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**Dangerous labour: Crime, work and punishment in  
Kolar Gold Fields, 1898-1946**

by  
**Janaki Nair**

**Madras Institute of Development Studies**

**79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar  
Adyar, Chennai 600 020**

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**AUTHOR'S NAME AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION**

Janaki Nair  
Madras Institute of Development Studies  
79, II Main Road  
Gandhinagar Adyar  
Madras 600 020

**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the conditions of possibility of the development of disciplinary apparatuses for the working class in colonial India. The paper consists of two parts, one that analyses the ways in which the Mysore Mines Acts were deployed in the Kolar Gold Fields, and a second part that foregrounds the forms of negotiation of these laws that developed among the labouring classes of the KGF.

Given the restricted nature of capitalist development in colonial India, and the relations of dominance that prevailed between ruler and ruled, the stern measures adopted in the area remained isolated, repressive practices, rather than generalised disciplinary measures, while successfully reorganising the field of illegalities so that subaltern criminality was highlighted as much as elite criminality remained in the shadows.

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In the Indian context, this is an interface that has rarely been explored. Despite a far from insubstantial body of work on the labouring classes<sup>12</sup> and a more recent focus on the histories of criminality<sup>13</sup>, the possibility of unifying these two perspectives within the matrix of disciplinary and punitive measures necessitated by the organisation of capitalist production under colonial rule has not been admitted. An obsessive focus on the organised political activity of the working class in the one instance, and on the construction of criminality engendered by the Criminal Tribes Acts in the other, have deflected the possibility of bringing the two perspectives into dialogue.

Perhaps no industry called for measures to straddle that "wavering and variable frontier" between the working and the labouring classes as much as the gold industry. Gold, whose function as a universal equivalent had become inseparable from its money form, possessed its own mesmerising "magic" since "gold or silver in its crude state becomes immediately on its emergence from the bowels of the earth the direct incarnation of all human labour."<sup>14</sup> The nature of the commodity itself placed a heavy burden on its producer, inevitably dazzled by the product, and therefore "naturally" inclined towards criminality.

There was early recognition of this in the Kolar Gold Fields, located in south eastern Mysore and run by the British managing agents, John Taylor and Sons. From its uncertain beginnings in 1880, the gold industry was assured of success in 1884 following the discovery of the Champion Lode, and for seven decades thereafter enjoyed spectacular fortunes, principally generated by five (and after 1931, four) working mines.<sup>15</sup> At its height in 1907 the KGF employed more than 30,000

12 I can do no more than provide a sample of the advances made in Indian labour history over the past two decades. On the structural features of the Indian working class, Chitra Joshi "Kanpur Textile Labour: Some Structural Features" *EPW* 16 (November 1981): pp. 1823-1837; Collin Simmons, "Recruiting and Organising an Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India: The Case of the Coal Mining Industry c. 1880-1939" *IESHR* 13 (1978): pp. 455-512, and "The Creation and Organisation of a Proletarian Mining Labour Force in India: The case of the Kolar Gold Fields, 1883-1955" in Mark Holmstrom ed. *Work for Wages in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), pp. 46-117; Ranajit Dasgupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India" *EPW* 16 (November 1981): pp. 1781-1806. On the organisation of the working class in India, Eamon Murphy *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres* (Delhi: Manohar, 1981); Sanat Bose, "Industrial Unrest and Growth of Labour unions in Bengal, 1920-24" *EPW* 18 (November 1981): pp. 1849-1860; Sabyasachi Bhattacharya "Capital and Labour in Bombay City 1928-29" *EPW*, 18 (November 1981): PE 36-44; Omkar Goswami "Multiple Images: Jute Mill Strikes of 1929 and 1937 seen through others' eyes" *Modern Asian Studies*, 21 (1987): 547-583; Richard Newman *Workers and Unions in Bombay, 1918-1929: A Study of Organisation in the Cotton Mills*, (Canberra: ANU Monographs, 1981); Sukomal Sen, *Working Class in India: History of Emergence and Movement, 1830-1970*, (Calcutta: Progress Publishers, 1977). On working class neighbourhoods and culture, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar "Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the Wars" *Modern Asian Studies*, 19 (1985): 623-668; Radha Kumar "City Lives: Workers' Housing and Rent in Bombay 1911-1947", *EPW*, 2 (1987): PE 47-56; Shashi Bhushan Upadhyaya "Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay: Conditions of Work and Life" *EPW*, 25 (July 28, 1990), PE 87-99; and more generally Dipesh Chakrabarty *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). On women workers, Lindsay Barnes "Women, Work and Struggle: Bowra Colliery 1900-1985" PhD Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1989; Michelle Maskell "Gender Kinship and Rural Work in Colonial Punjab" *Journal of Women's History*, 2.1. (1990); M.V. Shobana "Conditions of Women Workers in Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, 1914-1939" *Social Scientist*, 216-17, pp. 42-60. On communal identities among the working class, Upadhyay "Communalism and Working Class: Riot of 1893 in Bombay City" *EPW*, 24, (July 28, 1989), PE 69-75; Joshi "Bonds of Community, Ties of Religion: Kanpur Textile Workers in the early 20th century" *IESHR* 2 (1985): 251-280.

13 For a detailed examination of the earliest operations of the Criminal Tribes Act in North India, see Sarjay Nigam, "Disciplining and Policing the 'criminals by birth', Part 1: The Making of Colonial stereotype, the Criminal Tribes and Castes of North India" *IESHR* 27.2 (1990), pp.131-164; "Part 2: The development of a disciplinary system, 1871-1900" *IESHR* 27.3 (1990), pp. 257-287; for the extension of the Criminal Tribes Act to Madras Presidency in 1911, see Meena Radhakrishna, "The Criminal Tribes Act in Madras Presidency: Implications for Itinerant trading communities" *IESHR*, 26.3 (1989), pp. 269-295; Stuart Blackburn traces the colonial construction of the Kallars as a Criminal Tribe in "The Kallars: A Tamil 'Criminal Tribe' reconsidered" *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, New Series, 1.1 (1978): pp.38-51.

14 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 187.

15 They were: Champion Reef, Oorgaum, Nanddroog, Mysore and Balaghat mines; the last was declared unprofitable in 1931, and property transferred to Nanddroog Mining Company. RCIMM, 1932-33, p. 7.

workers, drawn predominantly from the neighbouring Madras Presidency. The supervision and control of this accumulation of men<sup>16</sup> required unusual measures, but the product of the mine also "required adequate protection, something more than was contained in the ordinary law" since as "an industry of a peculiar and hazardous nature" it invariably attracted "adventurous and unscrupulous characters."<sup>17</sup> The theft of gold in small quantities was doubly criminal on the KGF, C.J.Muller the Chief Judge of Mysore declared in 1915, since "the offences are committed by regularly paid coolies or other workmen employed by the owners of the property stolen."<sup>18</sup>

The KGF, which was established entirely with British capital mobilised by the managing agents, John Taylor and Sons, contributed a small proportion of its revenues as royalty to the Mysore state.<sup>19</sup> For the Mysore state, however, crippled by the burden of a Rs. 35 lakh subsidy, this was a crucial source of revenue. There was thus not even the mildest resistance to the surrender of effective juridical control over the 75 square mile area of KGF.<sup>20</sup> Year after year, the Chief Inspector of Mines, a Government of Mysore (GOM) appointee, produced a surprisingly detailed report on the fortunes of the operating mines, the conditions of work, the number and nature of accidents and the success of worker surveillance measures, all in a voice that was indistinguishable from that of the mining authorities. No attempt was ever made in the fifty year period between 1898 and 1947 to interrogate even a fraction of the labouring men and women of KGF, or to establish the veracity of the many self-congratulatory claims of the mining authorities. Instead, there was an enthusiastic annual endorsement of conditions on the mines and surrounding areas from the perspective of the mining authorities as well as a faithful and exclusive adherence to the information supplied by them. So much so, the apparatuses of the state were indistinguishable from those of the company; the two collaborated so closely that the company was the state in KGF.<sup>21</sup>

As the employment of labour expanded in KGF from a mere 9038 in 1891 to 24,587 at the turn of century (1900) and soared to 34,641 in 1907<sup>22</sup>, the task of devising techniques that would make the labour force adequately productive while simultaneously reducing its potential for disruption, was undertaken with the same vigour as capital was raised in the London markets. In the mineral rich regions of Southern Africa, where large numbers of local men were employed in the extraction of the precious metal, a combination of the compound system, where single male workers who laboured in the mines were housed,

18 The gold mining industry did not employ women underground, and only a very small proportion of the surface work was assigned to women. This contrasts with the accepted practice of using family based labour in Indian coal mines and in the salt industry. See Barnes, "Women Work and Struggle" and Maskell, "Gender Kinship and Rural Work." At the same time, except for the men from North India employed in the watch and ward establishment, and the men from Kerala who were employed as carpenters, familial rather than single male migration was the norm, a pattern that was actively encouraged in KGF. M A Sreenivasan *Labour in India: Socio-Economic Conditions of workers in the KGF*, (Bombay: Vikas, 1980), p. 5.

17 John Taylor and Sons to the Dewan of Mysore, March 7, 1912, File no. 19-12, Sl. no. 1&2, Legislative, KSA.

18 Annamma alias Mari vs. Government of Mysore (hereafter GOM) 20 Mys CCR, p.155 (1915).

19 The rate of royalty was 5% of the total gold mined between 1894 and 1940 and although this was a small proportion of the total profits, it was a significant proportion of the revenues of the GOM. *Statistical Abstract of Mysore, 1928 Statement XXIII; Statistical Abstract of Mysore, 1923-48*, p. 56.

20 Of this, the mining area consisted of 30 sq.miles. E.R.Sundarajan, "Report on the Present Status of Birth, Death and Epidemic Diseases in Mysore District, Bangalore City and KGF with suggestions for improvement" (Bangalore: 1929), p. 12.

21 I shall emphasise this link throughout my discussion by using the term "company/state" which may be faulted for its grammar, (since each of the mines was registered as a separate company) but is analytically justified (since overall charge was with John Taylor and Sons).

22 Simmons, "The Case of the Kolar Gold Fields", p. 104.

clothed and fed, and the pass laws together constituted what Charles Von Onselen has called a system "unique to the annals of capitalist development."<sup>23</sup> In KGF, the preferred mode of labour recruitment was through contractors, and familial migration was the norm, relieving the companies of the burden of housing, feeding and clothing the mining population. This never prevented the mining authorities from praising the compound system as far more manageable and efficient: thus W.T.Hudson, reporting on his visit to South Africa in 1925 said "I feel strongly that if it were permissible and possible to adopt the compound system on KGF it would greatly benefit Indian employees."<sup>24</sup> A similar longing was expressed as late as 1948, even though it was clearly recognised that "in India, the compound system would be unworkable."<sup>25</sup>

What the mining authorities at KGF nevertheless strove to achieve through the Mysore Mining Regulations of 1897 and 1906 was the *effect*, if not the material arrangement, of the compound system. A double taxonomy of crimes and punishments, with all its fine gradations, was developed over the years, a taxonomy that often identified as "criminal" practices that were customary or long established ways of life,<sup>26</sup> matching it with punishments that were rarely of equal measure, and instead were excessive<sup>27</sup>, dispensing with the necessity of having to "punish exactly enough to prevent repetition."<sup>28</sup> This massive reorganisation of illegalities was not accomplished overnight or by mere administrative fiat, nor did it remain stable and unchanging thereafter. Instead the techniques of subjection were created, refined, and enlarged according to the shifting needs of the industry itself and, equally important, in response to the ceaseless challenges posed by the unwieldy workforce, with social, political, even criminal networks that stretched beyond the territory of the company/state. (Section I) Frustrating even the most finely graded system of penalty was the insistence with which the KGF labourers chafed against, subverted or violently protested the illegalities of the company/state, calling for fresh punitive efforts on the part of the management. (Section II) This dialectic is stressed not in order to insist that the subordinate classes played an equal part in forging the apparatuses of domination, or that they derived the same measures of benefits from it, (perspectives that certainly have their adherents)<sup>29</sup> but in order to suggest that there was no final and definite format that the disciplinary mechanisms could take over the course of five decades, no moment when the company/state could rest from the exacting labours of constant vigilance.

23 Charles Von Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 156. More generally on the compound system see pp. 128-194.

24 J.T. Hudson "Some Features of South African Mining Practice" *KGF Mining and Metallurgical Quarterly Bulletin* (hereafter *KGF Bulletin*) Vol. II, No. 18, (1925), p. 105.

25 Jack Spalding and J.D.Dixon "Visits to Witwatersrand and Goldmines in Eastern Transvaal, March 12-June 1, 1948", section 24.1, mimeo, KGF Technical Library, KGF.

26 For instance Mukherjee, "Crime and Criminals", p. 155; also Janaki Nair, "Prohibited Marriage: State protection and the Child Wife in Mysore, 1894-1930" (forthcoming, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*).

27 In the words of J.A.Pringle, "... the Indian can be — and is — fined a rupee when an anna would fit his earnings and his offence much better..." "Efficiency and Economy in the Underground Department", *KGF Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 5, (July-September 1921), p. 136.

28 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 93.

