

Employee Welfare in a Public Sector Coal Mining Company – A Study

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Coal mining is one of the most arduous and hazardous operations as miners are exposed to dangers from various mining hazards like explosions, inundations, roof falls, noxious gases etc. They are also prone to various diseases like pneumoconiosis, mining nystagmus and dermatitis due to the nature of work. These characteristics of coal industry make welfare more significant. In view of this, the present article reviews the welfare facilities provided by the company to its employees and their family members. The areas covered in this article are subsidized canteens, education, literacy programs, sports and recreation, housing, consumer cooperative stores, and cooperative credit societies. The other areas covered are the services rendered by Singareni Seva Samithi and Women's Cells and Associations.

ABOUT SCCL IN BRIEF

Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) is the second largest coal mining company in India after Coal India Limited with a total manpower of 69,043. The company's accredited function is to explore and exploit coal deposits in the Godavari Coal field area covering the four districts of Andhra Pradesh namely Adilabad, Karimnagar, Khammam and Warangal, where the coal reserves are a whopping 9435.78 million tones as per the reports of Geological Survey of India and the inventory covers up to a depth of beyond 600 meters which include reserves confirmed, indicated as well as inferred. The company markets its coal to diverse industries such as thermal power plants, cement, steel, paper, textile, tobacco, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, distilleries etc. With spurt in industrial growth and the resultant increase in demand for electricity, the company has been playing a key role in the growth and development of the nation. Further, with the new Electricity Act providing opportunities for independent power production and distribution, the demand for coal has increased phenomenally. In addition to the above factors, the

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upward revision of prices after the deregulation of coal prices by the Government of India helped the company financially. Consequently, the performance of the company is quite commendable as it registered a record profit of Rs. 268.11 crore in 2009-10. It appears that good times are ahead to the company.

NEED FOR WELFARE IN COAL INDUSTRY

Certain characteristics of mining industry in general and coal mining in particular make welfare more significant in this industry. Coal mining in India is a highly labor intensive industry. For the size of investments and mining operations, the proportion of manpower to be looked after and welfare facilities to be provided is substantial. Coal mining is one of the most arduous and hazardous operations. Not only are miners exposed to dangers from mining hazards like explosions, inundations, roof falls, noxious gases etc., they are also prone to many other hazards. Preventive action has to be taken against miner's diseases like pneumoconiosis, mining nystagmus, dermatitis, hook worms and the like. The day to day working environment is far from congenial. Below ground, the miner is exposed to perpetual darkness, forced ventilation, water logging, humidity and extreme temperatures. Even above ground, working conditions and other civic amenities are not up to the required level. All the same, accidents leave a trail of misery on dependent families, and sap the morale of co-workers who all work and live together. Post-accident care of victims and rehabilitation of disabled workers and bereaved families assume significance.

WELFARE IN SCCL

SCCL recognizes workmen as stakeholders in the company's progress and welfare of workmen continues to be an important corporate philosophy of the company. One of the important corporate objectives of SCCL is "to enable all the Singarenians to lead healthy, peaceful, stress-free and prosperous lives". The objective entails as humanizing working conditions, making mining operations safer, and providing welfare facilities thereby improving the quality of work life of employees, which would be conducive to higher productivity, self-development, and steady growth of the company. In pursuance of this objective, the company generously extends several welfare benefits such as subsidized canteens, Medicare, education, sports & recreational facilities, housing, consumer cooperative stores, cooperative credit societies etc. to its employees and their family members. In this regard, the welfare practices undertaken by the company have been outlined hereunder.

CANTEENS

SCCL in accordance with the requirements of the Mines Act, 1952 and also keeping in view the welfare of its employees provided 47 canteens in all the 11 mining areas. It also provided the required infrastructural facilities free of cost to run these canteens. Since these canteens are highly subsidized, they serve almost all the eatables except meals and coffee at throw away prices.

