116.
[367] Ibid. p.116.
[368] Ibid. p.116.
[369] Ibid. p.116.
[370] Ministry of Labour of Government of India, *Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal of India on Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, Delhi: Manager of Publication, 1957.p.1,39,137.

and plantations. However, the recommendation of the Central Wage Board, which was implemented in 1967, made no distinction between men and women while fixing their wage rates. This made the coal mining industry one of the pioneers in the industrial sector in implementing a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work. The difference in the incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers by the Government of India is evident in the Government of India's reply to the International Labour Office in 1950 in the process of making the Equal Remuneration Convention. This shows that gender bias further permeated conceptualising a living wage for the manual worker compared to the non-manual worker. The wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry was based on how the minimum wages for the workers were calculated, and the minimum wage rates for women and men manual workers in the Indian coal mining industry depended on how the consumption units for a worker were calculated. When the same consumption units for an earner were used for both men and women workers, it led to the same minimum wage rate for both men and women workers. So, for the construction of a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work for both women and men workers, the minimum wage rate for both men and women workers had to be calculated based on the same consumption units for an earner irrespective of the gender of the worker. The Award of the All India Labour Tribunal developed the national-level wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry based on the same minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female piece-rated manual workers and different minimum wage rates for unskilled male and female time-rated manual workers. The process of constructing the minimum wage for male and female unskilled manual workers by the Award of the All India Labour

Tribunal shows that the Award calculated the minimum and fair wages for unskilled manual workers as breadwinner wages. However, it did so in a qualified gendered manner, and part of the wage construction was based on imagined gendered biased assumptions rather than scientific calculations. There are similarities between the conceptualisation of men's rights as workers and women's work, as well as the merging of child and female work in the (male breadwinner) family wage model and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining. In doing so, it analyses the debates on the development of the minimum wage as a (male-breadwinner) family wage in the wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry. It also analyses the gendered calculation of the consumption units per earner for calculating minimum wage. It also discusses the similarities in how the two models (the male breadwinner family wage and the legislation for the prohibition of women from belowground mining) conceptualise women's work, the idea of conjoining women and children, and the right of a provider as a men's right. The Labour Appellate Tribunal negated the decision of the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal and moved away from the conceptualisation of the mining wage as a (male-breadwinner) wage. It conceptualised a minimum wage for all workers in the Indian coal mining industry as a provider's wage and, based on this, recommended a wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Conclusion

Between the early 1900s and 2000, the Indian collieries saw women mineworkers surpass men in the workforce to become as marginal as 3.3 per cent of the mining workforce.[371] First, the legislation prohibited women from belowground mining, and later, the legislation prohibiting women from night work in the mines played an important role in defining masculinity as a natural order in the mines.[372] A large male workers continued to work belowground and at night in the Indian collieries, and female workers completely disappeared from these places and times. So, during the 20th century, with the decreasing percentage of women in the workforce, the increasing masculinisation of the mining space, and international interventions and influences, the Indian collieries witnessed changes in the conceptualisation of wages for men and women mineworkers. Over the 20th century, the Indian coal mining industry also experienced how the different wage strategies evolved over time and permeated into the wage structures.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the changing composition of the workforce, the system of work allocation, the labour recruitment system, and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining led to changes in the conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers in the Indian collieries. The prohibition of women from belowground mining destabilised the old conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers, where the minimum subsistence of most households of the unskilled manual workers in the Indian collieries depended on the combined earnings of men and female

[371] B.R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1940). P.128; Directorate General of Mines Safety. *Statistics of Mines in India.* Volume I (Coal). Delhi: Secretariat Press, 2001.

[372] Indian Mines Act, 1952 prohibited women from night work in the mines.It was based on the 1921 ILO Convention no 89 Concerning Night work of women employed in Industry(Convention on Night Work)revised in 1948.

workers. Prohibiting women from belowground mining was crucial in developing and legitimising the (male-breadwinner) family wage model among the unskilled manual workers in the Indian collieries. Wage discrimination among workers based on social, geographical and sex differences had permeated the wage structures in the Indian collieries. Local workers who were mainly from Adivasi and lower caste backgrounds in the eastern Indian collieries were paid lower wages compared to immigrants. Among immigrants, the workers' wage rates decreased as their geographical origins moved from north and north-west towards eastern colonial India. The colonial ideas of race (such as reducing masculinity and efficiency among men from north and north-west parts to east and north-eastern parts of colonial India) had permeated the wage structures in the Indian collieries. The wage discrimination made the different sections of the same class of unskilled workers prone to varying degrees of vulnerability due to the prohibition of women mineworkers from belowground mining. The families of local workers and the family immigrants from the Central Province who worked with their female family members were the most vulnerable to the prohibition of women from belowground. Women workers suffered the most due to the prohibition. However, among the women workers, single women (widows or deserted) suffered more than married women as they had no one to fall back on for the survival of their household. In contrast, the single male immigrants from the United Province and Punjab were hardly affected by the above prohibition as they didn't work with their female members in the collieries.