29 Most recently, in Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994). A subtler argument along these lines may be found in Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990);

## SECTION - I

### 1. Petty Pilferage of the Product

The very architecture of the mines defied the application of those panoptical surveillance measures that were appropriate to factories or prisons. From initial depths of a few thousand feet below the surface, and a small network of shafts that traversed the underground<sup>30</sup>, the mines, (Champion Reef) reached a depth of 6000 feet in 1919-20<sup>31</sup>. By 1932-33, both Oorgaum and Champion Reef were at least 7200 feet deep<sup>32</sup> and in 1936-37, Oorgaum was the deepest mine at more than 8000 feet.<sup>33</sup> At these depths, temperatures soared upto 131°F, accompanied by an enervating humidity for which European constitutions were considered entirely unsuitable.<sup>34</sup> Even the Chief Inspector of Mines prefaced his annual reports with the remark that the very inspection of the mines constituted a challenge accomplished only with great difficulty.<sup>35</sup> In their unguarded, and rarer, moments some mining engineers such as P.J.Crowle were willing to admit that in KGF the labourer was working "under conditions corresponding to permanent overload" since wet bulb temperatures as low as 85°F were "becoming a rarity" by 1921.<sup>36</sup> This was hardly conducive to the direct supervision of labour by Europeans<sup>37</sup>, a process that was already complicated by the baffling array of languages spoken in the mines.<sup>38</sup> Instead, work in the mines was divided between two sets of labourers, those in the direct pay of the company and those who were employed by contractors<sup>39</sup>; the latter however were entrusted with the most difficult, risky and unrewarding (usually underground) tasks of all.<sup>40</sup> The responsibility for disciplining labour underground was entrusted to the mestri, whether in the Company or contractors' employ, who was himself employable only after passing a certifying examination.<sup>41</sup> As elsewhere in India, the mestri was a key mediator in the chain of command, and the system was an inexpensive way of retaining control of workers.<sup>42</sup>

30 RCIMM, 1900, p.16; RCIMM, 1908, p.7

31 RCIMM, 1919-20, p.8.

32 RCIMM, 1932-33, p.8

33 RCIMM, 1936-37, p.28.

34 Anthony Caplan, "Heat Exhaustion in KGF" *KGF Mining and Metallurgical Society Quarterly Bulletin* (hereafter *KGF Bulletin*) Vol. IX, no. 48, 1939, p. 113ff, reports the results of a study undertaken to determine the efficiency of workmen in humid temperatures underground.

35 RCIMM, 1932-33, p. 17, but there were similar statements in nearly every report.

36 Pringle, "Efficiency and Economy in the Underground Department", p.140.

37 *Ibid.*, 132-33.

38 Thus all mining rules had to be made available in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Hindi to cater to different segments of the workforce. See RCIMM, 1898, p. 8.

39 In 1930, a little less than half of all labour employed was contract labour a proportion that declined to 32 per cent by 1948. Sreenivasan *Labour in India*, p. 7; S.R. Deshpande "Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour on Gold Mines in India", (New Delhi: 1946), p. 3-4.

40 Simmons, "The Case of the Kolar Gold Fields", p. 87.

41 The first examinations for blasters, mestris and engine drivers were conducted under the Mysore Mining Rules in 1901. RCIMM, 1901, p.2.

42 For the role of the jobber in the Bombay textile industry see Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay*; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1994). For Bengal, see Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, esp. Chapter 3.

Yet the mestri was too closely connected, whether by ties of caste, language or region, with the labourers in his command to be a sufficient guarantee against the pilferage of gold at various stages of production. A definite necessity in such a situation was a large and vigilant police force whose services could be utilised as the occasion demanded, but whose very presence was designed to instill awe, if not fear, in the labourer. It was just one of the special conditions that the GOM, out of gratitude for the royalties it earned, was willing to concede.<sup>43</sup> By 1900, there was a 277 strong police force on the Field,<sup>44</sup> and gradual increments thereafter were regularly demanded and conceded.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the GOM readily supplied Reserve Police and even Imperial Lancers from Bangalore when the need arose.<sup>46</sup> Only when the company deployed the KGF Rifle Volunteer Force during the riot of 1907 did the GOM object on the grounds of "illegality", insisting that certain norms be observed on occasions of breaches of the peace of the mines.<sup>47</sup> In less than seven years, however, even this small check on the arbitrary use of power in the area was revoked in response to a demand from the companies. Government officials such as the First Member of Council could suggest that "the demands of the companies for any extravagant increase of police force must be resisted" knowing full well the compulsions that underlay such brave words: "there is a temptation to ask for excessive protection and facilities for this place," he complained "in the fact that the companies' yield to the Mysore Government a large revenue from a concentrated area."<sup>48</sup>

Even these concessions were not considered adequate. The mining companies had their own watch and ward establishment to police the shaft heads, and patrol the shaded avenues along which the European mining officials lived with their families. Exploiting to its advantage prevailing colonial stereotypes about those who were "naturally" best equipped for employment as police, namely the "martial races", the Companies' own watch and ward establishment consisted primarily of men from Punjab.<sup>49</sup> The active deployment of ethnic, religious and linguistic *difference* between the Punjabi Muslim watchmen on the one hand and the predominantly Tamil Adi Dravida workmen on the other<sup>50</sup> was no mere coincidence, and aimed to reduce the possibility of collusion between these groups.

The existence of a large police force and watch and ward establishment were meaningless in the absence of a framework of legalities which the apparatuses of the company/state could bring to bear on the labouring population. Here too, the provisions of the Indian Penal Code were considered too general to adequately deal with the special needs of the industry and the kinds of criminality that it engendered. As early as 1897, the company/state recognised the need for a set of rules which would reorganise the economy of legalities: by this the illegalities of property, those most accessible to the subaltern classes, were made more visible than the illegalities of rights enjoyed by the bourgeoisie.<sup>51</sup> In 1897, the company secured a significant concession from the Mysore state in the shape of the Mysore Mines Regulation, which made the invasive regime of the company legal even as it recast the entire non-white population of KGF as potentially criminal. This was followed by acts I and VI which granted the company/state extraordinary powers to reorganise, supervise and regulate all aspects of the lives of miners.

43 RCIMM, 1899, p.22.

44 RCIMM, 1900, p.18.

45 File no. 102-17, Sl. no. 1, Geology, KSA.

46 File no 123-08, Sl. no. 1-17, Police KSA; File no. 159-29, Sl. no. 23, CB, KSA.

47 File no. 219 of 1912-13, Sl. no. 1&2, Police KSA; File no. 145-14, Sl. no 1, 1a, 2&3, Police KSA; Order Number J 2573-82, February 4th 1915.

48 File no 66-13, Sl. no. 1-5, Police, KSA.

49 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India* p.5; also File no. 125-07. Sl.no. 1-17, Police, KSA.

50 *Census of India*, Vol. 25, Mysore, 1941, table 78, p.106; Simmons, pp. 99-100, comments on the ethnic division of labour, but does not unpack the implications of such arrangements in the management of the labour force.

51 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.86-87.

Prosecutions under the act fell primarily into two groups, those related to the theft of mining materials such as gold amalgam, gold quartz, sponge gold, mining candles and explosives, and those connected with breaches of specified mining rules. The former were conducted by the police, while the latter reached the courts following a reference from the mining authorities, who sometimes dealt out punishments on their own.<sup>52</sup> In the very first year of the operation of the regulation, as many as 263 persons were prosecuted in 203 cases of which 228 were convicted, a high rate of 86 per cent (Table I). The recovery in the next year of auriferous material worth over Rs.10,000, still only a "fraction of the several lakhs worth of gold" that "leaked" from the mines, led the companies to demand a larger police presence on the field.<sup>53</sup> This marginal increase of the force on the Field yielded dramatic returns, with a record 707 people charged in 486 cases under the Mining Act in 1901 of which 584 were convicted, while the value of articles recovered was Rs 11,297.<sup>54</sup>

All residents, and not just mine workers, were now placed under the hawkish eye of the KGF police: goldsmiths, jewellers and an assortment of rich inhabitants. Protests in the Kannada press soon followed on behalf of the "innocents" who were affected by the increased vigilance.<sup>55</sup> The Kannada press, which served as a weak voice of the people in the absence of other forms of representation, protested the misuse of police power in house searches<sup>56</sup>. *Nadegannadi* expressed its indignation against the fact that the operation of the act indiscriminately placed all those who possessed gold under suspicion so that "every goldsmith was seen as a receiver of stolen property."<sup>57</sup> Even more objectionable, it claimed, was the slavish willingness of the Government to grant unprecedented authority to the British managing agents.<sup>58</sup>

In KGF, more starkly than elsewhere in colonial India, the class interest of the law stood exposed, unashamedly dispensing with the hypocrisies of meting out "justice". In the fullest sense of the term, the law's "enforceability", the violence that undergirded the company's superior right to property, was more obvious in the colonial setting than in that original location of Law, namely England.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the rule of racial difference here worked to ensure that every Indian was under a cloud of suspicion, including men of means: this was what the Kannada press so loudly protested.

At the same time, even if public opinion were ignored, easily done under conditions of indirect colonial rule, repression itself produced a slew of fresh problems, calling for a constant finetoothing of the law which had to remain in place for decades to come. Consider for instance the clause in the regulation that required all goldsmiths to be licenced. Subbachari, who was hauled up before the Special Magistrate's court in KGF for not possessing a licence was discharged by the court when he pleaded that he was only a worker in silver.<sup>60</sup>

In operation, therefore the scope of even such a drastic act appeared severely limited.

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52 RCIMM, 1898, p.21.

53 RCIMM, 1899, p.22.23.

54 RCIMM, 1901-2, p. 23.

55 *Nadegannadi*, Nov. 5, 1901, Native Newspaper Reports, (hereafter NNR).

56 *Suryodaya Prakashika*, Nov,23 1904, NNR.

57 *Nadegannadi*, February 2, 1904, NNR.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Douglas Hay, "Property, Authority, and the Criminal Law" In Hay et al ed. *Albion's Fatal Tree*, (London: Pantheon Books, 1975), 17-63. The moral charge that subtends Hay's argument does not detract from its power, despite evoking the distaste of those wishing to hang on to the illusion of an "uninterested" or "autonomous" working of criminal law. See for instance John Langbein, "Albion's Fatal Flaw", *Past and Present*, 96-120, No. 98 (February 1983).

60 GOM vs Subbachari, 3 Mys CCR, p.141 (1898).

On the one hand, the removal of gold from the mining area had to be made difficult, if not impossible; on the other, the possession and use of such gold that was already in circulation had to be authorised. How might the gold produced in the mines be easily distinguished from other gold that may already have been in circulation in the area? This presented enormous technical difficulties involving much expense of time and money, the prosecution often relying on expert witnesses from the Department of Geology to determine the composition of the gold in question. In 1903, Mysore's Chief Geologist W.F.Smeeth, whose "impartiality" was readily admitted by the court, testified that the two gold bars in the possession of Gopalalah were indeed mine gold, since "the number of impurities in the bar are quite characteristic of the impurities contained in the gold from the KGF."<sup>61</sup>

The cumbersome and expensive procedure of the mining authorities having to prove that the "stolen" property was gold from the mines was nevertheless eased by one aspect of the Mysore Mining Regulation. While the ordinary provisions of the Indian Penal Code required the prosecution to prove that a certain property had been stolen, the Mining Regulation placed the burden of proof on the accused who had to prove that any gold found in his possession was "not mine gold or [if it was] that he obtained possession of it in a lawful manner..."<sup>62</sup> It was readily acknowledged that "the ordinary rules of law and procedure are altered within this *area* in respect to *certain articles* to the detriment of the rights of individuals in order to promote the interests of the mining industry,"<sup>63</sup> but this mining regulation was nevertheless enthusiastically administered. Materials other than gold, however, did not bear any unmistakable imprints of being from the mines. Candles issued to workmen moving about underground for example were regularly saved for later sale or reuse at tremendous personal risk.<sup>64</sup> Alarm at this fresh possibility of a drain on the company's resources was only thinly disguised as concern for the prevention of deaths underground, prompting new thoughts on how to provide the mining candles with some distinguishable feature "which will restrict purchase and possession to mining companies" and thus reduce theft.<sup>65</sup> Stearine candles coloured pink were introduced with immediate effect, and prosecutions for being in possession of this "mining material" were more easily obtained.<sup>66</sup> Predictably in the next few decades, the colour of the candles did nothing to prevent death of miners from falling to their deaths underground. The company showed pronounced unconcern for suggestions that it provide better illumination underground, and protect shaft heads adequately. As a result even in the 1930s, falling away of labourers in winzes and shafts was a major cause of deaths in the mine.<sup>67</sup> When the question of better illumination did concern the management at all, it was always in order to aid surveillance, to make the "milling and cyanide" processes "secure and well-lighted" in order to prevent pilferage.<sup>68</sup>

By 1906, a new Mysore Mines regulation was passed which stiffened penalties and plugged loopholes on the basis of a decade's experience. The Mysore Mines Regulation IV of 1906 consolidated the gains of the previous act and amended the law relating to areas which needed strengthening. It made illegal the possession of unwrought gold within the mining area except with a licence, and the possession of certain categories of "mining materials". It provided for the weeding out of those classed as "undesirable" while making it mandatory for hawkers and peddlers to take out licences to save them from such a fate,

61 Gopallah vs GOM, 8 Mys CCR, p.333, (1903).

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid, p.331.

64 A jumper cooly moving about underground without a light fell from the 340 ft. level to 540 feet and died instantly. RCIMM, 1898, p.14.

65 Ibid.

66 Abdul Rahim vs GOM, 9 Mys CCR, p. 100, (1904); In re Abdul Razack, 5 Mys CCR, p. 185 (1900)

67 File no. 101-35, Sl. no. 1-6, Geological, KSA; File no. 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geological, KSA.

