Strike-breaking or the Refusal of Subalternity?
An Essay on Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Chota Nagpur.

Dilip Simeon

Paper presented to the Second Conference of the Association of Indian Labour Historians
V.V.Giri National Labour Institute, Delhi
March 16 – 18, 2000

[This paper is presented for publication only. Please do not cite without permission - DS.]
Introduction
Late in August 1939, there took place a strike in a small iron foundry in Jamshedpur, the premiere steel city of colonial India. Its owners were a local Bengali businessman and a Marwari entrepreneur from Calcutta. The workforce consisted of a little over two thousand five hundred workers, most of them Adivasis (‘tribal’ peoples) and Oriyas, with a few hundred workers from north Bihar and the Gangetic plain. A large proportion - possibly upto 40 percent, were women. The management were known for being arbitrary, even by the notoriously low standards of the capitalists of this young company town. Their workers were low paid, with virtually no security - at the beginning of the year hundreds of hands had been discharged. The President of their union was the charismatic Congressman Abdul Bari, who was also the Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Trouble at the workplace had resulted in spontaneous demonstrations, as was not uncommon in the area in those times. In the ensuing developments the management used their links with the emerging leader of the Adibasi Mahasabha, Jaipal Singh and the Oriya Congressman Nilkantha Das to convince the bulk of their workers to remain at work. They were abetted by Bari’s chief rival in Jamshedpur, Maneck Homi, who had led a famous general strike in TISCO in 1928. By November the strike had ended and historic developments such as the outbreak of world war, the resignation of provincial Congress ministries nation-wide and the promulgation of emergency regulations in industrial areas, had pushed the plight of the foundry workers into the background of local politics.

Nevertheless, echoes of that event resounded for some time; in political overtures to Jaipal Singh by the estranged ex-President of the Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose; in the content of Jaipal Singh's speech welcoming Bose to Chota Nagpur; and in the
stance of the administration towards union leaders in the city. A close examination of the strike and its aftermath presents interesting problems for the historian, including questions concerning the delineation of historical episodes and the relative stress to be placed upon their determining elements. Was the strike a case of ethnic identities being used by the management to sabotage working-class unity? Why did prominent local personages such as Bari, Homi, and Jaipal Singh get involved? Why did workers respond to blatant instigation to strikebreaking, and did they have their own agenda? What role did gender issues assume in their motives? What was the attitude of the bureaucracy and what was the political significance of the affair? This essay attempts to unravel the layers of meaning that lie beneath the surface of a long-forgotten incident. I will argue that it be treated as the first agitational expression of Adivasi sentiment, fuelled in part by long-standing and bitter resentment amongst tribal women about the treatment meted out to them by up-country males. Such an interpretation would buttress my viewpoint about the social origins of the Adivasi estate, because the history of industrialisation and the labour movement in Chota Nagpur is interwoven with ethnic and gender issues. I will begin my account with a description of the composition of the workforce of the area during the thirties and a summary of the history of the labour movement in Singhbhum. I will then use examples and juxtapositions from other locales in the area to highlight the importance of the Tatanagar Foundry strike.

Caste and Gender among the Workers of Chota Nagpur
The Chota Nagpur plateau was the cradle of heavy industrialisation in colonial India, the home of coal mining, iron and steel manufacture and a host of other mining and metallurgical operations. By 1938 these were producing copper, manganese, limestone, mica, fireclay, tinplate, steelwire, metal
castings and even a small amount of gold. Within the region itself, the adjacent districts of Singhbhum and Manbhum attracted a polyglot labouring population drawn from different parts of the country and with a heterogenous social background. Ethnic factors affected recruitment and employment patterns in virtually every industry, and often played a significant role in mobilisation. The situation was complicated by historical developments in the 1930's and the employment in the factories of European executives, foremen and engineers. The presence of white men in positions of immediate authority (not to speak of policemen and administrative officials), heightened racial and national awareness among the workers of the region.

The coal mines of Jharia began production in 1895 and the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) which was founded in 1907, in 1911. The first World War occasioned a stable demand for coal and steel, and the encouragement given to Chota Nagpur's industries by the state was offered with an eye to their strategic import - TISCO devoted nearly all of its capacity to the British war effort in the Middle-East. Jamshedpur was quintessentially a company town, arising in 20 square miles of land acquired under zamindary right. Its entire municipal services were undertaken by the company and its associates. Steel production increased from 3000 tons in 1911 to 800,000 tons in 1939. There was a large floating population of unemployed workers, estimated to have been at least 7000 in 1929. Allied industrial establishments in Jamshedpur and its environs included the Tinplate Company, the Cable Company, the Copper Corporation, the Indian Steel and Wire Products Company, the Tatanagar Foundry, and the workshops of the East Indian Railway (EIR) and the Bengal-Nagpur Railway (BNR), all of which employed a total of 14,352 blue collar workers in 1938.
TISCO's entrepreneurial strategy aimed at stabilising a large skilled workforce in a modern industrial township. Jamshedpur had an intermittently employed `coolie' class recruited in its hinterland and a more stable skilled labour force recruited further afield. The population included a large proportion of non-Bihari immigrants (53.5% in 1931) - `outside' recruitment targetted skilled workers. In 1921 over half the skilled workers were immigrants, drawn from the labour pool in other industrial regions. European and American `covenanted' staff numbered 150 in 1925, declining to 90 in 1928. There were Germans in the Wire Products factory, and English engineers in the copper mines at Mosaboni (in Singhbhum district). Semi-skilled workers (*kbalasis*), many of whom came from Orissa and Madras, were about equal in number to the skilled workers. About half the unskilled workers were natives of Singhbhum. Data from the 1921 census reveal that 22% of Jamshedpur's unskilled workers were *Adivasis*, consisting of *Bhuiyans, Bauris, Mundas, Hos, Santhals, Oraons*. *Mundas* with 9% were the largest group, Muslims were another 9% and various other service and artisan castes made up for 6%. Women coolies (called *reza*s) formed 35.6% of the urban unskilled workforce and were the only women in industrial employment. The city's manufactories had a high turnover rate: TISCO's averaged 30.6% annually during 1925-27. Half its unskilled workforce did not work continuously even for a year. With a large number of the skilled workers and *kbalasis* going home for several months every two to three years, a stable reserve of trained workers gradually accumulated.