Similarities exist in the (male breadwinner) family wage model's conceptualisation of men's rights as workers, women's work, and the merging of female and child work with legislation prohibiting women from below-ground mining. Like the conceptualisation of the

minimum wage of a male worker as a (male breadwinner) family wage, which is based on social and gender norms that assumed the right to provide for family subsistence was a male right, the legislation for the prohibition of women workers from below-ground mining was also based on the importance of the male breadwinner. Both the male-breadwinner family wage model and the legislation for the prohibition of women from belowground conjoins women with children. Concerning the conceptualisation of women's work, despite the adverse effect on female autonomy, employment and wages, both the (male breadwinner) family wage and the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining recognised the need and the value of unpaid domestic labour for household and care work.

The difference in the incorporation of the principle of equal pay for equal work in the wage structures of manual and non-manual workers by the Government of India is evident in its to the International Labour Office in 1950 in the process of making the Equal Remuneration Convention. This shows that gender bias had permeated further in conceptualising a living wage for the manual worker compared to the non-manual worker. The Award of the All India Labour Tribunal, which recommended the first national-level standardised wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry, recommended the same minimum wage for men and women piece-rated unskilled manual workers but, for time-rated unskilled manual workers, it calculated the different minimum wages of women and men. The different minimum wage rates were calculated by calculating different consumption units per earner for male and female workers. The process of constructing the minimum wage for male and female unskilled manual workers by the Award of the All India Labour Tribunal shows that the Award calculated the minimum and fair wages for

unskilled manual workers as breadwinner wages. However, it did so in a qualified gendered manner, and part of the wage construction was based on imagined gendered biased assumptions rather than scientific calculations. The Labour Appellate Tribunal concluded that a female worker is entitled to the same minimum wage as their male counterparts in the same category, i.e., the same class of work and in 1962, the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry also held the same view, and this wage structure was made effective in the coal mines from 1967. The Labour Appellate Tribunal recommended calculating the minimum wage for male and female workers based on the same consumption units; hence, it transformed the minimum wage from a (male-breadwinner) family wage to a provider's wage. With the calculation of minimum wage based on the same consumption units per earner irrespective of the worker's sex, the wage structure of the Indian coal mining industry imbibed the principle of equal pay for equal work.

The primary sources that I have already used in this thesis for my analysis (like *The Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*. Volume I, *Decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal of India on Appeals Against the Award of the All India Industrial Tribunal (Colliery Disputes)*, and *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Coal Mining Industry.* Volume I) contains a very rich compilation of the demands of the different trade unions and colliery employer unions on questions such as what should be the consumption units for an earner; whether the earnings of the wive of the male worker be calculated while calculating the consumption units of the male worker; and should the principle of equal pay for equal work should be incorporated in the wage structure for unskilled manual workers. So, these sources could be used for further research on the

topic to understand the role played by trade unions and employer unions in creating the different wage strategies that became part of the wage structure.

Primary Sources like *the Report of the Central Wage Board for the Iron Ore Mining Industry, published by the Government of India in 1967,* can help us analyse the conceptualisation of wages for men and women workers and analyse and trace the development of wage strategies that became part of the wage structure of the Indian Iron Ore Industry. Unlike coal mines, belowground mining was rare in the iron ore industry in India.[373] So, the legislation prohibiting women from belowground mining must not have had a drastic and huge impact on women's employment in the Indian Iron ore mining industry. The other significant differences between India's coal and iron ore mining industries are the nationalisation and the privatisation of iron ore mining. It would be interesting to study if these differences impacted the conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers in both Industries' wage structures. If they were impacted, how were they impacted, and what were the implications of the impact on the wage strategies and wage structure of both industries? A comparative analysis of the conceptualisation of wages of men and women workers and wage strategies that permeated into both Industries' wage structures can examine the above interesting questions.

Sources like *The Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines (CIMAR), and Statistics of Mines in India.* Volume I (Coal), and Statistics of Mines in India. Volume I (Non-Coal) for several years can also be helpful for further research on the topic. They will be useful for comparative analysis of the effect of implementing the wage structure based on the principle of equal pay for equal work on women workers in the Indian iron

[373] At present, I don't have the exact statistics for the citation of this information.

ore and coal mining industry. For example, a comparative analysis of the effect of implementing the wage structure based on equal pay for equal work on the employment of women workers in the Indian iron ore and coal mining industry.

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