

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Public sector unit: The tacit dimensions

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This paper throws light on some burning issues of coal mining sector in contemporary West Bengal. Expansion of coal mining to a large scale is required and it presents enormous challenges not only in ensuring safe and efficient resource extraction techniques, pollution control and road/rail infrastructure development, but most importantly making the coal sector responsive to emerging social issues related to mining. Enormous challenges in this regard include transparent and responsible community consultation, involvement and participatory development, responsible resettlement and rehabilitation of mine-affected populations, and reassessment of several Government regulations, policies and legal instruments relating to land acquisition and mine operations. Beside land accusation factor entire coal mining sector is now facing some problems related to internal human resource management. This paper aims to focus particularly on some underlying issues relating to human resource on one side and society's reaction against land acquisition on the other.

**Key words:** bank Loan, exploitation, dilemma, displacement, fundamental rights, human rights, indebtedness, social justice.

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide a selective introduction to key issues in the work and employment conditions in Coal India Ltd. It brings comparative, historical, and theoretical perspectives to bear on understanding contemporary transformations of work and employment in the 'new economy', with particular emphasis on the Eastern Coalfields Ltd. where social organization and technological content have varied widely across time, space, and industrial sector (Paul, 1990). Employment or paid work, by contrast, is inherently a social construction, whose boundaries in relation to other types of activity like household labor, leisure, retirement, or unemployment are institutionally and culturally defined. In India like other social parameters, employment is also a social and legal status, which carries with it distinctive rights and obligations (at least for certain sections of the workforce), such as protection from arbitrary dismissal, subordination to managerial authority, procedures for collective representation, and entitlements to benefits like paid vacations, pensions, and health care (Kaplan, 1987). Both the boundaries of employment and the status associated with it are thus historically contingent constructs which differ significantly from one PSU to another, and are currently being renegotiated in response to a variety of pressures, from globalization and technological innovation to the expansion of the service sector, demographic

trends, and changing household/family structures (Paul, 1992).

It is very perplexing when PSU employees could neither perform the job easily nor they could remain in the job due to indebtedness. Dilemma is a situation in which one must choose between two alternatives, it's a situation in which none of the alternatives offers escape. In vast area of Eastern Coalfield Ltd. major number of collieries is situated under this subsidiary of Coal India Ltd. The scenario regarding indebtedness seems to be same in all these coal belts. This disease has grabbed semi skilled and unskilled workers; however Clerical staffs have not been spared. A sizeable number of employees belong to SC (Schedule Caste) and ST (Schedule Tribe) category. Due to multiplicity of reasons many workers take loan from various sources (other than legal institution) with a high rate of interest, which may be 5 to 6 percent per month, means 60 to 72 percent per annum. Many moneylenders become prepared with their purse to trap the victims and the victims fall easy prey in their net. The problem begins with difficulty to repay the installment to the concerned authority and subsequent threatening of moneylenders. With limited income neither workers become able to pay money easily nor can they maintain their family happily.

The victims cry out for getting out from the crisis but their

voices remain unheard and suppressed in the midst of affluent coal workers- the affluence which has been given birth at the cost of the blood of these bereaved. No social justice is there to attain to their crisis. No fundamental rights of the constitution come forward to their rescue. The victims sink in the darkness unfathomed. The workers have right to perform their duty with dignity and prestige and they have also right to look after their family satisfactorily. The right to food and water, housing, which includes resettlement and rehabilitation, access to education, access to provisions of health and healthcare, right to work, and access to information and the right to communication all these are form of social justice.

Another serious problem is up-rooting of people for the industrial expansion. This is becoming very serious issue for the policy maker day by day. Displacement or up-root of settled people is common as well as hanging problem in any coal mining area and obviously treated as an age-old problem of coal mining area like Raniganj. North Searsole Colliery also faces all the related issues due to coal mining activities involving environmental as well as socio-economic degradation and resettlement of surrounding people. Resettlement is a term used to describe the movement of individuals or groups from one location to other, although the term can refer to voluntary or involuntary human migration, it is often a euphemism for forced migration due to any such activities. The increasing demand for Coal requires an expansion and speeding up of coal exploration, production and processing in the country. A great ongoing 'social challenge' for the coal industry is the problem of Mining-Induced Displacement and Resettlement in the present study area. Eastern Coalfield Limited (ECL) is taking special care to provide generous package of compensation to project affected persons. But the difficulty lies in the fact that not only do the people lose their houses, but they are also deprived of the land and natural resources that constituted their economic survival base. The natural resources are non-formal sources of income which are rarely recognized or documented, and hence rarely compensated for. So, lots of environmental and social problems are generated due to such activities knowingly or un-knowingly. Other concerns due to mining-induced displacement and resettlement are some of the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural problems including the changes in population dynamics, health impacts, addictions, economic disparity and frustration. All these are affecting not only economic, but social, moral and cultural degradation, which are reframing the existing lifestyle in holistic manner. Therefore, displacement of villages along with their long standing economic, social, religious, and cultural activities is inevitable. When coal occurs in land held traditionally by indigenous people, mining gives rise to question of social justice. Displacement has an undermining influence on social bonds and cultural roots of the entire community, thus leads to Social problems.