In the coalfields, the *Adivasis* accounted for nearly 49% of the `actual workers' taken as a whole and together with the 'Depressed Classes' (or so-called `untouchables') accounted for 87% of those who cut coal. Till the 1921 census, a fifth of the
coal hewers were women, as were nearly half of the coolies, loading and carrying coal above and below ground. They formed 38% of Adivasi workers and 55% of Adivasi coolies. Nearly 90% of the coolies were ‘low-caste'. The overall picture is one of a coolie proletariat dominated by tribals amongst whom women were present in large numbers. But their employment was subject to change. Women constituted 37.5% of the workforce in 1920, declining to 25.4% in 1929, the year that the central government ordered their gradual exclusion from underground work. This fell to 13.8% in 1935 and 11.5% in 1938 - a trend linked to the mechanisation of loading, hauling and screening and the eclipse of Adivasi family labour - rezás were predominantly tribal. A contributory factor was the slump in coal prices in the mid-thirties, and the resultant closures of several small and under-mechanised enterprises.

In an economy with a sluggish rate of mechanization, female labour became a crucial feature of industries requiring the expenditure of large amounts of physical energy. Women workers in mining (we may assume that the situation was generally representative), were paid less than males doing the same jobs - in the 1850's they earned two-thirds of the daily wages of male workers and by the mid-1930's, at the height of the overproduction crisis in coal, they were drawing in some cases less than half the male wage. Their significance in the ‘unskilled' sectors of the labour process becomes apparent when we consider the reasons why the colonial government banned the employment of women underground nearly 90 years after their British counterparts were excluded from the pits. Describing the confabulations preceding the passage of the Mines Act of 1923, the author of an official treatise on industrial policy noted that although Government had long possessed the power to prohibit the employment of women
underground, "the extent to which coal mining in particular depended on women’s labour had stood in the way of action, and the development of the industry which had steadily added to the female labour force had steadily increased the difficulties along the way" (emphasis added). In the main coal areas there was vigorous opposition - the provincial authorities in Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, and the Central Provinces considered the measure premature. They agreed with its desirability at some future date, "but there was strong opposition to the fixing of a date and an almost entire absence of constructive proposals".

Gender influenced the determination of jobs as well as remuneration, and was an influential factor among workers as well as management. An enquiry in 1896 reported that men generally refused to carry and load coal - in the case of the up-country miners this created a special difficulty, as many of them came to the coalfields singly, and needed the assistance of women and children of other castes to do their loading. We learn that "Sonthalis in particular are so jealous concerning their women that they will not allow them to carry coal for other coal-cutters." A survey in 1924 revealed that nearly 80% of women in the coalfields worked alongside their husbands or male relatives. The gendered gradation of work by miners themselves was not an unusual phenomenon. Before the Act of 1842 prohibiting women's work in mines in Britain, all the carrying work in Scottish mines was done by women and girls, "as miners regarded the jobs too degrading for men".

The lives of the rezas in the mines and on the fringes of factory production were encapsulated within several layers of subalternity. To begin with, they were colonial subjects. As workers they were subject to the general disabilities suffered by the workforce of the region as a whole. As women they were
relegated to jobs such as loading, slag-picking and cleaning boilers and were paid less than their male counterparts for doing similar work. And they invariably belonged to the socially stigmatised tribal and low-caste groups, a status which made them easy targets for sexual abuse emanating from up-country male immigrants to the industrial region.

**Labour Relations in Jamshedpur and Singhbhum**

The context of the Tatanagar Foundry strike is provided by developments in the labour movement beginning with the TISCO strike and lockout of 1928. Among the interesting features of this movement were the initiatives taken by the semi-skilled workers many of whom were *Adivasis* and Oriyas. Some of their meetings were addressed in Santhali (a tribal dialect), and one report quotes the speaker as asking 'Hindus and Muslims' to join the deliberations, a request which brings out the sense of distinctness felt by the tribal population. The observations of a police sub-inspector manifest the current stereotypes about *Adivasis*. They also underline the capacity of the tribal sections of the workforce to act independently of establishments they viewed as alien to their interests:

> The Santhals are most obstinate people and... they may take recourse to violence at any moment, unless they are properly controlled. Most of the strikers are not members of the Labour Association, and moreover do not like to be guided by them. Hari Prasad Singh explained to me (the police officer - DS) that he came to study labour problems and was simply astonished to find the coolies talking sense and fully conscious of their rights.

The *khalasis* of a particular department, including numbers of *Adivasis*, also took steps to engage the assistance of a local
lawyer named Maneck Homi who helped the strikers formulate their grievances, and was to become the maverick leader of the most prolonged strike in TISCO's history (May-September 1928). The strike ended in a settlement mediated by Subhas Chandra Bose and the Congress-affiliated Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA). Bose spent much time between 1928 and 1931 trying to establish himself as the pre-eminent labour leader of Jamshedpur and liked to style himself a 'controller of labour'. During this period bitter struggles ensued between Homi and the JLA leadership, with the former setting up the rival Jamshedpur Labour Federation (JLF). Intricate manoeuvrings amongst English officials, Tatas' executives and Homi's political opponents led to a five year jail term for him which began in 1930. Matters concerning regional identity surfaced during this period due to the fact that many foremen and sections of skilled workers were Bengalis and owed allegiance to Bose and the JLA. This union, of which Bose became President, alienated itself from the body of workers and passed into history during the late thirties, when its leading activists joined Abdul Bari, the man deputed by the senior Bihari Congressman Rajendra Prasad to lead the labour movement in the steel city.

In September 1934 the activities of two radical activists, the dismissed hands Mangal Singh and Phani Bhushan Dutta, who had been influenced by Homi's leadership, caused much anxiety amongst local officials. Mangal Singh and his 'assistant', were externed from Jamshedpur on September 20 1934, for "setting up communist cells" and "particularly tampering with aboriginal labour". The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum reported that:

(Mangal Singh) and Phanindranath Dutta are paying more
and more attention to the aboriginal labour in the bastis (residential colonies - DS) rather than attempting to hold public meetings. This action is probably more dangerous and is probably in accordance with instructions from outside. He has shown himself to be a direct active link with outside communist organisations and for this reason he should be removed.

Mangal Singh's "Worker's Federation of Jamshedpur" was proscribed, despite its "very deflated condition", because of its links with the Workers and Peasants Party of Calcutta, a Communist Party front. It is significant that the administration considered the spread of radical ideas among the Adivasi settlements more dangerous than political rallies.