MEDICARE

SCCL has a generous medicare scheme for its employees, their family members and dependent parents, which can be availed in the company hospitals, and also at super specialty hospitals in Hyderabad. Medicare is also extended to all retired employees and their spouses at par with those in service. In SCCL, there are six Area hospitals, one main hospital at Kothagudem, and twenty six dispensaries with a bed capacity of 843. Staffed by qualified male and female doctors, these hospitals treat patients with utmost care and attention. Wherever, specialized treatment is required, either for employees or their dependents or retirees, patients are referred to super specialty hospitals such as Osmania General Hospital (OGH) and Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) in Hyderabad. The company also provided accommodation (10 rooms) to employees and their family members at Ramanath Ashram near Osmania General Hospital besides a hall on the second floor of Siva Ganesh Choultry near NIMS, which can accommodate 25 people at a time. In short, much attention has been paid to increasing availability of medical facilities both quantitatively and qualitatively.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

SCCL takes special interest in the overall development of the children of its employees. In pursuance of this objective, it set up 11 schools which include both high schools and upper primary schools. It also set up two colleges for women out of which one is a junior college and the other is a degree college. Besides the above, it established one polytechnic college for the benefit of the children of employees. These schools and colleges stand tall for their excellence in academics, arts, sports, and cultural activities, thus fulfilling the important objective of all round development of students.

SCCL also grants scholarships to meritorious students who secured admission in engineering and medical courses subject to the condition that they get ranks below 2000 in the EAMCET / IIT entrance. The company pays a scholarship amount of Rs. 6,000 per annum, per student, and the

scholarship is continued until the completion of the studies. Table-1 shows the scholarships granted to the children of employees for the period from 2002-03 to 2009-10. The table shows that the number of scholarships awarded ranged between 20 and 36 during the period understudy.

Table – 1. Scholarships granted between 2002-03 and 2009-10

Year	No of Students awarded Scholarships
2002-03	22
2003-04	20
2004-05	36
2005-06	27
2006-07	28
2007-08	30
2008-09	26
2009-10	25

Source: www.scclmines.com

The company in order to encourage the brilliant and meritorious wards of employees and also to motivate them to improve their level of excellence grants Rs. 10,000 per annum as additional scholarship to each student subject to his/her admission in BITS Pilani through BITSAT. It is in addition to the scholarships payable to students as cited above. It also extends financial assistance (Rs. 12,000 each) to those who qualify in the civil services main examination, subject to a ceiling of 10 persons per year.

SCCL also grants 50 per cent of tuition fee and hostel fee subsidy to the children of certain categories of employees such as coal loaders and coal mazdoors when they get admission and study in corporate Junior colleges. The eligibility for availing this facility is subject to the fulfillment of two conditions: (a) The wards of employees should have studied up to SSC in the schools run by the company (b) They should have secured 500 and above marks in the SSC examination. On the whole, 51 wards of employees were benefited under this scheme up to March 2010.

LITERACY MISSION

A decade ago, illiteracy was rampant in SCCL. A survey conducted in 2001 revealed that about 33,860 workmen were illiterate who could not read or write Telugu. The company in order to achieve total literacy among employees started organizing literacy classes in coordination with the concerned

“District Literacy Mission” to make the illiterate workmen literate on a time bound basis. It also engaged a professional organization called M/S LEADS to conduct literacy classes at the work place, an hour before the beginning of each shift for the benefit of illiterate workmen. All the same, the teachers who work in the educational institutions of the company undertake special classes for illiterate workmen at regular intervals. Owing to the efforts of the company, all the workmen were made literate by March 2010.

SPORTS AND RECREATION

‘Health is wealth’ is not simply a proverb, but a fact of life. A healthy body bears a healthy mind, and obviously sports are a prime contributor to the health of people. SCCL as an organization with progressive outlook has laid great emphasis on the promotion of sports. The company conducts tournaments like-foot ball, cricket, kabbadi, shuttle badminton, Lawn tennis, chess, ball badminton, caroms etc., every year and to the winners, it presents mementos. It also encourages its employees to participate in the Inter-district and state level tournaments conducted by the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP). The players from the company participated in these tournaments, and won many medals. It shows that the company has made great efforts to develop sporting culture among employees and their family members to build a healthy organization. Regarding recreation, it provided ten community halls and thirty six recreational clubs for formal and informal get-to-gether of employees and their family members. Further, it arranged 7 non-A/c rooms on a regular basis at Pushpagiri Trust Choultry in Tirumala, the abode of Lord Balaji. When employees go on pilgrimage to Tirupathi, they can make use of this facility.