But the difficulty lies in the fact that not only do the people lose their houses, but they are also deprived of the land and natural resources that constituted their economic survival base (Biswas, 2007). The natural resources are informal sources of income which are neither recognized nor documented, and hence never compensated for. Though people are economically benefited but are socially degraded due to Mining Induced Displacement and Resettlement. Mining Induced Displacement left their scars on project affected population.

### **Objectives of study**

Present study is an attempt to know the various causes of indebtedness among the employees of North Searsole Colliery. It is also intended to know the intrinsic factors motivating the workers for loan, which may be beyond the capacity to repay with high rate of interest and to know the socio-economic background of workers of this colliery. This study is to reveal those disguised people who are giving loan illegally with high interest rate on day light in front of administration. An attempt has also been made to know the process of modus operandi of moneylenders and relationship between giver and taker. One of the objectives is also to know the role of welfare/personnel department in understanding this problem.

### **Area of study**

The area of this study is North Searsole Colliery. It is situated in famous Raniganj coalfield in West Bengal, India and 9 km from Raniganj Railway station towards Grand Trunk road. It is one of the best collieries in ECL for production and good quality of coal. This colliery has manpower of 1061. Most workers belong to surrounding places and majority stay at colliery quarters. This colliery has opencast mining as well as underground mining. Here Public Sector Unit (PSU) stands for ECL.

### **Methods of study**

This research paper is mainly based on primary data, which has been collected from 100 samples on the basis of interview schedule. Purposive sampling was used to choose the sample. All the workers are semi skilled or unskilled. An interview has also been taken from personnel officer of this colliery. Through participant observation with workers few data is collected. However secondary sources are also used for data collection.

### **Various issues of indebtedness in Coal India**

In North Searsole Colliery all workers are involved in different job as per their skill and eligibility. Present context of study is about the semiskilled and unskilled workers. During study particularly it is revealed that those

who have taken loan from any individual or private farm their condition is more miserable than those taken from legal sources. Most of the workers who have taken loan from any individual moneylender are taken in confidence. They are made to convince about reasonability of interest rate, which may vary person to person. Loan from moneylender is primary concern and focal point in the present study. The rate of interest is 5 to 6 percent per month, which means 60 to 72 percent per year. Due to illiteracy and inadequate knowledge these section of workers become soft victim of moneylenders. Most of the moneylenders do not belong to the colliery but they operate outside from the colliery. Their operation is clandestine their targets are fixed. They take pay slips, Identity card, PF / Pension books, Bank passbooks etc as mortgage before giving loan to anybody. Without these statutory documents nobody can draw their salary. They also obtain written agreement on stamp paper from the worker. During salary days workers are asked to pay initially the interest of loaned money. Gradually, it has been observed that the principle with the rate of interest exceeds the worker's salary. Few workers have multiple loans from several places. Paying off the interest every month to moneylenders has become unmanageable to them. Some of the workers have taken more than one loan only to avoid inconvenience from the first moneylender. This way they get trapped in the vicious cycle of loan interest.

Main causes for loan were marriage of family members, or for treatment of serious disease. But some workers regularly consume alcohol, drugs and have gambling habit. Those who have taken to fulfill situational exigencies seem to be more painful than the latter category. They have a strong sense of social prestige and fame. Moneylenders reach to them every month during salary. They take major part of worker's salary. If due to any reason workers fail to pay interest they are often threatened or even physically assaulted. During interview it was felt that workers were very much scared. On the way from home to the colliery either moneylender himself or his appointed person gives reminder to his prey. This happened to every person who obtained loan. This situation creates two fold problems. Neither the workers are free to perform their duty nor can they sit at home doing nothing. If they come to work places moneylenders harass them, if they sit at home the fear of termination from the job for unauthorized absence from duty drives them to restlessness. This is real dilemma. It becomes very difficult to choose either option.