A protest by women workers in late 1934 is also significant for the pre-history of the Foundry strike. In a memorial to the provincial authorities about the abusive conduct of goondas and dalals (hooligans and company spies) at the workplace, an activist named P.P. Patnaik wrote:

They (rezas) complain that since they all resigned their membership in the Worker's Insurance Society... their immediate superiors... have always been deriding, chiding, and violently scolding them with very obscene language viz. sali, randi, and bhosri* etc. throughout the whole time they work and for this they have been exceedingly disappointed and depressed in their minds...

The overbearing behaviour of superiors at the workplace was a standing complaint of workers in Chota Nagpur throughout the twenties and thirties, and repeatedly appeared as a motivating factor for protest actions. For the female component of the
workforce, however supervisory abuse was only the tip of the iceberg. Many of the offending foremen were Punjabis, and judging by what we know about the composition of the workforce, most of the reças must have been Adivasis and low-caste women. The abusive admonitions of the supervisors in this case were especially contemptuous and hurtful. It was Patnaik who drafted the memorial, but he must have been prevailed upon to do so by the offended women, whose feelings he described as disappointment and depression.

**Popular Ministries and the Emergence of Ethnic Populism**

In the late thirties the mood of Chota Nagpur's workers was drastically affected by the quasi-democratic space provided under the extended suffrage of the Government of India Act of 1935. On the one hand there was a distinct expectation that with Indians in control of the provincial government they would be able to articulate deeply felt grievances and secure long-standing demands concerning their right to choose their leaders, against intensified work processes, for improved working conditions, better remuneration, and protection against the widespread practice of whimsical dismissals. There was a wave of unrest, with lightning strikes often called to resist instances of perceived injustice. Some workers, especially the miners, would take recourse to strike action without formulating any demands.

The advent of democratic politics also deepened the awareness of ethnic and regional identities within the labour movement. For example territorial disputes over Singhbhum and Manbhum had plagued relations between Bihari, Oriya and Bengali Congressmen for over a decade. This had affected radical nationalists (including many labour organisers) such as Jadumani Mangraj, Parliamentary Secretary from Orissa, who visited the
Moubhandar copper works in May 1939, and combined fiercely nationalist speeches with attendance at meetings advocating Oriya unity and the attachment of Singhbhum to Orissa. The politics of an ethnic identity for the districts of southern Bihar dated from the beginning of the century. The latest of a series of tribal rebellions had been led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the century, leaving reverberations in Adivasi consciousness during the national movement, with popular folk songs linking Gandhi and Birsa. The `Santal disturbance' in Mayurbhanj, adjacent to Singhbhum, in 1917 had required troops to quell it, and resulted in 977 convictions. The Tanabhagat movement and no-tax campaign of the Oraons in the 1920's was strongly affected by nationalist non-cooperation. The Haribaba movement among the Ho's in the 1930's proclaimed Swaraj and the victory of `Gandhi Mahto'. Pan-tribal sentiment began to be organised in 1912, with educational scholarships being raised by the Chotanagpur Charitable Association. The Chotanagpur Improvement Society formed in 1916 by the Anglican Bishop of Ranchi represented a tribal middle class committed to educational and social reform. From 1918 the Society began propagating the ideals of tribal identity, and re-named itself the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj in 1920. Years later, in 1938, the Samaj took the initiative in the formation of the Adibasi Mahasabha. Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, who had studied the Mundas and who was a member of the provincial Legislative Council, the Provincial Committee of the Simon Commission and the Franchise Commission, had pleaded in the late 1920's for a separate 'aborigine' political entity in the form of a province, or as part of Orissa.

Thus the question of an Adivasi identity had become a live issue among the tribal workers of Chota Nagpur by the mid 1930's. As the issue became mixed up with the ambitions of the Bengali
and Oriya interventionists in the region, the debates became ugly. In November 1938 the provincial Congress mouthpiece *Searchlight* praised the Bihar government's annual sojourn in the Chota Nagpuri town of Ranchi as a move which had "confounded.. the enemies of Bihar who have been conspiring against her territorial integrity by promoting the utterly spurious agitation for the separation of Chota Nagpur". Jimutbahan Sen, Bihar's disaffected Bengali Congressman, criticised the "unsympathetic attitude of the Congress Government towards the aborigines", and the habit (among a section of the nationalist intelligentsia) of abusing missionaries and 'Christian aboriginals'.

Maneck Homi began raising the `aborigine' question in the second phase of his career, after his release from jail in late 1935. He was of course, adapting to the changed political environment after the constitutional developments of 1935, and the growing ethnic awareness of the tribal population. The occasion was a strike in the Indian Steel and Wire Products Company (ISWP) owned by Sardar Bahadur Indra Singh, a Sikh who employed some German covenanted staff. The union complained to the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee about favouritism, intensified workloads, compulsory leave, and the punishments meted out to workers:

In the Rod Mill the procedure is yet more whimsical and unjust. For nothing the German Officers would ask a man to go home without any kind of inquiry. They would not even ask the Time Office to give the `check' back. If one insists, one would be cursed, threatened, and even pushed out.

On August 2 1937, 250 coolies and *rezas*, mostly *Ho* tribals, went
on lightning strike over discriminatory bonus. Apart from some *rezas* throwing stones at a lorry, the protest was peaceful. The skilled workers were almost entirely Punjabi and their support for the strike was considered unlikely, but the few Punjabis who were called in to replace the strikers refused to join after seeing the nature of the work. No grievances were presented and the strikers depended entirely on Homi's guidance. The 'backward' members of the workforce were once again taking the initiative and turning to experienced unionists to lead them. The management enrolled Punjabis and Pathans as counter-picketters, and police intervention was required to keep the two groups apart. It is noteworthy that the *rezas* were especially militant in this strike. On August 9 the union presented a list of demands which concerned increments, piece rates, dismissals and bonus. The *rezas* demanded maternity benefits and a restroom for women. The second grievance on the list was that "*no chance of promotion is given to aboriginals, preference being given to Oriyas, Babus, and Punjabis*" (emphasis mine).