68 RCIMM, 1899, p.22.

and insisted that all goldsmiths and dealers keep detailed accounts.<sup>69</sup> The act was applied to the whole of Mysore, except sections 5-20 which only applied to KGF.<sup>70</sup>

Even the best laid surveillance plans could often be defeated by geography, since the hot pursuit of those in criminal possession of gold or other mining materials often took the KGF police too far afield, to areas in British India where their enhanced powers had no meaning. Vadavelachari was seized by the police for being in unlawful possession of gold, but only after he had got to the Bowringpet Railway station. Although he was convicted in 1905 under Section 8 of the Mysore Mines Act by the District Magistrate, the conviction was struck down in the Chief Court of Mysore on the grounds that the railway station fell outside the jurisdiction of the District Magistrate.<sup>71</sup> The problems presented by this zone of autonomy that ran right through KGF called for fresh exertions on the part of the mining authorities. The 11 mile length of railway which ran through the KGF belonged to the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway company, and consequently fell within the jurisdiction of British India. Repeated requests were made by the representatives of the Mining Board in the Mysore Representative Assembly to extend the Mysore Mines Act of 1906 to the KGF Railway "which passes through the very heart of the field and under existing conditions affords a sanctuary to thieves."<sup>72</sup> While the GOM recognised that "nothing was to be gained by keeping a strip of country a few feet broad beyond the scope of the Mines regulation" there was also the fear that such "an objectionable regulation" contained provisions that could prove too unpalatable in British India.<sup>73</sup> By 1918, the Mysore Government showed itself willing to make the "small administrative adjustment" to make the railway police accountable to the Police Superintendent of KGF, and it was soon evident that the British Indian government was far less concerned about arbitrary searches than Dewan Visvesvaraya had imagined. In 1920, the control of the local railway and premises was vested in the Superintendent of Police in KGF, much to the satisfaction of the mining Board.<sup>74</sup>

The 1906 act renewed fears that a serious and permanent infringement of fundamental freedoms was being given the force of law. H.V.Bhima Rao pointed out in the Representative Assembly that the regulation infringed on the fundamental principle that "a man should be presumed innocent until he is proved to be guilty." To be sure, the outrage of the Kannada press and the representatives in the assembly, was primarily reserved for the violations of the rights of "respectable people".<sup>75</sup> Their hearts bled for those respectable men who were ignominiously placed "at the mercy of subordinate police" who were often their social inferiors.<sup>76</sup> No similar concern for the indignities suffered by the labouring poor was expressed. After all, the rights of a group of poor and underprivileged labourers, who were not even properly subjects of the Maharaja counted for little against the acknowledged rights of the mining industry, and privileges of the indigenous elite. In the hierarchy that was developing, company interests were best entitled to receive the protection of the state since the "state as a whole derived considerable benefit from the mining industry."<sup>77</sup>

69 Mysore Administration Report, 1906-07, p.10.

70 Mysore Law Code, Volume I, Unrepealed Mysore Acts, 1850-1920, GOM, 1955.

71 In re Vadavelachari, 10 Mys CCR, p.156. (1905).

72 Representation of Mr Richards, Proceedings of the Mysore Representative Assembly, (PMRA), 1907, p.99; also, Arthur Gifford's representation in 1909, PMRA, 1909, p.144.

73 Dewan Visvesvaraya to Private Secretary to the Maharaja, April 17, 1913, File no. 19-12, Sl. no.1&2. Legislature, KSA. We may note here Visvesvaraya's touching belief that the "rule of law" was somehow honoured, and was even inviolable, in British India.

74 Address of the KGF Mining Board Representative, HMA Cooke to the Dewan of Mysore, Appendix A, PMRA, 1920, p.169.

75 *Nadegannadi*, June 4, 1904; Sept. 3, 1904; August 25, 1906; *Suryodaya Prakasika*, September 3, 1906.

76 PMRA, 1906, p.21.

77 PMRA, 1906, p.21.

Even so, the privileges of the indigenous elite could assert themselves at various levels. The guardians of the law showed themselves more than willing to allow extra-judicial considerations — namely “respectability” — some measure of influence in their deliberations.<sup>78</sup> On July 12, 1907, the house of Venkatramaiah Chetty “a well to do man resident at Bethmangala” who paid an annual revenue assessment of Rs 150, was searched by the police where some jewellery and a gold bar weighing under 2 lbs. were found.<sup>79</sup> Chetty was sentenced to pay Rs 50 as a fine and serve one month’s simple Imprisonment. The Mysore Chief Court was far more sympathetic to the indignities he had been made to suffer and set the conviction aside because “the mining regulation only contemplates two kinds of licences, one for goldsmiths and another for gold dealers”. The regulation left out of its reckoning, the court argued, “a third kind of person, who being neither goldsmiths nor gold dealers, yet like most well-to-do natives of India, happen to possess remnants of melted gold at some time or other” perhaps even before the new regulation came into effect.<sup>80</sup>

In the elaborate taxonomy of crime that was being shaped, one end was gradually constituted by those whose station in life should automatically place them above suspicion. Goldsmiths who had in the early stages of the operation of the act been indiscriminately subjected to checks and Interferences, often found a more sympathetic ear among the judges of the Chief Court. In the case involving Muniswamachari and two others, the court declared that “three months RI for working without licence ...was unduly hard” and suitably reduced their sentences.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Chengachari and his partner, accused of working without licences, were able to have their convictions set aside.<sup>82</sup> The court was quite willing to acknowledge the symbolic value of gold for respectable Indians, declaring that “culturally gold is essential in Indian households.”<sup>83</sup> And if the declining number of cases that came on appeal to the Chief court are any indication, over the years, even the lower court showed itself willing to honour the sentiments of the “respectable” inhabitants of KGF.

This much was clear: the accidents of birth counted for a great deal in the emerging taxonomy of crime, a fact that was once more emphasised in the measures taken to identify “Criminal Tribes” who were considered to have been born to a life of crime. For several decades, a Criminal Tribes Act operated only in parts of north India, but the Criminal Tribes Act passed in 1911 was made applicable to the whole of India, permitting local governments to declare any tribe, section or class of people “a criminal tribe” and thereafter to register these members, requiring them to report to the police who could resettle them if it was necessary.<sup>84</sup> Some itinerant tribes, such as the Korachers and Koravas, showed no particular respect for the border between British and princely India, so there were populations of Korachers, Koravas

78 For the link between judicial pardons and the preservation of class privilege, see Hay, “Property, Crime and Authority”, p.43-45.

79 Venkatramalah Chetty vs. GOM, 10 Mys CCR, p. 231, (1907).

80 Ibid., 232-234. On the other hand, even as late as the 1940s, any mine worker found in the possession of a Rs 100 note was immediately taken into the police station for questioning since it was assumed that he could not have come to possess it lawfully. Interview, Bernard, Retired KGF miner, January 8, 1995.

81 12 Mys CCR p.75, (1907).

82 Chengappa alias Chengachari and another vs. GOM 12 Mys CCR, p. (78) (1907).

83 GOM vs Chittor Muniswami, 23 Mys CCR p. 239, (1918).

84 Radhakrishna, “The Criminal Tribes Act”, p.278.

and Woddars in the border regions of Mysore. Alarm bells were sounded by the KGF Mining Board in 1913 when "a series of burglaries on the outskirts of the mine" were attributed to the criminal tribes who were immediately identified and sent back to British India.<sup>85</sup> In 1915, a leading Woddar was charged with receiving stolen property.<sup>86</sup> These arbitrary prosecutions and transportations of those identified as criminal tribes were given the stamp of legality in 1916, when Mysore followed the British Indian lead by passing a Criminal tribes bill, after which the "criminal gangs" were regularly "deported" to British India.

Five tribes were brought under the purview of the Mysore Criminal Tribes act, the Korachers, Woddars, Kepmaris, Gantichors, and a few Handijogis.<sup>87</sup> Of these, the Korachers and Woddars, being the most numerous in the region around Kolar, were most consistently harassed by the KGF police as well as the watch and ward, and were registered and restricted in their movements.<sup>88</sup> By 1923, the mining board sought to broaden provisions of the act to permit local officers to transfer Criminal Tribes from one locality to another, even other parts of India, and authorise the arrest of identified tribes without warrant.<sup>89</sup> Despite some opposition, the amendments were passed after the District Magistrate's assurance that it would be used only against "really bad people."<sup>90</sup> The sharpened laws in turn fuelled new demands for an increased police presence, and by 1930, a special staff consisting of two Jamadars and 8 constables was deputed to supervise and watch the movements of Woddars and Korachers.<sup>91</sup>

Yet the trail ends in the early 1930s, and all references in the Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines to the vigorous application of force against the Criminal Tribes taper off into silence. Did the mining establishment feel that such strict surveillance was no longer warranted since entire communities were being counted, registered, watched? Or were there newer and more urgent "illegalities" that required the redeployment of the surveillance apparatus?<sup>92</sup> Despite new and pressing anxieties, however, in 1938, the Government of Mysore declared its reluctance to repeal the Criminal Tribes act on the grounds that the criminal tribes were inured to punishment, and all available procedures were too mild to curb their thieving proclivities.<sup>93</sup> At any rate there were no strenuous objections to this act either in the Representative Assembly or the Legislative Council. Even the Kannada press which had briefly expressed opposition to the Mining Regulation in the early years of the century no longer railed against the repression that prevailed in KGF.

The steady decrease in property crimes over time was attributed in part to the implementation of increasingly strict regulations.<sup>94</sup> The number of cases registered, persons put up and convicted and particularly the amount of property recovered never matched the heights that were reached in 1906-07, although the conviction rate remained consistently high with only rare exceptions.(Table I) Yet several hundred goldsmiths carried on a thriving business in what was an overwhelmingly working class town.

85 RCIMM, 1913-14, p. 26.

86 RCIMM, 1915-16, p. 24.

87 File no 23 of 38, Sl. no. 1-4, Legislative, KSA.

88 RCIMM, 1924-25, Appendix, p.6; 1925-28, Appendix 3; 1926-27, Appendix 3.

89 PMRA, 1923, pp.72ff.

90 Ibid, 75.

91 RCIMM, 1929-30, Appendix 3.

92 An unexpected total strike lasting 28 days broke out in the KGF in April 1930. This is analysed in detail in Janaki Nair "Representing Labour in Old Mysore: The KGF Strike of 1930", *EPW* 25 (July 28, 1990).

93 Note of IGP of Mysore, File no 23 of 38, Sl. no 1-4, Legislative, KSA.

94 RCIMM, 1906-07, p.45; RCIMM 1910-11, p.17.

Clearly, their business stemmed less from the demands of the labouring poor, and more from the steady and assured supply of smuggled gold from the mines. Nor did their business significantly decline after the 1906 act; instead the cases that came on appeal to the high court indicate the nature of the negotiations that were going on between the primary smugglers of gold, namely the European employees, who were never subjected to checks at the shaft heads, and their conduits in KGF. The triumphant reports of the steady decline in the theft of auriferous materials masked the workings of organised smuggling, a point to which I shall return below.

Despite encouraging official signs of decreased criminal activity, the costs of prosecution under law were becoming increasingly burdensome, especially since, even when prosecutions were successful, the Company found it difficult to reclaim the stolen property from the Government.<sup>95</sup> The companies had always found it worthwhile to settle some disputes departmentally,<sup>96</sup> and this became an increasingly attractive option in dealing with cases that did not involve the theft of property and therefore the police, i.e. cases involving breaches of mining rules. Here the authority of the mining engineers and supervisors could be deployed without external checks.<sup>97</sup>

## 2. Criminal Breaches at the Workplace

The entire panoply of regulations to control crimes against mining property operated above ground, where the labours of the surveillance department were amply aided by light and a manageable topography. But in the labyrinthine passages underground, where gangs of men worked under the supervision of their mestris, much could happen to threaten the steady and lucrative process of gold extraction, affecting the resources of the company as surely as, and perhaps more devastatingly than, petty pilferage. Thousands of workers risked losing their lives in mining for gold on a daily basis, fearing rockbursts, blasts, fires and other mishaps. Descending to the depths of the mine held no guarantees of golden rewards: in the grim humour that made light of these risks, workers believed that "keelay ponai ponam, melai vandai panam" ("when you go down, you risk turning into a corpse, if you surface, you surface with gold").<sup>98</sup> The death rate per thousand workers in KGF, though lower than that in the gold mines of the Transvaal, was alarming. Over a fifty year period from 1891 to 1940, an average of 60 men lost their lives annually, while hundreds of others were permanently maimed or seriously injured.<sup>99</sup> In some years the death toll soared: while 114 deaths occurred in 1909<sup>100</sup>, in 1913, 42 out of 112 deaths were caused by the fall of a cage used to transport workers underground in Edgar's Shaft<sup>101</sup>, and a devastating underground fire in the Nandydroog mine claimed 53 lives in 1931.<sup>102</sup> Rockbursts, resulting from destabilised layers of rock underground, became increasingly common as the mines went deeper: in 1916, there was a hundred per cent increase in fatalities due to rockbursts.<sup>103</sup>

95 There were endless debates on the validity of claims on recovered property, as in File no. 19-11, Sl. no. 1, Legislative, 1911-12, KSA. The difficulties faced by the State in realising the proceeds of the seized materials were innumerable. File no. 38, Sl. no. 1-5, Legislative; File no. 16-10, Sl. no 1-7, 12-26, 28, Legislative; File no. 28-23, Sl. no. 1-9, Geology, KSA.