Impact of taking loan can be identified with economical aspect in specific and social in general. The workers become less interested to work or they get gradually alienated from the work, from society and ultimately from themselves. This may be the real case of Marxian notion of alienation. In this way colliery's production is adversely affected on the one hand and social life of workers become hell on the other. Some time they become a psychotic patient. The high rate of absenteeism is observed among

these category workers and this lead them to get unexpected charge sheet and termination from service subsequently. From the first hand experiences about the workers it has been observed that they can't lead a general smooth social life as others do. Their family life becomes worse. Their children are affected with parent's disturbance. Sometimes such workers resort to fasting for want of money and take food only once in a day. This is strange that a public sector service holder can't have stomach full food twice in a day far to speak about nutrition level. Past experiences revealed that some workers had committed suicide.

Apparently it seems that the workers are responsible for their own misfortune. They have chosen their own destiny. We all would agree that partially the workers are responsible for their misery. But what's about those who are openly borrowing money with high rate of interest? It is not only inhuman but a naked violation of human rights. Money lenders are operating openly, they don't hesitate to use unfair means to get back their money. Neither management plays a role to prevent them nor does civil administration think seriously on this matter. We can't deny the role of high profile racket monitoring behind the small moneylender. Throughout the colliery this loan giving business with high interest rate is on the increase. If this business could not be stopped in near future there might be a serious IR problem in the coal mining industry. Not only the worker's ignorance is responsible for this dilemma but also whole civil society is also responsible for this sort of problem.

Realizing their problem the workers take loan generally from legal authority such as Bank, co-operatives and PF. But low literate and illiterate workers often don't want to go through bureaucratic and administrative system to get a loan. So the easiest and fastest way to fulfill the situational financial exigency they go to moneylender. Here moneylender having nuisance value has a crucial role to misguide and often mislead such innocent workers. Moneylender make the workers understood that they have to pay only 5 to 6 percent interests. Which may seem to be lower than the nationalized bank also. They tend to confuse per month interest rate with per annum. But the moneylenders resort to jugglery of calculation of percentage of interest. Here neither worker has to pay a processing charge nor has to mortgage lots of documents. So they become easy victims. Generally these workers get a salary of about Rs.10, 000 per month. In this salary if they pay 60 to 72 percent per annum interest it is really difficult to maintain the normal family life, though it all depends on the amount of the loan. So every month workers have to pay the interest irrespective of the constraints. They may remain in empty stomach but interest should reach moneylender. The essential documents concerning payment have already been mortgaged to secure constant inflow of interest. In many cases borrowers have failed to pay some installments. Thus the loaned amount gets multiplied for compound rate of interest. During the time of superannuation a huge

amount of money from the borrowers is grabbed from his superannuation benefit like Provident fund, gratuity etc. As per the version of the management the gratuity cheque handed over to workers is ultimately collected by the moneylender well before it goes to concerned Bank for encashment. The amount in many cases is large. In some cases the workers don't turn up to collect their gratuity cheque because by the superannuation time the borrowed principle money with interest exceeds the gratuity amount. As information supplied by the authority such superannuated persons whose native place is far from colliery left the colliery without any information.

The role of local political party is not satisfactory in this regard. The trade union leaders are also silent. They were asked about this burning problem of workers but failed to answer logically. Leaders replied passively to avoid contradictions. They said that this was worker's personal matter and didn't fall into their jurisdiction. On the other hand the concerned officer has taken it as a serious IR problem. On their level they are making the workers aware about the far reaching consequences. Management has done some sincere effort to solve this problem between workers and moneylenders unofficially. In North Searsole Colliery this problem is getting momentum day by day. Due to high rate of absenteeism the management now awake from long sleep.

Social justice for these workers is like a myth (Farnsworth, 2004). Both the work place and home become unbearable for them. Neither they could remain silent nor could they cry. It is a paradox in which the workers become the worse victim of permanent indebtedness. Ultimately workers loose the right to work with dignity and right to look after the family freely (Liker, 1999). Here one unwritten constitution works where no social justice functions according to the provision of law and the writ of the moneylenders runs here. An individual become puppet of another individual. It is said that the social justice is the guardian and protector of the interest of the socially handicapped, disable, poor, downtrodden and deprived section of people. The workers are in dilemma. Dilemma doesn't only exist outside or externally as has already been mentioned but dilemma resides within also. One-side workers feel inferiority complex within themselves, on the other side they find no place to redress their grievances. Taking loan or lending money on interest is not the violation of social justice. But social justice is violated when any one takes the advantage of weakness of another. When normal life is threatened by unwanted social elements, when life becomes burden, then the social justice seems to be a futility. From interaction one person revealed that he couldn't die unlamented, because if he remains alive, moneylender will not spare him to live peacefully under any circumstances. If he dies the family has to bear the burden of loan.