The strike ended in a politically over-determined stalemate, with Abdul Bari (who had just made his advent in Jamshedpur), helping to defuse the situation in favour of the management. The owner had Congress links and Bari and the regional Congress were keen to erode Homi's influence. Thereafter Homi lost ground and branches of his new union, the JLF-1936 began performing a conciliatory function in the region's labour movement. The ethnic component of the workers' consciousness was to play an important role in the fate of the Bari-led Union at the Wire Products factory. Moreover, the battle lines drawn at this stage were to re-emerge at other locations over the next two years and with great poignancy in the Foundry strike.
Multiple Identities in the Jamshedpur Trade Unions

1938 was the year of an unprecedented upsurge in the labour movement in Chota Nagpur. It was also the year of Bari's pre-eminence. He was by then the President of seven unions in the area, and led some tense confrontations in foreign-owned plants. During the unrest at the Indian Copper Corporation mines (Mosaboni), and works (Moubhandar) in Singhbhum, an English engineer was assaulted and tensions over race and nationality erupted repeatedly. Thus, while condemning the company doctor for neglecting sick strikers, speakers at workers' meetings said of him that he was "born of a European father and has got worst mentality than the real Sahibs". In this case as in many others, the Englishmen tended to identify 'trouble-makers' (or especially 'excitable' elements) by their ethnic/regional identities - in June the management dismissed "about 100 Madrasis including all labour leaders". The British Director Sir Geoffrey Fell wired the local administration:

(management)... will not deal now or in future with any union of which Abdul Bari is officer... some of worst characters chiefly madrasee will not be reemployed.. this is essential condition and we should prefer to close down...

Despite official platitudes about the troubles being due to "factionalism within labour", at critical moments workers could and did collect in their union. However their other identities remained intact - 'Madrasis', Oriyas, Gurkhas and Adivasis functioned as ethnic groups. South-Indian workers grouped together, either within the union or through other bodies - this tendency was also apparent among Punjabis and South-Indians in TISCO. The Nepalis (or Gurkhas) used clan networks in matters of employment and residence. These groups could splinter on strategic matters. For example, militants within the
"Madras party" had formed a so-called Cosmopolitan Club. Moubhandar also saw the formation of a Muslim League branch that the union alleged was made up of the company's goondas. However, more mundane aspects of daily life brought workers together. "It is notorious", said the Police Superintendent, "that on Sundays the whole population of Aboriginals and Sikhs of Mosaboni and Moubhandar drink heavily in the liquor shops". Despite ethnic distinctions workers showed a capacity to lend broad (though not unanimous) support for movements directed against arrogant managements. This was so in most of the strikes in the region during 1937-39. The one instance when ethnic identity disrupted a strike was at the Foundry.

In the midst of the working class upsurge European managements took the initiative to form a combine. This was remarked upon by Vidya Bhushan Shukla, Assistant Secretary to the Bihar Labour Inquiry Committee in a letter to Rajendra Prasad in June:

The lockout in the Tinplate Company here, as you know, was declared about a month and a half ago. About 60% of the workers have left for their homes and now the management with the help of Mr Homi wants to restart the works. They have employed a number of goondas to intimidate the peaceful workers... The strike situation at Musaboni also is not improving... Almost all the European employers are determined to crush any organisation of the workers, especially Prof. Bari is, at present, their target. In spite of the Congress Government, I am sorry to say, the European managements are getting all sorts of help in order to crush the worker's movement. It is the manager of the Tinplate Company, Mr Leyshon, who is leading the organised employers. I am glad to say that the Tatas and
other Indian concerns are at present keeping aloof..

It was not only the European employers who were alarmed by the radicalism of the workers. Indian managements and the ministry were equally concerned. Bari's radical inclinations, his fiery and abusive rhetoric and eccentric ways caused acute dismay to the Tatas and to senior Bihar Congressmen, who took steps to have his speeches recorded verbatim. Indeed, he was not averse to using ethnic sentiment in his diatribes against the TISCO management before they agreed to recognise his union. Referring to senior executives on one occasion, he described the company as being "full of Parsee loundar* like Kutar", who wanted to drive him from Jamshedpur. On another, he referred to TISCO as "not a national industry but pure and simple a Parsi industry". But whereas Bari's position in the Congress and his proximity to Rajendra Prasad helped him emerge as the main mediator in TISCO, Indian employers of lesser stature often found themselves at a loss when dealing with militancy among workers. It was in this atmosphere that other forms of populism began to play a role in the politics of labour.

**Subhas Bose, Abdul Bari, and the Tata Centenary**

Another strand in the story is represented by the conflict between Abdul Bari and Subhas Bose over a boycott of TISCO's Tata Centenary celebrations in March 1939, an issue that was to embroil the nationalist leadership until August. (After this crisis Bari emerged as the established mediator in TISCO). From 1930 onwards, the company had celebrated the birthday of its founder on March 3 with festoons, fireworks and a march by uniformed workers. "What was originally intended as a voluntary demonstration became in course of time, a compulsory duty". In 1939 TISCO arranged an especially elaborate occasion for Tata's centenary. (This was the time of
year that the issue of the annual bonus came up). Bari denounced this as a *tamasha*[^1], and meetings were held to discuss a boycott. Just before the festivities a foreman assaulted a worker for refusing to help with decorations. This led to a flash strike in the Sheet Mills and the Duplex plant. Three workers were suspended and the celebrations were disrupted after the first day.

On April 1 1939 Bose saw fit to remark upon these ‘wrong tactics'. He was at the time embroiled in the famous controversy arising from his re-election as Congress President on January 29 and the subsequent rebuff delivered to him at the Tripuri session of the Congress in mid-March.

I was delighted beyond measure when I found Mr Bari taking so much interest in the cause of Jamshedpur labour. He is bold, upright, honest. During the last few months on two occasions I was able to help in bringing about a settlement. On both occasions I found the attitude of Sir A R Dalal to be conciliatory... (but), instead of doing the right thing and persuading the workers to do the right thing Mr Bari began to show a tendency to submit to whatever the workers said whether it was right or wrong. This was one of the fatal defects in Mr Homi. Matters came to a head in February last when Mr Bari publicly announced that the workers would boycott the Centenary celebrations of the founder of Jamshedpur... In a country like India where Trade Unionism is still in its infancy, we who call ourselves Trade Unionists have a great responsibility in the matter of guiding the workers along right lines... It was the duty of the workers as also of the Management to pay homage to the memory of India's premier industrialist who built a modern industrial city out of the jungle and provided them...

[^1]: *tamasha* is a term used in Indian culture, particularly in theatre and cinema, to describe a show or performance, often involving exaggerated and romanticized elements.
all with bread.