96 RCIMM, 1906-07, 45.

97 File no. 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geology, KSA.

98 As cited in Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*; but the proverb is still current in KGF.

99 Simmons, "The Case of KGF" p.114-115, Table 9.

100 RCIMM, 1908-09, p.31.

101 RCIMM, 1913-14, p. 17.

102 RCIMM, 1930-31, p. 20.

103 RCIMM, 1916-17, p.17.

Rockbursts and fires underground belonged to a category of "unavoidable" accidents, occupational hazards that multiplied as the mines plunged ever downward. The Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines in 1924-25 admitted that the number of heavy and very heavy rockbursts had increased.<sup>104</sup> On the question of rockbursts, the company/state more or less shrugged off any responsibility: "there is only one way to entirely avoid accidents due to airblasts [rockbursts] and that is to close down the mines altogether. That would be like curing a man of being sick by cutting his throat but the position by no means warrants such drastic procedure."<sup>105</sup> To abandon permanently, or even temporarily those areas that were most prone to rockbursts was uneconomical since the closure of the mine "would have as deplorable an effect over a mine field as an accident."<sup>106</sup> Such solicitude for the lot of the mining labourer, expressed in terms of the "equal" measure in which a closed mine impinged on the fates of owners as well as workers, matched the ingenuity of the colliery owners of Britain, from which respectable ancestry the managing agents John Taylor and Sons were drawn. Although poor ventilation and gas explosions were an enduring feature of the nineteenth century English collieries, owners never failed to claim that their (monetary) loss was greater than the workman's, who after all had only lost his life!<sup>107</sup>

If the burden of these unavoidable accidents bore down disproportionately on workmen themselves, so too did other kinds of accidents which were considered "criminal follies" brought on by the deliberate carelessness of workmen, resulting in an unconscionable "loss of time and money".<sup>108</sup> A small number of accidents, both fatal and non-fatal, were thus attributed to the "recklessness" or "negligence" of workmen. These accidents were given an extraordinary degree of visibility in the accounts of the mining board and the annual reports of the Chief inspector of mines. Even when the GOM did express concern over accidents in the mines, it focussed on those classes of accidents that should "prima facie be susceptible of more control by regulation."<sup>109</sup> Mining rules that came into existence in 1911 attempted to achieve a degree of efficiency that the workmen, primarily of rural background, did not "naturally" possess. "The overseer's book of penalties" did indeed "replace the slave driver's lash"<sup>110</sup> with one difference. Although a "barracks like discipline" was in fact integral to the capitalist workplace, such measures were not easily transposed to the colonial work situation where the chain of command necessarily passed through the mestris.<sup>111</sup> In the gold mines, moreover, the primary concern of the authorities was for a reduction in the number of disruptions resulting from accidents, or more properly with the affixing of responsibility for accidents in the mines to people *other than those* who were accountable for inadequate safety measures. A deliberate focus on the lack of dexterity or alertness among workers therefore served to deflect attention from the conditions and terms of work which produced accidents in the first place. The extraordinarily detailed investigations of accidents on the mines that accompanied each report constitute a surprising archive, an embarrassment of riches on accidents resulting from the anxiety to affix blame. As the mine management admitted in 1935, a strict enquiry into causes of accidents was undertaken "with a view to punishment of breaches of Mysore Mining Regulation, negligence and carelessness."<sup>112</sup>

104 RCIMM, 1924-5 p. 27.

105 *Ibid*, p. 20.

106 Chief Inspector of Mines to Secretary, Development Department, GOM, May 19, 1931, File No. 3-30, Sl. no 78-81, 87, 88, 93, 99, 107-109, 121, 127, 131-33. Geology, KSA.

107 Marx implies as much in his extensive quotations of such exchanges in *Capital*, vol I, p. 634.

108 RCIMM, 1923-24, p. 19.

109 File no. 101-35, Sl. no 1-8, Geology, 1935, KSA; File no. 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geology, KSA.

110 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 550; see also Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 144-45.

111 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. 100-101. The path taken by the workman from his residence in KGF to his place of work became an object of scrutiny and regulation in 1903-4, partly as a way of enhancing discipline, but primarily to put the mestri in total command of his men, and therefore remain responsible for them. Such surveillance was too unwieldy to put into practice in the long run. RCIMM, 1903-04, p.25; Proceedings of the GOM, 1903, December.

112 File no. 101-35, Sl. no. 1-6 Geological, 1935, KSA.

Principally, three groups of accidents resulted in deaths of workers: the falling away of workers in shafts and winzes, deaths due to blasts, and deaths resulting from the collapse of cages due to winding errors. The taxonomy of "breaches of mining rules" ensured that there was no escape from punishment even when there was narrow escape from death. (Table 2) In the case of workers who died from falling down shafts, no one but the individual worker could be blamed. But over time, a trio of men was held primarily responsible for two other kinds of accidents: the mestri, the blaster and the engine driver, all of whom were among the better paid Indian workers who required certification in order to work in the mines.

Falling away in shafts and winzes was recognised as a serious problem even in the early stages of the industry. In 1898, a cooly who died after falling from a height of 340 feet to 540 feet was immediately classed as "careless" since he had moved around underground without a light.<sup>113</sup> The cause of the accident was quickly traced to the fact that the "cooly frequently wished to save candles for subsequent sale." The introduction of pink stearine candles, which distinguished them as "mining property", did little to prevent deaths from falling away in shafts, winzes and stopes; this class of accidents continued to rise, even predominate, among all accidents in the mines. In 1914, the Chief Inspector of Mines declared that the alarming increase in underground deaths was far from being an indication that "insufficient precautions are taken to prevent persons from falling into or down openings such as shafts winzes and stopes" as laid down in sections V and XI of the Mining Rule; instead, "all these were *individual* accidents the greater proportion being due to slipping and falling off ladders while climbing up or down and leaving doors, barriers, etc open which should have been shut".<sup>114</sup> Yet in some cases men fell off "perfectly good ladders".<sup>115</sup> Every so often the worker continued to be faulted for "valuing a candle more than his life."<sup>116</sup> By 1920-1921, when the problem of deaths from falling away reached "epidemic proportions" the annual report reluctantly admitted that "indirectly higher temperature underground may have something to do with a certain number of them as six out of the 19 cases were the result of falling away while climbing up or down ladders."<sup>117</sup>

The company/state could not name the cause of this class of accidents without implicating itself and insisted on other causes. Higher temperatures underground told only a part of the story, the other part of which was the inadequate wages that forced several categories of workers to save fuel underground for use in their homes or even at work. In fact, in the very year that the company/state complained of an "epidemic", Champion Reef workers struck on precisely this issue. The end of the war brought not only spiralling prices but also *shorter work hours*, which the company enforced indirectly, by supplying only half of the normal candles needed by workers underground. The Champion Reef labourers demanded a full supply of candles, as well as more rice per rupee, and the agitation looked poised to spread to all the mines before it was successfully diffused.<sup>118</sup> Contractors' coolies who were accustomed to working more than one shift continuously, were among the hardest hit. The problem of saving candles and thereby risking death as well as the problem of slipping of ladders due to sheer exhaustion arising from overwork or excessive heat, were hardly the "individual" accidents they were made out to be and were more than closely linked to the question of wages and conditions of work.<sup>119</sup>

113 RCIMM, p.14, 1898.

114 RCIMM, 1914-15, p.16.

115 RCIMM, 1924-25, p.20.

116 RCIMM, 1918-19, p.25.

117 RCIMM, 1920-21, p. 27.

118 File no. 111-20, Sl. no. 1-20, Confidential Branch, KSA.

119 The wage strike, which only lasted two days in August 1920, became an occasion for labourers to vent a range of grievances about arbitrary fines, hut repair, and other living conditions. The fear that the workers would strike again after pay day frightened the mining superintendent into granting two day strike pay. Only the unrestrained use of Section 17 prevented the leader from Madras, who was rumoured to be on his way to lead the strike, from entering KGF. File no 111-20, Sl. 1-10, Confidential Branch, KSA.

For its own part, the company/state introduced a vigorous "safety first" campaign. Perhaps it was no coincidence that this was just at the time when the question of ventilation at the lower depths of the mines was becoming too urgent to ignore, especially since it impaired the efficiency of workers.<sup>120</sup> Yet mining authorities complained even years later that impoverished workers still risked death in order to save a few paise worth of fuel, attributing this to the fact that the "bulk of underground labour has been wholly uneducated in the dangers of the mine and has been slow to learn except by personal experience in accidents."<sup>121</sup> Any reference to the better illumination of mines, however was studiously avoided by the mining board as well as the Government.<sup>122</sup>

The company/state's efforts to delink the cause of accidents from the conditions and terms of work were immensely successful in the case of other kinds of accidents, which were easily punishable. Unplanned blasts underground were a direct result of the "irresponsible" actions of mestris and blasters, who were fined, suspended, dismissed and even sentenced to rigorous imprisonment with great regularity for not preventing hand jumper coolies from drilling into holes already containing explosives. On occasion, the mestris and blasters were not only fined, but were required to "indemnify the relatives of the deceased."<sup>123</sup> In one case, the mestri was fined Rs. 50 and also asked to serve a week's RI.<sup>124</sup> Yet here too the cause of blasts was unmistakably linked to the conditions and terms under which coolies worked. In 1921-22, there were three cases of hand jumper coolies "deepening sockets so as to gain and be paid for a few extra inches of hole drilled without counting the cost". This the Chief Mining Inspector complained, "is a *very common practice and one most difficult to eradicate* the temptation presumably being too strong."<sup>125</sup> By 1927-28 it became impossible to deny that the deaths of hand jumper coolies in unplanned blasts was directly linked to the system of piece-rated work under contractors: since "the hand jumper coolies are generally paid by the depth of the hole drilled, they are sometimes tempted to take advantage of socket holes which are not free from explosives."<sup>126</sup> In all such cases, action was taken against the mestri or blaster in charge for permitting a breach of rules. Ironically, in the South African mines, miners were faulted for just the opposite reason, i.e. for having been "overcautious with explosives". As a result, the basis for the payment of bonus was changed from footage per machine shift, and explosives consumption per foot, to a straightforward footage bonus.<sup>127</sup>

Engine drivers who were responsible for the raising and lowering of cages or bows of workers, were frequently fined, dismissed or suspended for cases of overwinding which led to snapped cables and death of those travelling in cages. At first, the Indian engine driver was considered congenitally incapable of responsibly handling "large modern winding plants": safety, it was argued, could be ensured only by replacing all Indian drivers with Europeans.<sup>128</sup> But such racism was prohibitively expensive, considering

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120 RCIMM, 1923-24, p.19.

121 Roger Horseley, "Accident Prevention, Past and Future" *KGF Bulletin*, Vol IX, No. 47, 1938, p.100. Interviews with workers who had worked with carbide lamps in the 1940s revealed not only that gangs of workers had worked out a scheme of careful co-operation which enabled every worker to save a proportion of his fuel for home consumption, but that they developed an underground sense which enabled them to move around without lights if necessary. Interviews with Devanbu, Gnanaprakasam, and I. Subramaniam, May 22, 1995.

122 Ibid; File no. 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geology. KSA.

123 RCIMM, 1923-24, p. 18.

124 Venketa Reddy vs. GOM, 10 Mys CCR, p.80, (190??)

125 RCIMM, 1921-2, p. 31, emphasis added.

126 RCIMM, 1925-26, p. 26; RCIMM 1936-37, p.26.

127 Spalding and Dixon "Visit to Witwatersrand". 22.2.

128 RCIMM, 1908-09, p. 31.

that the European employee's wage at this time was approximately 15 times the Indian employee's, and the European engine driver was paid approximately seven times more than Indian drivers.<sup>129</sup> By no stretch of imagination could the KGF mining management actually claim that European driver did seven times more work than the Indian one, so the "mythical portrait of the colonized" prevailed without question.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike cases of theft, breaches of mining rules were prosecuted by the District Magistrate on the basis of complaints from the inspectors or officials of mines, and only rarely by the police. This presented its own difficulties since "evidence obtainable is either circumstantial or of a purely expert nature".<sup>131</sup> The swifter, and sometimes harsher, penalties dealt out by the Superintendent of the mine were clearly less cumbersome as a disciplinary technique, but, more importantly, they eliminated the risk of acquittal by technically ignorant, or worse, compassionate magistrates.<sup>132</sup> The difficulties of prosecution prompted the mining board to suggest that the mere fact of an accident having occurred be taken as "prima facie evidence of negligence",<sup>133</sup> but no such drastic measures were finally adopted, although there was an increasing tendency for the superintendent of mines to adjudicate<sup>134</sup>, particularly in those cases where there were no casualties,<sup>135</sup> alongside the vigorous filing of cases in criminal courts. On occasion, the mining superintendents tempered their dispensations with a measure of mercy, but only because the Divine hand had already intervened on behalf of the company/state: the injuries suffered by the mestris or blasters themselves sometimes sufficed as just penalties for negligence.<sup>136</sup>

The impressive battery of fines, imprisonment, suspensions, and downgrading of mestris, blasters, and engine drivers did nothing to reduce the total number of serious and fatal accidents.<sup>137</sup> What was striking was the declining proportion of accidents that resulted from "negligence" and "recklessness" and the leading edge that "unavoidable causes" began to have (Table 3). Clearly, it was hardly for want of knowledge of the dangers of underground work that handjumper coolies continued to drill into existing holes<sup>138</sup> or several others plunged to their deaths by falling down unprotected shafts.<sup>139</sup> Yet by shifting the blame onto various categories of mining employees, additional expenditures on safety measures were avoided. As Onselen says of labour legislation in Rhodesia, its basic function "was to reduce the death rate to a level where it would not jeopardise labour supplies without threatening the profitability of the industry by requiring unacceptably high levels of indirect expenditure on compound inhabitants."<sup>140</sup> Similarly, it was logical for the authorities at KGF to expend time and money on investigating accidents in order to affix responsibility on workers themselves.

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129 RCIMM, 1908-09, Table on wages and salaries.

130 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* trans. Howard Greenfeld, (London: Earthscan Publications, 1990), p. 146. There were occasional words of praise for the KGF miner who "has qualities which make him cheap at the price" in Pringle, "Efficiency and Economy In the Underground Department," p. 136.

131 RCIMM, p.19, 1898.

132 R1/1/1066 Foreign Department, Confidential C Internal Branch, Sect. A 1905, India Office Library (IOL).

133 RCIMM, 1898.

134 File no. 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geology, KSA; RCIMM, 1914-15, p. 19, 1920-21, p.30; 1935-36, p.35.

135 RCIMM, 1926-27, p. 21.

136 RCIMM, 1927-28, p. 25-26; 1935-36, p.35.

137 L.Lubett, "The control of handjumper stoping on Nandydurg Mines", *KGF Bulletin* Vol. 13, No.67. (Dec.1947), p.237ff.

