

# Unorganised Sector in Coal Mines of India

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**Abstract ---** The unorganized sector flourishes almost in all sectors. But the unorganized sector in coal mines is the most impoverished and unlooked, in a shadow where everyone is aware of but no one has got deep into their dens to look into how these laborers work day and night to make this coal sector book almost 300% profit. Denied access to basic medical facilities and other statutory benefits, the unorganized sector in coal mines get not only progressively impoverished but also suffer from reduced life spans. The unorganized sector in coal mines suffers from degradation and trapped of laborers by centuries of caste based division of laborer and still largely culturally oppressed. The research work which was carried found out that the unorganized sector in various parts of the world began to reveal the highly active existence of men, women and children crowding at the bottom of the urban economy in Third World Countries. So many studies have revealed the vast number of workers in the Third World striving hard to survive on the fruits of their laborers, outside the formal sector of the economy. The research which was carried out opened out a series of problems of the unorganized sector in coal mines of India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing prominence of unorganized sector in India. Predominance of informal sector has been one of the central features of the labor market scenario in India. Unorganized sector in coal mines of India is an important issue. This sector contributes about 80% of the profit of the coal sector but hardly enjoys any benefits and security which are there for the organized sector. The investigation which was carried out showed that there are number of problems faced by this sector which needs to be highlighted.

(1) Working and living conditions of the laborers in and around the mining fields. They work in dangerous mine holes where they do not have guarantee of their lives.

(2) Living areas close to work areas. The workers live in dingy slums around the mining fields so that it becomes easier for them to go to their work fields. They do not have much money to provide for themselves easy conveyance from faraway places.

(3) Extended work hours and exploitation. The mining workers work for more than ten hours with little money. Otherwise they have no choice but would be out of work the next day.

(4) No concept of occupational safety and services. The mine laborers are not mostly illiterate. Some of them are able to read and write but that is not enough for them to understand the rules and regulations one must implement. They are not aware of the safety measures that the mining authority must take. They work in dangerous pit and open caste mines without any basic protection for themselves.

(5) Lack of implementation of health and safety legislation. The mining authorities care very little for these unorganized casual laborers. Because of which these laborers are prone to different types of diseases. Safety legislation is not maintained. Even children below 18 years of age work in tandem to earn a meager amount.

(6) No concept of Trade Unions and Labor Unions. As these mining laborers are illiterate, they have little knowledge of trade organization or labor unions. They have little knowledge of the outside world and are mostly managed by middlemen who provide them with jobs but care very little about their safety. Since they are uneducated, they are unorganized and fall under the clutches of middlemen who extract the highest efficiency from them.

(7) Deplorable social condition. As they earn a meager amount, they have a very low standard of living. They are unable to fulfill basic necessities of

life. They survive but they cannot live life to the fullest.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All these problems have been investigated in a number of ways. The investigation was carried out for almost three weeks in various mining areas. Seeing the areas and talking to the coal mining laborers and also the middlemen, it was insightful and inspired us to dig a bit deeper into the historical material of these areas. Some are faced by mafia problems, some are due to the negligence of the state, and some are due to the tribal problems. From the past and present of this area, we can raise important general question for a wider political debate about capitalist development, re-composition of the working class and the state regime. As described by the wikipedia, the coal mining laborers of these areas are among the most backward and exploited tribes in India, though their new generation is comparatively educated, in the sense that they can at least read and write, going to basic schools for education. There is a general impression held by the members of the coal mining laborers that they make a lot of underdogs and they have been discriminated against the common lot. Not much information is available from secondary sources to prove or disprove so as to prove or disprove as to indifference or difference of the community of coal mining laborers vis-à-vis other communities in the study area. Doing research work in these areas, we have found out that the plight of unorganized laborers are on the hands of middlemen—who benefit the most without any physical effort put in. These coal mining laborers are largely out of the control of government and it has no rules and regulations nor any fixed holiday or paid holiday. Anyone could be asked to move out from the mining work and search for petty jobs elsewhere. Another Study in the Pachgaon and Kuhu Coalfields in Nagpur has revealed that the unorganized laborers work in the dusty and hazardous work in the dusty and hazardous Mines with ANFO Explosives. ANFO Explosives are used in mines illegally because these are cheap and more powerful which shatters huge boulders into small sharp pieces but are very dangerous and risky for the lives of mining laborers.

The inhospitable conditions here make life hell for these mining workers. The workers are saddled with the day to day problem of pollution that is affecting their health. The problem is aggravated by the tough challenge of water shortage. In the land where layers of stone are sometimes found till 500 meters in the subsurface area, collected rain water is found in hollows created due to exhaustive mining activities. Another investigation has revealed that the children of these mining workers (who are basically from Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh) also suffer from health problems due to the heavy dusty condition. The children join their parents in the mining activity and quarries or mines as there is no school in that particular area. This has been explained by social worker Ram Ingole also. Social worker Ingole has further pointed out “Some NGO’s run project based schools, but there is no infrastructures for the poor miners or their families. Government Officers who are responsible for supervising the situation in the mining areas, hardly visit these regions.