Bose recalled that in late February Bari had come to see him in Calcutta, where:

Mr Bari admitted that his policy was wrong but he regretted that he had proceeded too far to withdraw. Subsequently I heard that the boycott was carried out. Let us not consciously or unconsciously imitate any of the tactics of Mr Homi. Let us be honest and straightforward and build up our Trade Unionism on the right principles. Only then shall we be able to fight successfully both the employers and the Government and our cause that is the cause of the workers will be sure to triumph in the long run.

Bose's latest intervention in TISCO affairs took place less than three years after he had accused the management of using goondas to liquidate the trade-union movement in Jamshedpur and flaunting nationalism as "an excuse for robbing the public". (Which is what Bari insisted was still going on). After becoming Congress President the first time Bose became less strident. In February 1938 he told the Indian Merchant's Chamber in Bombay that "productive capitalists were not reactionaries", and that Congress and private enterprise needed to co-operate. In April 1939 his remonstration of Bari seemed to be a political gesture made with an eye to effecting a compromise with those whom he had previously dubbed rightists and compromisers. Bari's response was swift. He was pained that he had not been consulted before the criticisms were published. It had become:

the policy of the Tatas to disregard completely the status of a union which is not of their own making... Those who are not acquainted with the real object and procedure of
these celebrations are not only not aware of the compulsion, drill, and regimentation introduced therein, but also of the direct and indirect manner in which the celebrations are used for weaning away the allegiance of workers from the fundamental issues of trade-unionism... To compare our attitude and methods.. with Mr Homi's, as Subhas Babu has done, is to add insult to injury.. he has done great harm to the cause of labour for we are just now in the midst of a tense situation (and).. the management can for once become sure of politically influential support.. A word regarding the labour association. This organisation... was absolutely dead and defunct in spite of the best intentions of Subhas Babu for the last eight or nine years... When I started my organisational activities at Jamshedpur Subhas Babu's organisation could not claim to have even a dozen regular members on the rolls..

Soon after this, the BLEC conducted its hearings, and on April 5 the management and Bari agreed to arbitration by Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru. By the end of April Bose had resigned his hard-won position as Congress President. The first week of May saw Bari's political mentor Rajendra Prasad become the interim President and the thwarted Bose found his Forward Bloc. In prolonged negotiations TISCO obtained the intervention of another senior Congress leader, Sardar Patel to obtain a compromise with Bari. On July 22 Prasad reported that the matter had been settled:

Prof Bari has assured me that he will not countenance any strike and will rather oppose it if anyone else tries to create trouble on account of the award. They have also agreed that there should be conciliation... I am hoping that if this thing shapes well then Professor Bari's Union will get strength
and there will be peace in the industry... if he is once convinced that the Company is going to deal fairly with him he will be a very strong supporter of the Company. So if you happen to meet any of the big people of the Company you can impress upon them the desirability of fair and square dealing with him. We are trying to settle somewhat difficult situation and both sides have to act fairly by each other. I am trying to impress this upon Professor Bari. You will also please write to him.

The `Aboriginal Question' in the Labour Movement
Abdul Bari had finally been accepted as the new "controller of labour" in TISCO, something that Bose had tried to be in the preceding years. The top leadership of the Congress had a great deal to do with this denouement and there is little doubt that for them, one of Bari's valuable attributes was his severe antipathy to rivals in general and Bose in particular. Before the year was out Bari was to be valued for his moderation. Realising that he was being sidelined, Homi now submitted demands designed to safeguard the position of his union and for "special considerations in matters relating to indigenous (sic) or aborigene (sic) labour". The Adivasis now entered (passively, thus far) Homi's campaign to resist the Bari-Congress hegemony over Jamshedpur labour. That ethnic grievance in Chota Nagpur's labour movement was already politically charged became evident on May 18, when Rajendra Prasad cited the alleged discrimination against `aboriginals' in promotions at TISCO.

What was the `aboriginal question' in the labour movement? Jaipal Singh, a Christian Munda from Ranchi, had offered his `services' to the Bihar ministry in 1938 hoping to be appointed a minister, but had been rebuffed. Three days before the Second
Adibasi Mahasabha (January 19-21, 1939), he informed Prasad that he had "now been recognised as the natural leader of the Adibasis", and was eager to use his `weight' to make his people work within the Congress. In February, he complained about the treatment he had received. In May he raised the question of self-determination and criticised the "indirect employment of labour", expressing the hope that the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee would "materially offer greater protection to the unskilled workers" of the industrial areas. Soon afterwards he demanded Adivi representation in the Committee and gave Prasad a list of grievances in his capacity as President of the Mahasabha. He concluded:

There is a genuine feeling throughout the Province that only Biharis matter now. I am making this statement.. after a careful study of what is going on with regard to the employment in areas like Tatanagar.. the Indian National Congress is sadly failing in its duty to the backward areas by neglecting them.. The Bihar Ministry is doing all it can to destroy self-determination of the Adibasis. The basest motives are attributed to us. For centuries we have been plundered and we had hoped the Indian National Congress would have helped us move forward to take our station of honour in the national life of India.

`Self-determination' for Chota Nagpur was an ideological reflex of the social disruption caused by industrialisation and the problem of employment. Adivasis formed the bulk of the coolies and rezas of the industrial areas. Jaipal Singh's intervention in labour disputes was part of a political struggle against the hegemonic posture of Abdul Bari, the Bihar Congress' strongest representative in Jamshedpur, but it was grounded in the sense of deprivation felt by the tribals. The
strategy of the *Marang Gomke* (Supreme Leader) was to demonstrate his popularity amongst tribal workers by appealing to them to abstain from participation in labour disputes. In his tours of the area in mid-1939, he advised *Adivasis* in Moubhandar, Mosaboni and Kheruadih to avoid union activity and called for a separate union. He was to make further interventions in labour disputes involving Bari before the year was out.

**The Case of Tatanagar Foundry**

The episode at the Foundry exemplified the complex nature of labour unrest in Chota Nagpur. The strikes in the small metallurgical and engineering factories in Jamshedpur in the late thirties had exposed the brutal complacency of their owners. The Foundry had experienced unrest during the period of the first Congress ministry. The intensification of labour in the Foundry and the Wire Products factory was remarked upon by their unions in statements to the BLEC. The phenomenon of compulsory leave kept two-thirds of the Foundry workers out of work either for a part of the year or for a part of the working day. As was common in the coalfields and in most factories in Bihar at the time, workers could be suspended or dismissed without a charge-sheet. Insecurity of service was a means of transferring to the workers the liabilities of market fluctuations and inefficient planning. Nonetheless, the Foundry’s manager often complained about the irregularity of his workers.