138 *Ibid*; RCIMM, 1936-37, p.24.

139 File no 101-35, Sl.no.1-6, Geology, 1935, KSA.

140 Onselen, *Chibaro*, p.67.

Meanwhile, the first death from heat exhaustion occurred at a depth of 8120 feet in Champion Reef where temperatures were 115°F, (dry) and 96°F (wet).<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, the company/state which was ordinarily quite sensitive to numbers and figures relating to profits, dividends and royalties and the rates of gold on the market, continued to attribute the persistently high rate of accidents to "personal" or "human" failings. Therefore, any concern for the mining workers could only be expressed in terms of even greater regulations and stricter fines.<sup>142</sup> The successful prosecution of miners and blasters for breaches of mining rules, said Charles Todhunter, Private Secretary to the Maharaja, required a degree of technical competence that the District Magistrate sorely lacked; at the same time, those punishments given departmentally were too low (sometimes as low as Rs.3) to act as a sufficient deterrent.<sup>143</sup>

The Mining Board also studiously ignored the links between the organisation of piece work under the contractor system, low wages and accidents, priding itself instead on its safety first campaigns<sup>144</sup> which were pursued in several languages.<sup>145</sup> Those who stubbornly refused to obey the safety rules were blamed for their own infantile ways, their inherent unteachability that acted as an obstacle. Thus A. Stephenson, in an article on "Action and Reaction in Industry", pointed out the dangers of printing posters showing the right *and* the wrong way of doing things: "with children and relatively uneducated labourers", he said, "examples of the wrong way should not be given".<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, little or no attention was paid by the KGF Mining and Metallurgical Society to the tacit skills that must have developed amongst KGF miners through the long years served underground. The Durham coal miners' rich brogue, for instance has yielded important glimpses of the well-honed skills of miners. Thus "pitsense" refers to

a kind of instinct and intuition coupled with actual experience of many underground happenings. An ability to take notice of minute warning signs, sounds and smells.<sup>147</sup>

In colonial situations, pervasive myths about the poor skills of workers and the division of work on ethnic lines have suppressed from view the equivalent of "pitsense". But the silence of an archive can by no means be taken as a historical absence, as recent investigations of "pitsense" among South African miners undertaken both by union officials and historians has clearly shown.<sup>148</sup>

So relentlessly and with such conviction did the company/state blame the child like qualities of the labourers for accidents that the historian must necessarily strain her ear to hear a word of praise for the "extraordinarily small number of blasting accidents in proportion to the number of holes drilled", words, we are told, that could well have come from "anyone who rides much in skips."<sup>149</sup> Such sensitivity to the ingenuity of the miners labouring in difficult conditions was considered misplaced, and even an obstacle to the process of producing manageable docile workers, who deserved supervision at work as well as in their neighbourhoods.<sup>150</sup>

141 RCIMM, 1939-40, p.10.

142 RCIMM, 1936-37, p. 26.

143 Todhunter to Mirza, Dewan of Mysore, September 8, 1937, File no. 31-37, Sl.no 1-5, Geology, KSA.

144 RCIMM, 1936-37, p. 10.

145 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p. 68.

146 *KGF Bulletin*, Vol. VI, No. 3, June Dec. 1932, p. 74.

147 Dave Douglass, "Pit Talk in County Durham" in Raphael Samuel ed. *Miners Quarrymen and Saltworkers*, History Workshop series, (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1977) pp. 297-348, esp. 334-5.

148 Jean Leger and Monyoola Mothibell, "Talking Rocks": Pit sense amongst South African Miners" *Labour: Capital and Society* 21.2 (November 1988), pp. 222-37.

149 Pringle "Efficiency and Economy in Underground Work", p. 138.

150 Pringle's complimentary remarks were sharply challenged by C.N.Kelth, (p. 145). Not surprisingly, we do not hear from the likes of Pringle again, since the *KGF Bulletin* thereafter scrupulously avoided publishing such articles in its pages.

### 3. The closer "penal mapping of the social body"

In addition to accidents, there were some disruptions of the production process that the formidable barrier of fines and punishments failed to prevent. The bubonic plague virus, for example, showed scant respect for barracks-like disciplinary codes, and in 1898, not only took away the lives of several hundred workers, but led to a mass exodus from the area by those who felt the effects of plague as much as those who resented anti-plague measures.<sup>151</sup> The periodic visitations of cholera and small pox similarly defied surveillance, stealthily devastating workers' lives and homes, while threatening to flare up into a full fledged epidemic. Even the most scrupulous watch on the activities of workers in the mines could be undone in the neighbourhoods, where the viruses harboured by the labouring people escaped detection. Surveillance measures therefore had to reach beyond the workplace into the residential areas, in order to supervise, reorganise and sanitise, where necessary, the daily lives of workers. But here too, there were aspects of the workers' lives that simply could not be transformed; malnutrition, for example, was dismissed as "a problem not confined to KGF or even India" and therefore "beyond our control."<sup>152</sup> Referring to jute mill labour in Bengal, Dipesh Chakrabarty has explained why there were certain "blind spots" in the employer's vision of labour conditions: "the workers' health became a question of epidemics and not one of nutrition; in this connection sanitation became a matter of interest but not the workers' general standard of living."<sup>153</sup> The nutritional status of the KGF workers only once became a serious concern for mining authorities: in 1919, a severe epidemic of gastro-enteritis broke out as a result of post war increases in food grain prices that forced workers to use Burmese rice of inferior quality which fermented too soon.<sup>154</sup>

When the plague broke out in 1898, 714 people lost their lives, and nearly 5000 fled KGF.<sup>155</sup> The illness seemed to thrive in the primeval ooze of the workers' colonies, and the alleged natural proclivities of mining labour did little to help. "The septic nature of the first case," the Chief inspector complained, "its termination fatally before the development of the bubo, the facilities the cooly had with his number of aliases to escape observation and the tactics followed by the people of Marikuppam bazaars of secretly disposing of dead bodies helped the infection to take root."<sup>156</sup> The evidence, provided on the very same page of that report that "there was not a single case [of plague] among the scavengers of Mysore Mines" did not urge the authorities to revise belief that insanitary conditions inevitably led to plague; instead, some people were merely classified as "plague proof".<sup>157</sup>

One possible response to such recurrent scourges was to provide well ordered housing for mining labourers that would lend itself to periodic inspections, disinfection, even destruction if the need arose. Although woefully inadequate in meeting the needs of the nearly 30,000 workers who were then employed in the mines, by 1904-05, 1485 huts were built in 11 colonies, to house 5400 people who would otherwise have "swarmed into villages carrying with them the necessary attendant rowdiness and evils of overcrowding".<sup>158</sup> Yet even in 1930, only 100 of the 10,500 houses in the mining area were of masonry;

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151 RCIMM, 1899, p. 16-17.

152 Anthony Caplan, "Heat Exhaustion on the KGF" *KGF Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 48, (December, 1939), p.124.

153 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, p. 95.

154 File no.6-19, Sl. no. 38, 1919-20; Palace Papers, KSA.

155 RCIMM, 1899, p.30.

156 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

157 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

158 RCIMM, 1904-5, p.19.

most ordinary labourers lived in what became notorious as "aeroplane huts", so called since the bamboo and thatt they were made of barely withstood the rigors of the windy season.<sup>159</sup> Indeed the flimsiness of the thatt huts was rather brazenly defended in 1930 and even as late as 1945 as a necessity to ensure that they could be torn down and burnt during an epidemic.<sup>160</sup>

Even this marginal investment in the construction of workers' lines greatly enhanced the surveillance powers of the sanitary overseer. For their part, the labourers paid a heavy price for such pathetic protection from the elements; they lost their domestic freedom.<sup>161</sup> Their floors were periodically dug up to catch and exterminate rats.<sup>162</sup> Failure to demolish houses that were condemned as "infected" became a punishable crime.<sup>163</sup> Small kitchen gardens that were carefully tended by the workers' families failed to inspire the zealous sanitary overseer who unhesitatingly destroyed them as potential "mosquito breeding-grounds".<sup>164</sup>

The Sanitation bye-laws that were included in the Mysore Mines Regulations invested the KGF Sanitary Board with powers to prosecute for any breaches.<sup>165</sup> For such a "crime" as failure to report small pox in their families, David and seven others were convicted in 1901.<sup>166</sup> Chowriappa was sentenced to two months RI for failing to report that his sister had small pox. The Mysore Chief Court, to which Chowriappa appealed, struck down the conviction as not only illegal, but "unnecessarily severe and harsh."<sup>167</sup> But since the District Magistrate did not forward the case in time, the sentence had already been served and the correction of illegalities was therefore made impossible.

A range of everyday acts, such as slaughtering animals, thus became liable for punishment. Even more baffling to the mining population, a whole range of new behaviours was mandated by the sanitary rules, while non-compliance was made punishable. Punishments were enforced against those who failed to have their children vaccinated by mining authorities' who were anxious to stamp out epidemics and ensure a stable and uninfected workforce. This did not prevent officials in the mines from complaining about the refusal of the mining population to allow the public health establishment to penetrate and reorganise their "religious and caste ideals" in the interests of "better living conditions":<sup>168</sup> such valiant efforts should after all have been welcome instead of being resolutely opposed.

159 The term was used by local KGF people and reported in MA Sreenivasan's report of 1931; however, the Mining Board raised strenuous objections to the use of the term in the report, and it was dropped. File no. 369-30, Sl. no. 1-3,9, Industries and Commerce, KSA. Contrast Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p. 51.

180 Sreenivasan *Labour in India*, p. 53; the argument was repeated by the mining authorities in 1945, when the Labour Investigation Committee conducted its enquiry. S.R.Deshpande, "Report of an enquiry into the conditions in the old mining industry in India" (Delhi:1946), p. 14.

161 Michele Perrot draws attention to the uses served by company built worker's colonies in controlling strikes. *Workers on Strike: France 1871-1890*, (New Haven: Yale University Press) p. 254.

162 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p.44; RCIMM, 1909-10, p. 25; J. Fitzmaurice, "Sanitation" *KGF Bulletin* Vol. IV, No. 23, (Jan-June, 1928, p. 171; Administration report of the KGF Sanitary Board, 1934-35, p.8.

163 Administration Reports of the KGF Sanitary Board, 1924-36, KSA.

164 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p.55.

165 Mysore Mines Act, 1906, in *Mysore Law Codes*, Vol. I, pp. 539-540.

166 6 Mys CCR p. 98-9, (1901).

167 In re Chowriappa, 6 Mys CCR, p.100, (1901).

168 Fitzmaurice, "Sanitation", p. 184.

Nevertheless, through the combined invasive efforts of the rat gang, the prickly pear gang, and the incinerator gang, the KGF lines were kept free of major infectious diseases. Meanwhile, other afflictions that arose directly from the conditions of work on the mines were given short shrift. The existence of heat stroke, common on the South African Gold Mines was strenuously denied and only "heat exhaustion" or collapse underground was admitted as a problem.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, so uniquely equipped was the Kolar miner to work under high temperatures underground that "conditions considered hot and oppressive in the average mine in Britain may be pleasant to the acclimatized worker of the tropics."<sup>170</sup> Although some concern for the "inadequacy of sanitary arrangements underground" was voiced as early as 1903 when the prevalence of hookworm infestation was discovered, a detailed investigation of the disease was not undertaken until 1937-38.<sup>171</sup> Finally, although by 1930, at least 100 employees were annually Invalided and sent home for miner's phthisis,<sup>172</sup> the existence of silicosis on the mines was suppressed from public view and excluded from the list of compensated diseases in the Mysore Workman's Compensation Act of 1928. Only when M.A. Sreenivasan detected the cover-up attempt in 1930 did official investigations begin, in the face of threats from the mining authorities that they would have to close shop if the disease was compensated.<sup>173</sup> The normal briskness with which the Mining Board extracted concessions from the Government was conspicuous by its absence, and even the Government did not seem overly hurried in its investigations. Finally, it was only in 1940, a full 12 years after the Mysore Workmen's Compensation Act was passed, that silicosis became compensated.<sup>174</sup>

If the microbes that threatened to disrupt work on the mines were weakened by the relentless activity of the officials of the sanitary board, so too were other "undesirables". The ordered coolly lines that enabled sanitation of the biological kind were also handy in weeding out unsavoury characters who could lurk undetected in the nooks and crannies of the mining area. These were professional thieves and squatters and, especially after the 1920s, those who were willing to charge worker discontent with a new and directed energy. If mere microbes were conquered and subjugated only by the sternest of measures, how much more difficult to control or diffuse were strikes and riots, those mass manifestations of social or political discontent which were disruptive in the extreme.

#### 4. Evicting the "undesirable"

The detection and eviction of "undesirables" received the attention of the framers of the Mining regulation right at the outset. Section 17 of the Mysore Mines regulation authorised the Superintendent of Police at KGF to ask those "considered undesirable" to quit the mining area within 24 hours, after which he could only remain with permission from the Superintendent of Police.<sup>175</sup> So integral was the physical removal of the dangerous classes to the overall effort of thwarting crime that the sharp drop of thefts in 1907 was immediately attributed to the removal of "dangerous characters from the field who have been warned off as undesirables and have not returned."<sup>176</sup> This section was pursued most vigorously

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169 Anthony Caplan, "Heat Exhaustion on KGF" *KGF Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 48, (1939), p.119.

170 A.Caplan and J.Lindsay, "An experimental investigation of the effects of high temperatures on the efficiency of workers in deep mines." *KGF Bulletin* Vol. XIII, No.65, September 1946, p.87.

171 W.B.Rowntree, "Hookworm Infestation", *KGF Bulletin* Vol. X, No. 49-53, p. 94

172 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p. 76.

173 Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p. xii.