**Figure 1. Mining in Jharia Coalfields**

## III. RESULTS

Specifically we have addressed the following issues of the unorganized Sector in Coal mines of India. : The laborers are mostly unskilled. They are mostly from smaller villages away from towns and cities. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition bound, totalistic and resigned to the insufferable lot to which according to them fate has condemned them. There is hardly motivation for change or improvement. Since there is direct supervision from

the middlemen (who are labor suppliers) there is no escape from hard work and since there is no alternative employment. The mine laborers are not organized, they are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages and hence they cannot organize in Unions. Moreover there is a threat to their daily wages, job and lives by the middlemen who are very powerful. The middlemen do not allow them to forge into Unions as these would weaken their interest. Even Political Parties do not take much interest in the Trade Union activities in the mining area. Accordingly it is difficult for the unorganized laborers to bargain with their lords and secure good wages. Low social status prevails among all the mine workers. They are from the depressed classes which have been neglected for decades. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they had never the courage to assert themselves. They have been like dumb driven cattle. Going into these mine fields, we have found out that there is a wide variation of demand and supply for laborers. The number of mining laborers being very large and skills they possess being meager, there are generally more than abundant supply of mine laborers in relation to demand for them. Less bargaining power prevails in the mining sector. They are the most exploited class of people of India. Infact quite a large number of them are in the grip of money lenders. They are unorganized since there are no trade unions for them. Another very important study is that the unorganized mine laborers are at the bidding of middlemen. There is generally direct day – to-day contact between mine laborers and middlemen on whose order are they working. These unorganized laborers do not get all the pay what these middlemen get from the mine owners. The mine owners make payment to these middlemen who keep a percentage out of this and pay the rest to the mine laborers. Since the laborers are unorganized they do not have any option to search for any alternative source of employment. Mine laborers are increasing due to increase in population, decline of cottage industries and handicrafts, eviction of small farmers and tenants from land. When there was discussion with the mine laborers, they have themselves provided with these reasons. There is a capitalistic trend been followed in agriculture because it can give more yields.



**Figure 2 . A Labourer in Talcher Coalfield**

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

Here we need to know that the role of trade unions can be of utmost importance. The existence of a strong and recognized trade union is a pre-requisite to industrial peace. Decisions taken through the process of collective bargaining and negotiations between employers and unions are more influential. Trade Unions can play a very important role and are helpful in effective communication between the two groups. The Trade unions are a major component of modern industrial relations in any nation. A Trade Union for the mine laborers can protect the interest and improve the working conditions among other goals. The Trade Union can protect workers from exploitive and abusive conditions at work. They can put pressure on employers to share productivity gains with their employees. Historically union representation and collective bargaining have been the keys to the growth of stable working population in developed economies and have made it possible for workers to gain a more equitable share of the wealth that they create; they are also to improve working conditions and help workers gain job security. Changes in the political, social and educational environment regarding awareness of rights-such as rights to organize, the right to bargain and the right to settle terms and conditions of employment-have caused workers unions to spring up to protect and further workers interest. Thus with the establishment of minimum wages, norms of mandatory work hours, provisions of health and safety and overall improvement in working conditions, unionization has

become instrumental in improving the quality of life of workers. The Trade Union in this respect can primarily look into the following problems of coal mines:

- (1) To improve working and living conditions and to represent workers interest in different forum.
- (2) To offer responsive co-operation in improving levels of production in the mines.
- (3) To secure fare wages for workers of coal mines.
- (4) To enlarge opportunities for promotion and training of the mine laborers.
- (5) To promote identity of workers' interest with their industries.
- (6) To maintain discipline and increase productivity of the coal miners and maintain high standard of quality.
- (7) To cooperate in and facilitate technological advancement by broadening workers' understanding of underlying issues.
- (8) It has been analyzed that the workers within the Trade Unions earn 19% more than the workers of unorganized sector.

How effective a Trade union can be in the coal mines of India, so that the unorganized sector can reap the benefits can be discussed below: In addition to their traditional bargaining activities, unions now have a newly acquired voice and representative function. Many can try to increase their value to workers by providing a variety of services to their members as well as to the community to which they belong. The Trade Unions must provide legal and financial advice, to improving skills for these mining labourers. We are all aware that today's Trade Unions is not only a bargaining institution but they have become specialized and so they can represent the voice and interest of these unorganized laborers of the mines.



**Figure 3 .Women and Child Workers in Korba Coalfields**

## V. SUMMARY

To summarize we can say that India has many coal mines, which employs about 60 lakhs of unorganized laborers either directly or indirectly. Though in some areas we have seen that they get subsidized rations etc. However this clearly not enough to satisfy the growing aspirations of a community that is utterly marginalized and feels alienated in a land that has been their home for centuries. It is to be noted that no person employed in amine shall be required or allowed to work in the mine for more than 10 hours in a day inclusive of overtime. Most of the mine labourers in India are illiterate, ignorant. They belong to schedule caste, schedule tribes and other socially, economically, weaker sections of the society. It is observed that these mine laborers are not aware of their rights or labor rights like right to equality, right to work, right to secure work, a living wage and a decent standard of life, security scheme, health, and right to form association, right to freedom, cultural and educational rights. This is a handiwork of a system which breeds intermediaries' middlemen who reap a lot of unmerited benefits at cost of the labor of these people. They are victims of both unfair labor practices a state of underdevelopment. There should be strict enforcement of labor laws in the coal mines of India, so that the unorganized sector in coal mines can at least look at the brighter side of life. There should be a weekly day rest for the coal miners. In case of accidents, the unorganized coal laborers do

not get the actual benefits. They get only a meager amount. But provisions should be such that they can get the correct compensation. In brief the following suggestions can be taken to improve the socio-economic condition of the unorganized sector in coal mines of India; Better implementation of Legislative measures. Improvement in the bargaining position. Resettlement of the mine laborers in case they lose their jobs. Creating alternative sources of employment. Protection of women and child laborers. Improving the working conditions in mines. Regulation of hours of work in mines. Proper training for improving the skill of untrained mine laborers.



**Figure 4. Mining in Panchgaon and Kuhi Coalfields**

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