The Foundry was established in 1927 and owned by Jagannath Agarwala (an old associate of Subhas Bose), and N.N. Rakshit. In 1938 it employed 1925 workers of whom 64% were unskilled, (including 727 women). 74% of the workers were from Bihar & Orissa. It supplied cast-iron sleepers (for railway tracks) to the Railway Board which was its chief customer. The
manager called it a "seasonal industry", with a "more intimate and much less formal" relationship with its workforce. There were no service or leave rules, and no security of service, sick leave, Provident Fund, school, housing or rules of conduct. Everyone except the supervisors was on daily wages on the ground of "irregularity". Wage rates were the lowest in the district and between 60 to 75% of the workforce was on compulsory unpaid leave with no guarantee of re-employment for two months every year when orders were slack. Appointments and dismissals were "according to necessity and sweet will". The factory was ill-lighted and nocturnal accidents common. There were no rest rooms, creches or tiffin-room. Water supply was inadequate and the 500 contractor's workers were sometimes not paid at all. Women did not have a lavatory or rest-room and enjoyed no maternity benefits or paid leave.

Between July and August 1937 Maneck Homi led a strike over these grievances. The strike ended in a stalemate, and a small wage increase for the coolies. The Tatanagar Foundry Workers' Union (TFWU) was `re-organised', came under Bari's leadership in April the following year and continued to press for its standing demands. In mid-1938 Managing Director Rakshit outraged his workers with a statement deploiring the insensitivity of labour leaders to the miserable plight of the locked-out workers of the Tinplate and Cable companies. His blatant hypocrisy led to a slowdown and a threat of closure. Through August, the union discussed intensification and low wages. Eventually the negotiations convened by the Deputy Commissioner led to a tentative agreement on a small wage increase. In September 1938 after another strike, conciliation was agreed upon along with an immediate increase of 10% and an assurance of union recognition once it was registered. Rakshit's `informal' relationship with his workers was coming to
an end. The terms of the award of December 14 1938, signed by Rakshit and Bari included provisions for security of service, a profit sharing bonus, a general increment, a grievances machinery and a Provident Fund. None of these were implemented. In March 1939 Rakshit told the BLEC: "I am not prepared to introduce anything unless I get better service". Around this time, 1100 Foundry workers lost their jobs. At the end of the year Rakshit was to attain new heights in the political handling of labour disputes.

The Foundry was re-started in April 1939. The management complained about a 25% to 30% reject rate in the Moulding Department (compared to 15% before the formation of the trade-union), and of the sullenness of the workers ever since the Arbitrator's rejection of their demand for a 25% increment. By this time there were 2528 workers in the Foundry - 1736 Adivasi, 530 Oriyas and 262 'others'; a 31% increase in the first two categories since 1938. Nearly 90% were from Bihar and Orissa as compared to 74% previously. (Although figures for the female component of the workforce in this new phase are not available, we may safely assume that this was comparable to the 35 to 40 percent norm in similar labour-intensive occupations). The management had clearly made a decision about the ethnic composition of its workforce. Mid-August saw violent tension between supervisors and workers, the bitterness exacerbated by the fact that some union ex-officials had been made supervisors. But the discharges and fresh hireings of the past months had affected the union's popularity - attendance at its annual meeting on August 27 was only 160, with most Oriyas and Adivasi workers absenting themselves.

On August 29 two union activists were suspended for negligence, and two others for organising a lightning strike in
protest. 66 men of the Furnace department were dismissed on the 31st for striking on the 30th, and shouting "labour and socialist slogans" inside the works. Six men were arrested in the premises for intimidation. In his letter to the Premier, the union Vice-President J.N. Mitra complained of "unprecedented repression" and management's attempts to sow "dissension and division". Meanwhile Nilkantha Das, President of the Orissa Pradesh Congress Committee and "a close friend of the Management" had addressed Oriya workers and asked them to work "loyally under the present service conditions". Meanwhile Jadumoni Mangoraj and P.K. Mohanty had started the Tatanagar Foundry Oriya Association. "The simple Oriya workers thus led astray", said Mitra, "began to agitate for their exclusive appointment..". The day after Das's meeting:

Mr Jaypal Singh, President of the Adibasi Sabha made his sudden appearance on the scene and held a meeting of the Adibasi workers. Another instalment of racial rivalry was skilfully administered. It is needless to mention here that Mr Jaypal Singh as usual stayed here as a guest of the Company... Management are actively encouraging other rival bodies, both on political and racial lines.

The union meeting on September 1 was attended by about 200 workers. Resolutions were passed denouncing the flotation of "racial and communal unions", and the non-implementation of the settlement of the Conciliation Board. Notice was issued of a strike in case the dismissed persons were not reinstated. Subsequent meetings attracted a similar attendance and on September 15 another worker was suspended. Congress and red flags were shown at the main gate amidst calls for a strike. There was an immediate hartal* in the Casting Department, and the Works Manager dismissed 26 hands on the spot and had them
removed by the police. The following day, 174 workers were dismissed for demonstrating inside the factory. Picketting began on the 18th, with violent obstruction at some places. Numbers of rejas now began to be escorted into the plant by Adivasi men shouting slogans against the picketers. Jaipal Singh arrived and asked Adivasis not to join the strike. "The Adibasi labourers who were escorting loyal workers including rejas were also shouting their slogans asking workers to come to work". These methods were the first explicit attempt in Chota Nagpur by an owner to counter union activity through political mobilisation. Describing a letter received by Bari, J.N. Mitra complained about the Managing Directors' "cliquish joy that the Union had no more hold over the workers", and of his insulting reference to the Union Secretary as a chokra\#. The letter was later referred to by the police as having inspired Bari's ire.

The management's refusal to provide loyal workers with accommodation inside the works led to a complete shutdown by September 19. Rakshit and Agarwala departed to make arrangements for shifting rail-sleeper production to Bengal. Bari arrived for a short visit on the 24th, and after reminding the strikers of his numerous victories left for Patna. 247 workers had been dismissed till mid-September, and another 800 refused employment. Meanwhile Jaipal Singh helped employ new hands and Homi offered to mediate, enrolling 200 Adivasis in the Federation.