174 RCIMM, 1939-40, p. 27.

175 Mysore Mines Act, 1906.

176 RCIMM, 1906-07, p.45.

and appeared to produce dramatic results<sup>177</sup> unencumbered by legal procedure and uninterrupted in its effects.<sup>178</sup> Combined after 1913 with the strong measures against the Criminal tribes, Section 17's obvious success in scaring away "bad characters" was evident in the fall in the number of cases registered under its provisions.<sup>179</sup>

Armed with a new found power to declare any person "undesirable", the company/state could guard against the possible reinscription of popular illegalities within a broader political framework. In 1923-24, the Chief mining inspector reported, not without satisfaction, that relations between employer and employee were cordial because "known bad characters and habitual offenders are liable to be served undesirable notices".<sup>180</sup> The "thief" thus became "rabble rouser" by a slight, almost imperceptible shift, since economic crimes could and frequently did, shade into political activity especially when isolated illegal practices were brought into a unified framework during a riot or a strike.<sup>181</sup> "Undesirability" in KGF was a quality that could be attached to a variety of persons: actual or potential thieves, political troublemakers, but also mestris or blasters who had been discharged from a particular mine for negligence or recklessness. Mestris and blasters travelled with ease between mines, even after they were dismissed, and, despite identification checks, succeeded "in obtaining employment in another mine under an assumed name". What was more, "with natives it is not likely that such men will be easily detected..."<sup>182</sup> Section 17 helped the mining authorities to immobilise such artful dodgers.

By and large, even liberal judges were willing to interpret the law relating to undesirables in favour of the mining authorities.<sup>183</sup> Not content with the scope of its application, the mining board soon requested that it be "invested with the power to issue notices which will be operative throughout the field" as opposed to the mining area alone.<sup>184</sup> In 1916, the ever obliging Mysore state permitted the provisions of Section 17 to be extended "to Robertsonpet, Andersonpet and other notified areas adjacent to the mines" enabling the police to deal more firmly with the "gold thieves, and receivers who resided therein".<sup>185</sup>

Yet even such a muscular provision as Section 17 could not entirely prevent various forms of subterfuge. Besides, by a very strict reading of the term "residence" at KGF, the administrators of the law sometimes argued that mere re-entry of a person who had been sent out as "undesirable" could not constitute an offence.<sup>186</sup> When enhanced vigilance could so easily be thwarted by judicial quibbles about the meaning of the term "residence", the demand was immediately made to replace "residence" with the word "presence".<sup>187</sup> Beginning in the 1920s, after all, a new spectre had begun haunting KGF, the spectre of political activists and labour organisers who were, under the aegis of a fledgling Congress party, warmly

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177 RCIMM, 1919-10, p. 20.

178 RCIMM, 1910-11, p.17.

179 RCIMM, 1913-14, p. 14.

180 RCIMM, 1923-24, p. 26; file no. 12-11, Sl. no.1&3, Legislative, KSA.

181 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 275.

182 RCIMM, 1901-02, p. 2; see also PMRA, 1907, p. 9; PMRA, 1912, p.194-5.

183 Thus Chandrasekhara Aiyer commenting on Ramana's return to the mining area to collect money he was owed said that "section 17 is plainly intended to prevent bad characters (or more correctly, persons directed to quit a mine) not merely from congregating together ..but even from settling their foot upon what is mining property. It may be the provision is a very stringent one, but then it is only one of several stringent provisions contained in a regulation which is itself an exceptional piece of legislation..." Ramana alias Kollan vs GOM, 13 Mys CCR, 1908, p. 124.

184 PMRA 1907, 99; PMRA 1912, 194-5.

185 PMRA 1916, p. 6.

186 Ramanna alias Kollan vs. GOM, 13 Mys CCR, p.64 (1908); GOM vs. Annamalay alias Gundal, 20 Mys CCR, p. 292 (1915); Nadamuni vs. GOM 12 Mys CCR, p. 64, (1907).

187 PMRA, 1916.

received by workers and students elsewhere. Student riots in Bangalore and Mysore in 1922 inspired several labour organisers from the neighbouring Presidency to make forays into mines and factories of Mysore. In KGF, they were long without success, thanks to the prompt "ejection" of political and labour "agitators" by repeated recourse to the provisions of Section 17.<sup>188</sup>

Yet it was only when the police, under orders from the mining authorities, swung into action against political "undesirables" that the Mysore intelligentsia chose to raise its voice in protest. A measure that should have long provoked outcries from those committed to "democracy" and the rights of labour only now gripped their attention.<sup>189</sup> In 1922, T.M.Ramachandra Rao and K.Rame Gowda complained in the Representative Assembly that the mining regulation was very drastic. "Undesirables" they said, "are evicted without an enquiry and there is no right of appeal. *The term undesirable is also not defined.*"<sup>190</sup> The government response was predictable, and dropped even the fig leaf of disinterestedness by admitting that "exceptional cases require exceptional remedies"<sup>191</sup> while disregarding the protests of members.

But not for long. Pressure began mounting once more to clearly define the range of people who could be classed as "undesirable" and then extorted. In June 1925, a resolution moved in the Mysore Legislative Council sought safeguards against misuse of Section 17.<sup>192</sup> No revocation of the offending section was being demanded, no stirring speech was made for the rights of labourers. What was being sought was a freshly defined Section 17, one that would be more discriminatory in its targets. The amendment would provide for show cause notices to be issued to "undesirables" and additionally "for such orders having effect *in the case of subjects of His Maharaja paying Kandayam (revenue)* only for six months,"<sup>193</sup> a concession that Mohommed Abbas Khan wished to have extended to merchants as well.<sup>194</sup> Men of property, who were after all the first to be enfranchised, could hardly be lumped together with petty criminals and deceivers. Among those who were classed as undesirables, along with those who were suspected of or convicted for theft or receiving mining material, were the "disorganisers of labour" and others whose very presence in the field was "considered dangerous or not safe".<sup>195</sup> The legislators hoped to urge the Government to keep the labour organiser out of the purview of the law.<sup>196</sup> Others who were harassed under Section 17, however, fully deserved their fate: one legislator remarked that people only went to KGF for "trade or theft" so the police deserved all help in thwarting criminality rather than being restrained.<sup>197</sup>

The amendment was not passed, but the total strike at KGF in 1930 produced fresh anxieties among mining authorities, state authorities, and the fledgling Congress. How, despite the prevalence of a great deal of vigilance, had the solidarity of the workers been maintained? How had the leaders remained unidentified?<sup>198</sup> The question of amending the mining regulation was revived in order to clarify who came under the ambit of "undesirable". This time, there was a forceful opponent in the Assembly, K. Chengalraya

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188 Fortnightly Report for the fortnight ending February 15, 1922, Crown Representative Records (CRR), KSA.

189 We may note here that the early indignation that was expressed in the Kannada press against the indiscriminate deployment of the Mysore Mining Act ~~all~~ but evaporated by the 1910s.

190 PMRA, 1922, October, p. 29. emphasis added.

191 Ibid.

192 PMRA, Oct-Nov. 1928, p. 53.

193 Ibid, emphasis added.

194 Ibid, p. 55.

195 Ibid, p. 54.

196 The interventions of D.S.Mallappa, B.Narasinga Rao, in PMRA, June 1929.

197 PMRA, June, 1929, p.20.

198 Nair "Representing Labour in Old Mysore", PE 73-86.

Reddy, who spoke out in defence of "the fundamental rights of citizens."<sup>199</sup> Not only did the act lead to the "victimisations of butlers, peons and honest women", he said, but the very definition of "disorganiser of labour" as "undesirable" was odious and decidedly partisan. "What from the labourer's point of view would be a perfectly legitimate organisation of labour" he thundered, "would perhaps from the capitalists point of view be a disorganisation of the same." This did not shake the belief of the government members that KGF labourers were drawn from "the lowest strata of society who required stiff punishments"; besides, mining labourers were not even citizens, since they had no "settled abode or vested interests in land."<sup>200</sup> Section 17 continued to have its uses well into the 1940s, and even when mine labourers could no longer be insulated from the activities of organisers in 1940-41, the mining authorities found it easy to issue mine out notices to eight labour leaders, who were forced to function from a union office across the border in Rallabudugur village of Madras Presidency.<sup>201</sup>

Until the 1940s, the KGF workers had few sympathisers in other parts of Mysore who would work to guarantee them a measure of dignity in their daily working lives. In part, there was a pervasive feeling that the inhabitants of KGF were alien birds of passage which must have made communications difficult. But even when the outsider did become interested in the conditions of labour in KGF<sup>202</sup> it was only when the political dividends seemed promising. Until 1940, the KGF labourer relied largely on his own meagre resources, with recourse to few avenues of justice. What notion of justice after all could be upheld when laws flagrantly violated the principle of equality and operated on the rule of racial difference? Even when it was acknowledged that European millhands would "not submit as the natives to be searched" and thereby enjoyed "excellent opportunities" for secreting gold out of the mines, little was done to stop them.<sup>203</sup> The well organised smuggling of gold out of the mines was enabled by the operation of racial difference. Paralleling the superbly documented actions of the police in suppressing subaltern criminality was the massive undocumented criminality of European officials and employees. Evidence of such organised crime was amply available in the disproportionately large number of goldsmiths who opened shop in an economically poor area. The illicit trade in gold was managed by several intermediaries who frequented the houses of officials such as butlers, barbers, tailors and bakers whose rise in fortunes within short spans of time became part of the folklore of KGF, and is remembered to the present day.<sup>204</sup> The decline in the number of cases of theft must surely have impressed the shareholders in Britain, but they testified to the ingenuity with which gold continued to be smuggled out of the mines. Given the almost complete control that the management had over the flow of information from the mines, only the memories of residents and visitors serve as testimony to this sphere of illegality.<sup>205</sup> P. Srinivasan who came to KGF as a communist organiser in 1943-44 describes the nexus between the police, the Marwari moneylenders, the goldsmiths and the European management who employed certain workers to do their dirty work. The police often arrested certain workers in order to show that they maintained the law, while making sure that the men who had served time were rehabilitated in the elaborate machinery for disposal of stolen gold.<sup>206</sup>

199 File no 30-31, Sl.No Notes, Legislative, KSA

200 Ibid, Note of the First Member of Council. In 1948, the Labour Investigation Committee found that a good 70 % of the KGF labourers had served for more than 5 years in the mines, and of this, 40% had served more than 10 years. See S.R.Deshpande, "Report of an enquiry into the conditions of labour in the Gold Mining Industry", p. 6. This hardly testified to Imparnnant Interests in the area.

201 FR for the fortnight ending January 15, 1941, CRR, KSA; Interview, Shourle Dass, January 5, 1995; Devanbu, January 4, 1995.

202 As was Chengalraya Reddy in 1930. See Sreenivasan, *Labour in India*, p. x.

203 Secret Notes on Mysore, (September 1903), Resident of Mysore, CRR, KSA.

204 Communication from I Loganathan, May 22, 1995. Smuggling of gold continues to be a problem to the present day and for the most part occurs with the active connivance of the senior officers. Interview with Chinna Shourle, Trade Unionist, January 5, 1995.

205 K.S.Seetharaman *Kolar Thangavayal Varalarai, 1956 Varai*, (KGF: Elushun Electronics, 1989), pp. 58-59.

206 P. Srinivasan, *Ennathu Varkay Varalaru* (Maraimalainagar: Published by the author, 1991), p. 281.

The repressive regime clearly engendered its own traffic in illegalities, profitably pursued by those who escaped the provisions of the law. Even a sanitary overseer, Atkinson, who accepted a bribe from a man in whose house incriminating "mining materials" were found, could not be prosecuted since he was the administrator of the sanitary laws!<sup>207</sup>

The arbitrariness of the law was the cause of bitter complaint well into the 1940s,<sup>208</sup> and the Court frequently commented on the illegalities of procedure that vitiated many trials.<sup>209</sup> In the case of a mestri who was prosecuted for having failed to prevent a blast that led to the death of his workmen, the prosecution produced just one witness, whose evidence was "mostly hearsay".<sup>210</sup> Where foreign overseers and engineers could abuse, even threaten the Indian mine worker with impunity,<sup>211</sup> where lesser penalties were inflicted on Europeans who assaulted than on the Indians who acted in self defence<sup>212</sup> there was little to convince the Indian labourer that the law protected his interests as well. The law functioned as yet another reminder that under colonial rule, the migrant, lower caste and propertyless Tamil labourer was certainly not a candidate for any privileges that were enjoyed by the Europeans or the richer class of Indians.

Despite this, there were also frequent reminders that the dense network of punitive regulations, administered by a formidable phalanx of supervisors, overseers, and magistrates, could not always guarantee the docility of labour. The KGF labourer recognised the severely circumscribed limits within which he could defend his dignity, and built up a small but spirited repertoire of actions that he could deploy to his advantage: occasionally working the "due process of law" to his advantage, skillfully evading detection through the widespread use of anonymity, and occasionally appealing to the supra-power of the Dewan as the representative of the Maharaja to tame the intemperate force of the company/state's repressive apparatuses. At other, more unexpected, times, the indignation of the workers found more direct, and violent, expression particularly during riots and strikes in which the agents of surveillance themselves were targeted for attack.

## SECTION - II

### 1. The "due process of law"

The KGF workers had no reason to expect justice in the District Magistrate's court when the laws were weighted so heavily against them. But the outcome of the court case could not entirely be predicted, for how else could the persuasive power of Law manifest itself except through vestiges of "impartiality"? There were moments when the law held ambiguous possibilities even for those prosecuted under it: as early as 1905, J. Bourdillon, the Resident of Mysore complained that "local magistrates put obstacles in the way of convictions for theft of gold".<sup>213</sup> The superintendents of mines also frequently expressed their impatience with the slow, tedious turns of the law and often favoured departmental punishments which

207 File no.3 Sl. no. 1&4, Legislative, KSA; File no. 3, Sl. no. 2,3,5, Legislative, KSA.

208 Thus, the workers of Champion Reef Mines complained in 1920 against the arbitrary fines imposed on sinkmen who came to the surface when they felt faint underground. File no 111-20, Sl.no. 1-10, CB, KSA; RCIMM, 1940-41, 24.

