

Pushed to the Margin: Women Workers in Indian Coal Mining Industry

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the Indian coal mining industry women have played an important role in its development and growth. But later as the mining started advancing technologically and the protective legislations were introduced, displacement of the women workers from the coal mines started at large scale. Still at the time of India's independence, about one fourth of the total workers in the mines were women. Today, there are only about 5-6 % women workers in the Indian coal mines. The coal mines were nationalized about three decades and it seems that the process of displacement of women workers from the coal mines have only got accelerated after the nationalization.

The evident discrimination against women workers in term of their declining number needs to be probed further. In this paper based on my PhD study, I try to see if there are any other forms of discrimination prevalent against the women workers in the Indian coal mines. In addition, the study looks at the factors leading to the declining women's share in the coal mines. My research focuses on the interaction between technology and institutions in the coal mining industry, focusing on both formal (laws and policies) and informal (gender values, attitudes, and perceptions of workers, management, trade unions) institutions. The gender values and attitudes of people are conceptualized as informal institutions and shared mental models, which determine our actions as well as affect the outcomes of (formal) institutional and technological changes. The study applies evolutionary perspective to understand and explain the triadic interactions between the gender, technology and institutions. The major theoretical question addressed in the paper is: how the institutions and technology interact at the workplace and how they impact the women workforce. The paper examines technological and policy changes since Independence based on the secondary sources as well as the primary data collected from two coal mines in Jharkhand, India. The study finds that the policy changes and technological developments in the industry have co-evolved to produce negative outcomes for the women workers.