Prior to these developments, in July-August 1939, there had been a flash strike in Indra Singh's Indian Steel and Wire Products factory. The strike had become a cause-celebre for Congress-socialists and communists seeking to undermine Bari's position - it was his union which was compromised by the militants in this case. During this episode Adivasi strikers had
been encouraged to return to work "very probably under the influence of Jaipal Singh". In this instance his interests had not been in conflict with those of Bari, who had been upstaged by the radicals and wanted the movement to end. Bari's influence declined after the Wire Products affair and was adversely affected by the political crisis of early September and the imminent resignation of the ministry. The strikes of the past had expressed class power refracted through his political personality: he was now confronted with the mobilisation of ethnic identity articulated through anti-Bihari and anti-Congress sentiment under the leadership of his political opponents.

On October 2 and 3, over 500 Adivasis were escorted into the plant in the face of some strong picketting. Fifty Punjabi workers also attended work. Bari declared a strike, slogans were shouted, and stones hurled by both sides. A showdown was expected as police learnt that certain Punjabi goondas of TISCO and Tinplate had been approached. On the 9th a thousand Adivasi workers led by Homi and his lieutenant Mangal Singh confronted five hundred men led by Bari in a Mahabharata-style culmination of years of hostility. Police mediation defused the tension and nearly nine hundred workers entered the plant. On October 10, abuse and indecent gestures were directed at the rezas by the striking picketers, and the next day TFWU officials fist a JLF activist and abused Homi. Sabotage of a rail siding was reported. Loyal workers received advances on their salaries. A hundred Oriya workers, who had so far remained aloof now decided to enter the factory. The desperate Bari made the unusual gesture of placing his cap in front of two of his old supporters in a plea for support. On October 11, Oriya and Adivasi workers complained about the abuse of women by "Punjabis of other companies", and warned of exercising their right to self-defence.
The Foundry management, which had implemented selective reductions in 1938, had by now effected a change of strategy through the discharge of several hundred workers and the shifting of part of its manufactory to Bengal. On October 12 it informed the administration of its willingness to settle accounts with some 250 dismissed hands. A confrontation was narrowly averted on the 13th when picketers attempted to turn back loyal workers. After this Bari admitted that the strikers were misbehaving, and the tension abated for awhile. The official's comment at this stage was perceptive:

It appears that Mr Jaipal Singh has now handed over labour leadership in respect of Adibasis entirely to Homi. It also appears that now the fight is not so much between Prof. Bari and the Management as between Prof. Bari and Homi. Prof. Bari's influence, however, is definitely on the wane and now he is not able to collect supporters and followers in such large numbers as before...

The union pelted government with a barrage of communications replete with phrases such as "Homi's Adibasis" and "Homi's Punjabis", along with complaints about the police. However, its links with government were no longer effective. The management refused on October 9 to meet Congress Parliamentary Secretaries K.B. Sahay and Binodanand Jha. Bari was absent most of the time and demoralised strikers made a desperate attempt at sabotaging electric cables on October 28. An ambush of the police resulted in nine arrests.

It is noteworthy that violence and intimidation, much of it directed against the režas, and some of it very likely animated by hostility towards low-caste employees, had characterized the
behaviour of the strikers from the very outset of the crisis. Four sweepers wrote to the management on September 21 complaining about threats and obstruction. On October 23 and 27, groups of *rezas* were physically assaulted and sustained minor injuries - episodes which prompted a written submission to the administration by hundreds of loyal workers. The visible divisions among the employees permitted the Works Manager to claim that the troubles had been instigated and "no real labour issues (were) at stake." The management had wanted to close down the works he said, but had desisted when assured of police protection. The promised protection had not been forthcoming, but the police had prevented the use of chartered lorries, "although this would have avoided abuses and assaults on the women-folk." With transparent innuendo he now introduced a communal motif:

You know we Hindus do not like to see bloodshed, the idea of assaults on women shocks us to the core. As we did not get any response to our repeated appeals for help and the activities of Mr Abdul Bari and his associates have been on the increase and we cannot afford to incur any further displeasure of our patrons, especially the Railway Board of the Government of India.. we had no other alternative left than to dismantle a portion of our Foundry and are shifting it to Bengal. Mr Bari is not only Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Assembly but also commands great confidence of the Ministry and his violent speeches upset and embolden the poor illiterate men to indulge in lawlessness..

On October 29-30, seven Congress provincial ministries resigned and the political situation changed dramatically. By November 4, there were 1400 persons at work of whom a
It is now quite clear that the strike is fizzling out... While the termination of the strike is a matter for general satisfaction, it is to be regretted that the end has been brought about to a very large extent by the part played by Mr Homi in inducing the Adibasi element of the labour population to keep loyal. One of the natural results will, therefore, be that the reputation of Mr Homi with labour will go up tremendously while that of Professor Bari will go down in proportion and considering the past of Mr Homi the situation will thus be full of potentialities for evil in the future. It is, therefore, desirable that something should be done even at this late hour, to enable Professor Bari to rehabilitate his position. With this end in view, I am directed to suggest that you should endeavour to bring Mr Rakshit of the Tatanagar Foundry Works and Professor Bari together... to restore general good relations between them. A timely hint may perhaps be given to Mr Rakshit that although for the time being the Foundry Works have gained their end through the help of Mr Homi, a time will come when Mr Homi's influence with labour may prove real danger to industries in general at Jamshedpur and in particular to the employers of labour. Professor Bari has, on the whole, been an influence working more for the wholesome development of trade-unionism at Jamshedpur.... (Emphasis added).

Labour and the Politics of Ethnicity
The complicated politics of the Foundry strike exemplified the interlocked ethnic, class and regional elements in Bihari politics.
It also demonstrated the patterns through which social forces, individual animosities and political calculations were articulated. Three broad axes of influence may be discerned: the personal/factional; the social/demographic and the managerial/political. An explanation focused on any one of these would be plausible, but also partial. In addition various modes of instrumentalisation were taking place. Management were using populist ideologues, who deployed ethnic and class questions (and each other) to pursue political ends. Groups of workers were using leaders to articulate their resentments at the workplace. The strike manifested the old antagonism between Homi and Bari and the factional interests of Nilkanta Das. It was an occasion for Jaipal Singh to challenge the provincial Congress which had "treated him shabbily". Although Jaipal Singh's ambitions suited the management and Homi, the Adivasi workers' response to him expressed the sense of ethnic deprivation among the poorest of the Chota Nagpur proletariat, and their especial sensitivity to the molestation of tribal women: this was its broader social determinant.