209 Mohammed Mastan vs. GOM, 12 Mys CCR, p. 57 (1907); In re Chowrlappa, 6 Mys CCR, p. 100, (1901).

210 Venketa Reddy vs GOM, 10 Mys CCR, p.80 (1905).

211 FR for the fortnight ending September 30, 1934, CRR, KSA.

212 RCIMM, 1941, p.25.

213 R1/1/1066 Foreign Department Confidential, B Internal Branch, Section A 1905, IOL.

could be meted out more summarily than the procedures of the court,<sup>214</sup> chafing at obstacles placed in their efforts to check the epidemic of crime.<sup>215</sup> In 1937, Charles Todhunter, private secretary to the Maharaja of Mysore, attributed the continued prevalence of accidents in the gold mines to the overall failure to convincingly and effectively convict those committing breaches of mining rules.<sup>216</sup> "The man responsible will frequently plead guilty before the Inspector [of mines] who knows the facts and figures surrounding circumstances but if put on trial will engage a vakil to do his best to confuse a magistrate who has never been underground" and thereby obtain an acquittal.<sup>217</sup> Worse yet, Todhunter complained, the fines levied by the courts or superintendents were too mild to prevent repetition of the "crime" or to serve as stern warnings against careless work.

No doubt, the fears of a paralysis in the administration of the law were vastly exaggerated: had the judicial system in the KGF been as unproductive as these statements suggest, the Mining Board would have more than amply armed itself with other sterner measures. On the contrary, not only was the conviction rate consistently high, the Chief Inspector of Mines had occasion as late as 1928 to report that "prosecutions for breaches of mining rules in connection with accidents have been *successfully conducted* in criminal courts."<sup>218</sup> But there were early indications that the "due process of law" to which the mining authorities paid scant attention, could be a stumbling block to achieving even higher conviction rates. Subbachari, a goldsmith, was acquitted by the chief court, despite being in unlawful possession of Golhally sponge gold because "Golhally was not included in the notified area."<sup>219</sup> Siiversmith Subbachary was able to convince the Magistrate that the provisions of the mining regulation were strictly applicable only to goldsmiths.<sup>220</sup> In the case of Abdul Rahim, a tailor who was found in possession of 30 pink stearine candles, the prosecution could not prove that they were in his exclusive possession."<sup>221</sup> Some were acquitted on the grounds that what was found in their possession was not "mining material."<sup>222</sup> others for having been prosecuted in areas that fell outside the jurisdiction of the mining regulation,<sup>223</sup> or sometimes simply because the proper legal procedures were not followed in bringing accused people to trial.<sup>224</sup>

Even the smallest number of cases that were decided in favour of the accused person under the mining regulation therefore had its uses in maintaining the illusion of a "disinterested" law. But the wheels of the law moved too slowly and told too heavily on the meagre resources of the impoverished labourer. Most cases that went on appeal to the Chief Court were cases involving a better endowed class, men of means, who could "find a purse and a lawyer"<sup>225</sup>: goldsmiths, contractors and shopowners. Even so, cases concerning goldsmiths came to the High Court on appeal with drastically reduced frequency after the 1910s, signifying that they had made their peace with the suppliers of gold and other intermediaries such as the police, settling into a comfortable and profitable network of illegalities by this time.

214 RCIMM, 1906-17, p. 45.

215 PMRA, 1923, p. 72. The Inspector General of Police spoke in 1929 of the difficulty of producing evidence before magistrates, PMRA, 1929, June, p.205.

216 File no 31-37, Sl. no. 1-5, Geology KSA.

217 *Ibid.*

218 RCIMM, 1927-28, 20, (emphasis added).

219 Subbachari vs. GOM, 3 Mys CCR p.124, (1898).

220 GOM vs. Subbachary 3 Mys CCR, p/141, (1898).

221 Abdul Rahim vs GOM, 9 Mys CCR 100 (1904). Also Abdul Razack vs GOM, 5 Mys CCR, p. 185 (1900).

222 Annama alias Marl vs. GOM, 12 MYs CCR p. 58, (1907). Mohommed Mastan vs GOM 12 Mys CCR p. 156, (1907)

223 In Re Vadavelachari 10 Mys CCR 158 (1905).

224 In re David 6 Mys CCR, p. 98 (1901); In re Chowriappa 6 Mys CCR p.97 (1901); In the matter of Nadamuni 12 Mys CCR. p.64 (1907); Venketa Reddy vs. GOM, 10 Mys CCR 80 (1905); Munisamachari and 2 others vs GOM 12 Mys CCR p.75 (1907); Chennappa alias Chengachari and another vs GOM 12 Mys CCR p. 78 (1907).

225 The phrase is E.P.Thompson's, *Whigs and Hunters*, p. 28.

In contrast, a low caste cooly such as Murugesham could be speedily dismissed from his job and even "extradited" to British India.<sup>226</sup> Others, such as Chowriappa, who were too harshly punished under the sanitary byelaws, had already served their sentences when they were acquitted by the higher court.<sup>227</sup> It was not surprising then, that workers sometimes chose to express their resentment in more direct ways, through riots and strikes against those who were seen as the very embodiment of the vicious regime of surveillance on the mines.

## 2. Attacks on the agents of surveillance

In 1907, riots broke out in the Mysore mines cooly lines following the molestation of a woman named Palliam by four Punjabi watchmen. The watchmen did not spare even the protesting husband, Madurai, and dragged him off to their quarters,<sup>228</sup> and when several of Madurai's mates came to rescue him from their clutches, went on rampage through the cooly lines, dragging away two other men in order to prevent them from filing any complaints.<sup>229</sup> Even after these two men were released, the indignant coolies came as a large crowd the next day and attacked the Punjabis with stones, leading to a full scale riot. The task of placating the enraged coolies was not easy since "the coolies could not name any Punjabis and had to identify them."<sup>230</sup> The coolies only dispersed when they were assured that the Punjabi lines would be moved away from the cooly lines.

Two days later it became obvious that the general resentment against all the watch and ward staff was growing and spreading to new sites instead of subsiding. Presuming, and not without reason, that the Punjabis had been treated too leniently, the coolies of Ribbensdale shaft refused to go down to work on December 28, 1907, when they saw several Punjabis taking their place at the shaft heads in the afternoon. Instead, "stones began to be thrown first at the Punjabis and the picking floor and at the Taylor's and Crocker's Shafts, and later at the police and the Europeans".<sup>231</sup> This continued for a while, until police forces swung into action in the cooly lines, arresting a few and marching them off to the police station. The restive crowd finally began to disperse due to the intervention of the Deputy Commissioner of Kolar, and after the KGF Rifle Volunteers "advanced upon the crowd in extended order".<sup>232</sup>

The court's investigations, in cases filed against the Punjabis for the first riot and against the coolies for the second, revealed that the Tamil workers clearly resented the molestation of the woman Palliam. However, there was also "a feeling of resentment generally for the way in which they [the Punjabis] had been conducting the search of coolies at the shaft heads in the various mines *for some time past*."<sup>233</sup> The Deputy Commissioner assured the workers that although "their charges against the Punjabis in general were unreasonable" all specific complaints would be carefully investigated and the culprits "brought to justice".<sup>234</sup>

Some efforts were made to put a greater distance between the Punjabis' residential lines and the cooly lines, thereby reducing the undue and offensive interest that the watchmen, separated for long periods of time from their families, took in the women from Tamil cooly families. Yet there was no significant

226 File no. 84-02, Sl. no 1-4, Courts, 1902-03, KSA.

227 In re Chowriappa, 6 Mys CCR. p. 100, (1901).

228 File no. 125-07, Sl. no. 1-17, Police, KSA.

229 S.M.Pritchard to Deputy Commmlssloner, Kolar District, Iblid.

230 Judgement, Criminal Case number 360 of 1907-08, January 2, 1908.

231 Judgement, Criminal Case number 372 of 1907-08.

232 Iblid.

233 Iblid., District Magistrate to Officiating Secretary, Government of Mysore, January 17, 1908 (emphasis added).

234 Proceedings of the Government of Mysore, No. J 2855-57-Pol, 125-07, March 18, 1908.

change in the composition of the watch and ward staff for the next three decades. Not surprisingly, in 1935, when more than 3000 men struck work in the Mysore Mines to protest against the introduction of new bonus rates, the strikers attacked the Punjabi lines and tried to "disable those guarding mining property", injuring as many as 11 Punjabi watchmen. Yet the mining authorities were always better equipped, and in a move that outdid the violence of the labourers, instructed the police to open fire on the agitating workers, resulting in the deaths of two.<sup>235</sup>

Any occasion for resentment against the company could turn against the Punjabi watch and ward staff, who were among those whose very appearance, so distinct from the mass of Tamil labouring people, only heightened the hatred that the working population harboured against the daily search routines, and against the menacing attitudes of the security staff even when off duty.<sup>236</sup> At such moments, the naked hostility of the labourers to the deployment of power in the mines revealed itself with a force that was alarming, and remained undeterred by pleas of the company/state to seek other, less violent, channels of protest, and unmindful of the consequences. When the heavy hand of the law appeared to strike against the labourers with such consistency, "taking the law into their own hands" was the only way of getting even. On such occasions, the persuasive powers of the mining authorities reached their limits, forcing them to turn to pure repression, as they did in 1907, when they indiscriminately arrested people from the coolie lines.

Over the years, the long suffering labourer himself recognised the power of collective action in extracting concessions, and in restoring a sense of justice to life on the mines. In 1941, a partial strike affecting the Mysore Mines and the Champion Reef mines began when a European miner who had assaulted an Indian workman, and another European agent who had abused an Indian underground coolie were fined lightly; the striking workers were not satisfied with such mild punishment and demanded dismissal of the Europeans.<sup>237</sup> Repeated assurances from the District Magistrate and the Chief Inspector of Mines who "explained to them that there were courts of law to prosecute the European miner" failed to impress the Indian workers, who remained on strike for eight days, resuming work only when they were assured of justice.<sup>238</sup>

These were but occasional challenges to the operations of the law in KGF. For the most part, the machinery of justice, though formally in the domain of the state, was kept well-oiled in the interests of the mining company and left little room for illusion among the workers. As a pamphlet brought out in 1947 for the AITUC session at Calcutta pointed out, there was little to distinguish the autocracy of the company from the despotism of the state.<sup>239</sup> There were some rare moments when the miners appealed to the supra-power of the Dewan, the representative of the Maharaja, who alone, it was felt could loosen the excessively tight grip that the companies kept on the workers. The most spectacular instance of such intervention was during the 1930 general strike, which was called off only after the Dewan, who toured the mines on the 17th day, assured workers that he would effect immediate changes in the company policy.<sup>240</sup> By 1940, when strenuous efforts were being made to establish a union in the face of severe

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235 File no 981-35, Sl. no. 1-3, Residency Files, NAI; FR for the fortnight ending August 15, 1935, CRR, KSA.

236 The incident concerning Pallam began with one of the Punjabi men "poking her basket" in a manner that implied she was hiding something.

237 RCIMM, 1940-41, p. 25-6.

238 Ibid. FR for the fortnight ending May 15, 1941, CRR, KSA.

239 "The Kolar Gold Miners Speak", N.D.Shanker Private Papers, KSA.

240 File no 159-29, Sl. no. 1,20,21, Confidential Branch, KSA; FR for the fortnight ending April 30, 1930, CRR, KSA.

repression, even the Dewan's intervention failed to produce the desired result of urging workers to call off a strike which lasted 28 days<sup>241</sup> and finally ended only when all demands had been met.<sup>242</sup>

### 3. The uses of anonymity

By the 1920s, there were few sites that the long arm of the law did not reach in KGF. A vast accumulation of men and their families densely packed into a small geographical space, made it easy to detect and quell popular illegalities. In the 1920s, the Mysore state, ever ready to oblige the company demands for near total power in the region found fresh reasons to make common cause with the companies. The irresistible attractions that democracy held for many sections of Mysore society were as threatening to the princely order as to the mine management.

In such repressive circumstances, could subterfuge be far behind? We have already noted the frequency with which the mining management complained about the ease with which mestris and blasters switched between mines, prosecuted and dismissed from one, while finding a foothold in another. Perhaps the practice of using aliases which so frustrated the mining authorities was poetic justice given that in KGF, as in all colonial situations, the colonized were destined to wear the "mark of the plural", for as Albert Memmi says, "The Colonized is never characterised in an individual manner; he is entitled to drown in an anonymous collectivity".<sup>243</sup> Indeed, so useful was the notion of an "anonymous collectivity" and so jealously did the mining labourer protect it that the first attempt made in 1930 to introduce a system of identification was resisted with frightening unanimity.

Under the harsh glare of the mining regulation, anonymity had several other uses as well. Anonymous notices pasted on rocks, trees and in the cooly lines were not merely cathartic but threatening communications, fearless speech on behalf of that amorphous mass of mining labour in a situation where other avenues of communication were quickly stifled or traced to their sources. Although it lacked the power of the political meeting, the strike pamphlet or the union office, anonymity unnerved the mine management and set the state apparatuses on guard, brazenly defying the regime of surveillance by parading as the unmediated voice of the worker. There can be no doubt that the anonymous tradition must have been part of a robust political sub-culture in the KGF, yet it was only during moments of generalised unrest that it got noticed and reported and thus became visible to the historian. The heightened alert of the police in the politically uncertain days of 1942, for example, has provided us a rich sampling of the traffic in anonymous messages.