Thus the darkness of coal mining industry remains enveloped by dark. Everybody knows but no initiatives have yet been taken to eradicate this problem (Sabel, 1991). The problem in context is dynamic and multi-

casual. From the worker's side awareness is required and from the administration side a vigorous proactive role should be initiated to prohibit such immoral and inhuman business. Colliery authority should simplify the loan sanction process and provide adequate amount of loan to meet up the urgent demands of its workers. The cases of those unfortunate drugs addicted and money abuser should be handled with sensitivity and sympathy. The help of NGO's may be sought to bring about a solution to the burning problem.

In ECL we can understand the present aspect of IR culture adopted by the employer's side. These are promoting and developing congenial labour management relations. They are enhancing the economic status of the worker by improving wages, benefits and by helping the worker in evolving sound budget and regulating the production by minimizing industrial conflicts through state control. The management has given effort to socialize the industry by providing an opportunity to the workers to have a say in the management and decision-making. The management is also keen to improve upon workers skill with a view to solve their problems through mutual negotiations and consultation thereby maintaining industrial democracy (Simon, 2004).

In West Bengal employers' organizations are desirous of associating themselves with different government agencies taking into consideration the general, social, public and economic issues affecting employers and workers relations. In West Bengal Eastern Coal Fields Ltd has taken part in developing many rural projects in the surrounding villages such as community development in the form of constructing community well, clubs, hospitals, schools, rural roads and play grounds. The ECL management has extended facilities of electrification in many villages. A good percentage of coal mines workers reside in the surrounding villages of the mines who continuously share their views with the masses of coal mining society. All these happened for very good industrial relation.

Eastern Coalfield Limited (ECL) is also taking special care to provide generous package of compensation to project affected persons. But the difficulty lies in the fact that not only do the people lose their houses, but they are also deprived of the land and natural resources that constituted their economic survival base. The natural resources are non-formal sources of income which are rarely recognized or documented, and hence rarely compensated for. So, lots of environmental and social problems are generated due to such activities knowingly or un-knowingly. Other concerns due to mining-induced displacement and resettlement are some of the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural problems including the changes in population dynamics, health impacts, addictions, economic disparity and frustration. All these are affecting not only economic, but social, moral and cultural degradation, which are reframing the existing life-

style in holistic manner. Therefore, displacement of villages along with their long standing economic, social, religious, and cultural activities is inevitable. When coal occurs in land held traditionally by indigenous people, mining gives rise to question of social justice (Vicki, 2001). Displacement has an undermining influence on social bonds and cultural roots of the entire community, thus leads to Social problems (Singh, 2005). But the difficulty lies in the fact that not only do the people lose their houses, but they are also deprived of the land and natural resources that constituted their economic survival base. The natural resources are informal sources of income which are neither recognized nor documented, and hence never compensated for. Though people are economically benefited but are socially degraded due to mining induced displacement and resettlement.

## CONCLUSION

Indebtedness is a social stigma. It neither allows man to live peacefully nor does allow dying peacefully. The practice of loan in North Searsole Colliery is not only illegal but also inhuman. Providing loan with high interest rate is a manifestation of cruel capitalistic culture. It's exploitation against humanity. Few clever persons are taking advantages of the simplicity and weakness of workers. Most of the workers who have taken loan from moneylenders belong to SC and ST section. They are lagging behind on the social ladder. Gradually the borrowers get into the trap of the moneylenders. However those fortunate who could manage to pay off their loan completely could not find a place in the process of further sustainable social development. They couldn't socially be rehabilitated. Those who are still in the service are limping with the burden of interest and are drifting in the darkness. Scared, physically assaulted and mentally humiliated sections seem to have no bright future. Social justice appears to be making a mockery with the fate of these unfortunates. However no formal steps have been taken so far by the competent authority to stop this malpractice going on inside the colliery. Few formal complaints have been recorded but due to invisible reasons concrete action to stop this business not yet been taken.

Another important issue is dealt with importance regarding mining induced displacement. Though Eastern Coalfield Limited (ECL) is taking special care to provide generous package of compensation to project affected persons. But the difficulty lies in the fact that not only do the people lose their houses, but they are also deprived of the land and natural resources that constituted their economic survival base. The natural resources are informal sources of income which are neither recognized nor documented, and hence never compensated for. Though people are economically benefited but are socially degraded due to Mining Induced Displacement and Resettlement. Mining Induced Displacement left their scars on project affected population. These two bifocal

problems should be taken seriously otherwise in near future insurgency may breakdown from the employee side from inside Coal India and outbreak by the local people may happen.

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