There was yet another dimension. Bari's habit of plain speaking as he assailed managements had had a sensational impact upon the climate of labour-management relations in 1938-39. His use of earthy language to castigate his opponents must have encouraged his followers to indulge in abuse when they found themselves thwarted by the rezas. The conduct of the Adivasis allows us to interpret the failed strike as a struggle between 'Hindustanis' and tribals, between foul-mouthed men from up-country and deeply resentful working women determined to teach them a lesson.

Nor can the Foundry strike be reduced to a matter of 'worker's unity' versus 'communal blacklegging' even though the
prejudices of the management against Bari were obvious. Bari had himself helped break the ISWP strike a month earlier, and _Adivasi_ coolies had indirectly helped him do so. The evocation of ethnic or class identities was a means by which leaders sent signals to the working population. Such signals were designed to attract a mass following. Bari worked with concepts of class and national unity, but this meant unity under his authority and implied control over Singhbhum Congress affairs as well. Once his political links obstructed class issues as they did in the ISWP strike, his credibility with the workers declined. This erosion was accelerated by the ministry's demise. The most egotistical of leaders were brought down to earth by the workers, the most passive of whom would express themselves by the tact of absence. The man who had humbled the Tatas and numerous English managements was worsted in Golmuri maidan by the ex-hockey player, the Parsi lawyer, and the _Adivasi rezas_.

The responses of management and bureaucracy were significant. We must remember that the drastic shifts in governmental power and in the calculations of the managers and bureaucrats were taking place in an atmosphere surcharged with world war and imminence of political-hegemonic changes. After two years of watching Bari at work and despite the displacement from power of the Congress ministry from power, the administration was convinced that Bari was a more reliable 'controller of labour' than Homi, and wanted him in place for the turbulent period ahead (Bari was a known opponent of the socialists, communists and Bose). Along with Mukutdhari Singh, the Congress organiser in the coalfields, he could be trusted to retain 'moderate' union influence over the workforce in strategically important industries. Officials participated in conferences to arrange wage increases for miners and to prop up Bari's declining fortunes in Tatanagar. The state also made
preparations for air raid protection and Jamshedpur was declared a `protected area'. All managers were given extraordinary powers to punish tresspass and union leaders were asked to co-operate.

On November 16 a dozen persons were seen at the pickets at Tatanagar Foundry. Although the police rejected the union's allegations of bias against Bari, the Deputy Commissioner carried out Chief Secretary Godbole's instructions:

Mr Rakshit finally stated that he was always willing to come to an understanding with Prof. Abdul Bari and would welcome a restoration of good relations provided I could find some formula for this.

On December 6, 1939 a `Round Table Conference' took place, presided over by B.P. Pande (the newly appointed Labour Commissioner) and attended by Rakshit, Bari and other union leaders. Rakshit was prepared to reinstate eighty of the five hundred and seventy six dismissed hands, and later raised the figure to a hundred and sixty. This was all that Bari could hope for, and it was no longer possible to prevail upon the government to withdraw criminal charges, which were reported on December 26 to be awaiting trial.

On December 3 Subhas Bose arrived in Jamshedpur on a propaganda visit for his Forward Bloc. Present at his reception was the indomitable N.N. Rakshit in his capacity as president of the Bengalee Association. Rakshit complained about the plight of Bengalis in Bihar. Bose told him that his speech was `like poison', and that Bengalis were the `root cause of the subjugation of India to the British'. He announced his readiness to serve the cause of labour. The wheel had turned another
circle. As Congress President, Bose had admonished Bari for insulting the memory of the TISCO Founder. Then it had been Bose who had spoken for moderation, responsible unionism, for looking after capitalists' interests and Bari who signified extremist postures, inflammatory language and imprudent leadership. Bose was now aligning with Bari's enemies and the local opponents of the Congress on a platform calling for nationalists to use the world crisis to provoke a final showdown with the British, if necessary in alliance with the Axis Powers.

On December 4 Bose addressed a rally of 5000 *Adivasis* under the presidency of Jaipal Singh. In a speech critical of the 'Congress High Command', and suffused with militant nationalism he reminded the *Adivasis* of the struggle of their forefathers against the British. He then asked them to join the Congress in large numbers and help his Forward Bloc take it over. Jaipal Singh praised Bose's 'excellent captainship', welcomed his move to build 'a new team', and invited him to approach the Adibasi Sabha "to fill up the weak places with... better equipped players". In a reference to the Foundry strike, he denounced the behaviour of Bari's followers who had 'assaulted Adibasi women with impunity'. He announced that he ('we') had declared a "war against the reign of terror of professional labour leaders, who for the most part are Congress henchmen", and he demanded more employment in Chota Nagpur for the *Adivasis*, "the most ancient aristocracy of India".

As for the *Adivasi* workers of Rakshit's Tatanagar Foundry, we need only record that their demand for higher wages was rejected by the management in December and that management also asked Homi and the JLF not to interfere. Against the demand for the reinstatement of over 500 workers the Deputy Commissioner now reported the possibility of only a hundred
getting their jobs back. With regard to the administrations' efforts to undermine Homi, Chief Secretary Godbole was pleased to note an official police report on December 16:

It is learnt that Mr Rakshit has given orders that none of Homi's lieutenants should be allowed to go inside the factory without his permission. The management is trying to gain over the aboriginal workers from Homi's side with the help of Mr Jaipal Singh.

The events we have recounted could form part of the biographies of three important local leaders: Maneck Homi, Abdul Bari and Jaipal Singh and tangentially, a stroke in the canvas of Subhas Bose's life. However, the substratum of all these would be, not an individual biography but the history of the workers of Chota Nagpur with all their complicated inherited identities and the newer tensions of their proletarian predicament. It was as workers that they became `Adivasis', something more than Hos, Mudas and Oraons, and it was the impact of industrialisation on the region that was to become the social crucible of the movement for Jharkhand. The episode of the Tatanagar Foundry in 1939 was part of a prolonged process of the formation and the unmaking of the working class. Ironically the point of rupture amongst its workers signified both the assertion of tribal and feminine dignity as well as the re-appropriation of their activity into the program of `their' capitalist and into the structure of class domination. At the moment of unmaking, they were cast once more as a working class.