In 1930, an anonymous notice pasted on a rock in the Oorgaum cooly lines exhorted workers not to permit the mining companies to take thumb impressions, which led to a general strike that lasted 18 days, and achieved its object.<sup>244</sup> The leaderless strike of 1930 broke through the calm surface of untroubled employee-employer relations, giving the state and the mining authorities an alarming glimpse of what the organised power of the labourers could achieve, even without an identifiable leadership. How much more troubling this force could become if irresponsible labour agitators were allowed free reign in the fields.<sup>245</sup> Yet identifiable labour leaders were still preferable to this dark anonymous force that mocked the disciplinary efforts

241 FR for the fortnight ending July 30, 1940, CRR, KSA.

242 FR for the fortnight ending August 15, 1940, CRR, KSA.

243 Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 151.

244 File no 171-29, l. no. 1,2,3,6 to 9,11, 14, 17 to 19, Confidential Branch, KSA.

245 There were clear indications of the mining administration's fear of the gradual infiltration of labour organisers into the KGF area in the 1920s. C.N.Keith, "Presidential Address", *KGF Bulletin* Vol. 5, NO. 26 (April Dec, 1929), pp. 33 ff, said "I would like to see the professional labour leader banned at least from such comparatively primitive societies as those we have to deal with." p. 40.

of the company/state: one of the notices found in the mines during the strike was signed by "Danda Sothu Dadi Raman", one who eats but does not work, a metaphoric reversal of the drive for increased efficiency and profit, and an ironic acceptance of the constitutional laziness to which mining labour was condemned.

Nor was such anonymity threatening only to the company/state. In the early 1940s, when several labour leaders began to express interest in starting a formal trade union at the KGF, anonymous notices were aimed against "cut throat" union leaders who had received bribes from the companies.<sup>246</sup> They sometimes exhorted workers to participate in strikes and be united<sup>247</sup>, warned chit fund collectors not to collect dues when workers were on strike, and urged strikers not to pay.<sup>248</sup> Scheduled caste employees of the mines were warned against leaders who paid only lip service to the language of non-brahmanism: thus "Oh! You Brahmin who say that "Aryan get out and Aryapurana get in" you must remove all these [indistinct] of Aryans and work for your adi-Dravidas."<sup>249</sup> "Friends interested in the welfare of Champion Reef labourers" shrewdly asked "is our union a labour union? Or a political One? or a capitalistic one?" In the concealed violence of these messages, the questioning spirit of the worker briefly flared into view, while remaining undetected and therefore unattached to any single individual.<sup>250</sup>

## Conclusion

The brief glimpses that we get of the fighting spirit of the KGF worker could well tempt us into constructing a narrative of protest, of subaltern rebellion that flew in the face of almost certain repression. That would be as unjust to the triumphs of the surveillance systems of the company/state as it would be to the daily struggles of the KGF workers, for whom the deaths in harness of previous generations due to silicosis or in rockbursts are as much markers of memory as strikes, riots and other collective actions.<sup>251</sup> But neither can the monotonous list of rules and punitive measures alone be the concern of the labour historian. Instead, the focus here has been on the specific ways in which capitalist production processes organised and disciplined workers, through the deployment of a conception, however flawed, of law.

What becomes quite clear in KGF is the novel function of the law, which, in its very zeal to mark, quantify and prosecute subaltern "criminality" served to suppress from public view another set of illegalities in which the colonial masters were implicated. Colonialism's active deployment of racial difference in the administration of Law provided the rich soil in which such illegalities flourished. So artfully disguised was this subterranean sphere of activity, so successfully did it cover its tracks, that it nearly escapes the eye of the historian.

On the other hand, if the supervision and control of the mining population was conveniently effected through the instrumentalities of the law, the mining authorities studiously averted their eyes from those illegalities prevalent on the Field that called for regulation and intervention if on a much smaller scale. The illegalities of moneylenders, for example, were too convenient to the mining authorities as a form of labour control to warrant any action on the part of the company/state until 1938. Considering the large numbers of KGF workers who were steeped in debt,<sup>252</sup> only on rare occasions did the law come to the

246 These anonymous notices, available to us in English translations invariably done by policeman in the Fields, are only distinguishable by the date on which they were submitted to the office, which may or may not have been the date on which they were discovered. 5.10.1942, Collection 42 of 1942-43, Confidential 147-42-19, KSA.

247 6.10.1942, *ibid.*

248 8.10.1942, *ibid.*

249 10.9.1942, *ibid.*

250 EP Thompson, "The Crime of Anonymity" in *Albion's Fatal Tree*, p. 306.

251 Interview with Swekin, January 6, 1995, KGF, who lost his father to silicosis and his grandfather to a rockburst.

252 Sreenivasan, *Labour in india*, p. 29-42; also S.R.Deshpande, "Report on an enquiry into conditions in the Gold Mining Industry", p. 21; File no. 6-38, Sl. no. 2-3, 1938, Legislative, KSA.

rescue of the labouring poor; so exceptional was the conviction of the moneylender Heera Lall, for instance who was sentenced to 15 days SI and a fine of Rs 100 for refusing to return a poor KGF woman's gold chain, that it made its way into a nationalist newspaper.<sup>253</sup>

In such a context, Foucault's insistence on the dual nature of systems of penalty — to discipline as much as to punish -- is more persuasive than Thompson's invitation to appreciate the ideological uses of the rule of Law. But Foucault's formulations also lead to something of an impasse. For while the disciplinary mechanisms which were forged in Europe could be conveniently deployed in the colonial setting, they were without the same effects. The capitalist enterprise in colonial India was but one of the many forms of economic exploitation that willingly adapted to the forms of power and authority that already existed, instead of transforming them. When such forms proved inadequate to the task, new disciplinary apparatuses were introduced, but they too remained exceptional, and were not part of wider disciplinary society. Colonial rule did not usher in a "combined and generalised" universe of various techniques of discipline, mutually co-operating in the production of knowledge and reinforcing the increase of power.<sup>254</sup>

Far from representing a shift away from absolutist forms of power to more abstract forms of legality, the complex of laws and regulations that were instituted in the KGF represented negotiations between two kinds of despotism, the despotism of the princely state and the despotism of the colonial enterprise. As we have seen throughout, Princely state authority was weak, defensive, and clearly subordinated to the imperatives of colonial rule. Perhaps no single statement so well summed up the relative balance of power between the two as the response of the Mining Board to the GOM's proposal to exercise its right to examine the accounts of the mines in 1917:

It is understood the Government contemplates instituting a system of inspection of mine accounts, and the Mining Board desires to know to what extent it is intended that this system is to be carried out. The mines have been in operation for 30 odd years [during which time the GOM did not exercise its right] and before effect could be given to any government order in this connection the question would have to be submitted to the directorate in London for consideration.<sup>255</sup>

The powers sought by the mining authorities and so readily conceded by the Princely state did not have to concern themselves with the aspirations of the labouring poor at all. In that sense there was little dissonance between the Company and the state in the governance of the KGF. When critical words about the mining authorities appeared at all, it was when individual officials such as MA Sreenivasan in 1930, K Mathen in 1940, and SR Deshpande in 1945-6, conducted independent investigations that showed more sensitivity to the needs of KGF's labouring poor.

Yet it is striking that even these three men did not consider the systemised terror that operated in KGF worthy of comment or reform. Although the Sreenivasan and Mathen reports in particular expressed stern disapproval of several arrangements on the Field, they stopped short of commenting on the draconian law. It was here that the liberal critique of gross injustices met its limit, for the independent officials, like the Mysore state itself, recognised only too well that the severely repressive conditions in KGF were a small price to pay for economic development of this kind. Critiques of the indignities to which the labourers were subjected did find expression in collective protests at KGF, particularly after 1930, and by 1940 there were political leaders willing to shape such protests in more meaningful ways.

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253 *Hindu*, June 27, 1938.

254 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 224.

255 File no. 102-17, Sl. no. 1, Geology, KSA.

**TABLE 1**

**Prosecutions in connection with Theft of Gold, Amalgam, Quartz, Other Mining Materials etc.**

Year	No. of cases	No. of persons put up	No. of persons convicted	% of col.(iii) to col.(ii)	Value recovered
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)
1899	142	179	157	87.71	10936-2-7
1900	252	332	302	90.96	3548-7-4
1901	486	707	584	82.60	11297-10-10
1902	404	577	449	77.82	5535-15-1
1903	285	403	288	71.46	10640-15-1
1904	212	286	201	70.28	6010-15-11
1905	254	365	291	79.73	23659-13-2
1906	165	258	189	73.26	12786-15-8
1907	135	196	140	71.43	2159-10-10
1908	117	169	116	68.64	3825-5-7
1909	188	270	213	78.89	2630-14-4
1910	119	140	114	81.43	1679-1-0
1911	113	152	118	77.63	2266-6-1
1912	74	107	77	71.96	874-4-3
1913	80	102	79	77.45	8122-8-8
1914	87	109	97	88.99	3259-6-8
1915	99	124	108	87.10	2314-8-7
1916	112	135	125	92.59	1603-2-4
1917	74	104	84	80.77	1756-14-2
1918	113	150	106	70.67	3052-14-3
1919	140	183	128	69.95	3860-8-5
1920	99	120	80	66.67	6262-10-3
1921	111	177	144	81.36	3231-0-10
1922	99	140	102	72.86	3548-5-6
1923	72	114	88	77.19	1101-11-0
1924	94	133	109	81.95	1532-11-6
1925	68	90	70	77.78	1642-12-0
1926	72	124	120	96.77	2534-0-6
1927	46	62	54	87.10	1506-2-0
1928	58	95	89	93.68	1777-0-0
1929	66	79	59	74.68	1741-1-0
1930	50	55	45	81.82	2190-15-0
1931	37	44	40	90.91	1518-8-0
1932	56	76	60	78.95	5780-2-6
1933	44	69	56	81.16	2432-14-11
1934	24	31	28	90.32	1259-14-0
1935	43	67	57	85.07	1399-8-9
1936	53	89	60	67.42	946-11-0
1937	48	70	49	70.00	652-11-3
1938	19	30	19	63.33	121-11-6
1939	35	51	37	72.55	197-10-0
1940	23	31	28	90.32	1111-6-0
1945	50	96	76	79.17	2765-2-0
1946	63	93	86	92.47	3999-2-0

Source : Annual Reports of Chief Inspector of Mines, Mysore, 1899-1946.

**TABLE 2**

**Prosecutions in connection with accidents and breaches of Mining Rules**

Year	No. of cases	No. of persons put up	No. of persons convicted	% of col.(iii) to col.(ii)
	( i )	( ii )	( iii )	( iv )
1900	29	48	37	77.08
1901	35	66	55	83.33
1902	34	47	43	91.49
1903	24	30	18	60.00
1904	30	46	23	50.00
1905	27	40	26	65.00
1906	23	29	15	51.72
1907	33	38	29	76.32
1908	37	40	34	85.00
1909	37	41	29	70.73
1910	33	42	36	85.71
1911	48	51	50	98.04
1912	48	72	68	94.44
1913	38	45	40	88.89
1914	23	31	27	87.10
1915	37	42	37	88.10
1916	29	31	29	93.55
1917	15	20	15	75.00
1918	13	14	10	71.43
1919	25	32	25	78.13
1920	12	15	6	40.00
1921	26	47	32	68.09
1922	14	15	12	80.00
1923	29	39	28	71.79
1924	43	63	57	90.48
1925	39	78	71	91.03
1926	32	54	53	98.15
1927	23	33	31	93.94
1928	17	19	17	89.47
1929	27	28	28	100.00
1930	24	43	41	95.35
1931	15	27	23	85.19
1932	21	37	36	97.30
1933	20	27	25	92.59
1934	36	38	38	100.00
1935	23	28	27	96.43
1936	45	52	41	78.85
1937	30	41	39	95.12
1938	16	17	14	82.35
1939	51	53	53	100.00
1940	13	14	14	100.00

Source : Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines in Mysore 1900-1940.

**TABLE 3**

**Accidents\* in Mysore\*\* 1898-1946 (selected years)**

Year	Total No.of accidents	Causes			% of col.(iv) to col.(i)
		Negligence	Recklessness	Unavoidable causes	
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)
1898	125	54	22	49	39.20
1899	124	36	29	59	47.58
1900	300	38	29	168	56.00
1901	211	20	33	158	74.88
1903-04	212	19	30	163	76.89
1904-05	245	39	36	170	69.39
1905-06	252	60	47	145	57.54
1906-07	399	68	62	269	67.42
1907-08	382	17	28	337	88.22
1908-09	421	22	42	357	84.80
1910-11	413	46	37	330	79.90
1911-12	390	33	30	311	79.74
1912-13	285	30	26	229	80.35
1913-14	278	38	31	209	75.18
1914-15	234	24	29	174	74.36
1915-16	276	25	26	225	81.52
1916-17	203	22	24	146	71.92
1918-19	208	23	17	161	77.40
1920-21	264	29	23	212	80.30
1921-22	173	14	25	134	77.46
1922-23	175	19	19	137	78.29
1923-24	204	26	21	157	76.96
1924-25	205	23	16	166	80.98
1925-26	207	16	14	177	85.51
1926-27	192	16	19	157	81.77
1927-28	212	17	15	180	84.91
1929-30	230	19	18	193	83.91
1931-32	195	22	10	163	83.59
1932-33	213	22	18	173	81.22
1933-34	275	26	13	236	85.82
1935-36	274	19	24	231	84.31
1936-37	240	23	17	200	83.33
1937-38	218	21	18	179	82.11
1939-40	149	8	9	132	88.59
1940-41	246	14	8	224	91.06
1942-43	234	13	8	213	91.03
1943-44	252	5	5	242	96.03
1946-47	169	4	2	163	96.45

\* These are only investigated accidents. A very small proportion remained investigated.

\*\* The figures are composite for Mysore as a whole : however, as KGF was the largest, most dangerous mining operation in the State, it accounted for the overwhelming majority of all accidents.

Source : Annual Reports of Chief Inspector of Mines, Mysore, 1898-1946-7