HOUSING

Among the basic necessities of life, housing is very important and it comes next only to food and clothing. In developing countries like India, housing has been a social problem affecting all sections of population in some way or the other. Since the health and efficiency of workers are directly influenced by the type of houses they live in, SCCL accorded top priority for the construction of housing quarters and the company provided as many as 50,540 quarters to its employees up to March 2010. It is expected that every worker will be provided housing facility in about a decade. All the housing quarters are well-furnished, and they are provided with individual water taps. The company also provided as many as 4,500 community taps in the housing colonies and the colonies are well connected by roads.

CONSUMER COOPERATIVE STORES

Consumer cooperative stores are of immense help to workers and employees. The access to these stores helps in eliminating middlemen besides providing the necessary consumables at less than market prices. The company established "Singareni Collieries Cooperative Central Stores Limited", popularly known as Singareni Super Bazaar. The required infrastructural facilities like buildings and furniture are also provided to the Super Bazaar. The Super Bazaar runs a total of 46 sales depots and the depots sell all essential commodities of daily use and cosmetics at less than market prices, thereby providing value for money to the customers.

CO-OPERATIVE CREDIT SOCIETIES

SCCL has laid emphasis on increasing the number of cooperative credit societies in coal field areas and as many as 49 such societies are functioning in the mines and departments of the company. These credit societies grant loans up to Rs 1.25 lakhs to each member employee for meeting the various purposes of the latter such as children's education, purchase of two-wheelers etc. The company charges 12 percent interest on these loans and the loan amount is recovered in 24 or 36 equated monthly installments. It shows that the company has made concerted efforts to extend credit facilities thereby freeing the workers from the clutches of moneylenders.

SINGARENI SEVA SAMITHI

Singareni Seva Samithi (SSS) is a social service organization formed within the company to undertake community development activities in the coal field areas. The Samithi, organizes free coaching camps to the unemployed children of employees to enable them to participate in police and army recruitments. When recruitment for these positions takes place, the candidates are reimbursed two-way fare and also the miscellaneous expenditure incurred by them for their stay at the place of selection within certain limits. The Samithi trained 5,989 candidates for police and army recruitments up to 31st March 2010 out of whom 723 got selected so far. Further, the Samithi in order to make the educated but unemployed children of employees as self employed undertakes training programs free of cost in 13 categories including photo lamination, screen printing, dress making, electrical courses etc in the coal field areas with the help of Khadi Gramodyog Mahavidyalaya, Rajendra Nagar, Hyderabad. The efforts of the Samithi are fruitful as 25% of the trained candidates (1,547 of 6,187) became entrepreneurs and started earning on their own.

SPECIAL WELFARE AMENITIES PROGRAM (SWAP)

SCCL launched a unique scheme under the title-“Special Welfare Amenities Program” (SWAP) in 1997-98. In SWAP, both colony representatives (workmen) and management decide on the works to be carried out in housing colonies and the works include provision of water, power, street lights, drainage facilities, sanitary lines, removal of garbage, replacement of doors and windows, construction of roads, establishment of sulabh toilets, maintenance of parks and playgrounds. The company also makes separate budgetary provisions for the timely completion of these works due to which hygienic conditions of living are created in the housing colonies.

INCULCATING HEALTHY PRACTICES AND HABITS

The company counsels its employees about the need for giving up bad habits such as smoking, alcoholism, gambling and Gutka chewing. It also undertakes social campaigns on issues like malaria prevention, importance of sanitation and nutrition, diabetes control, prevention of heart diseases and HIV/AIDS to bring greater awareness about health and human development. In short, the company not only encourages its employees to give up bad habits but also educates them about the adverse impact of bad habits upon their health.

WOMEN WELFARE

The company is committed to the welfare of women employees as well as the wives of employees as evident from the “Corporate Women Cell” it constituted at its headquarters in Kothagudem and also the women cells it constituted in all its mining areas. It also formed “Singareni Employees Wives Association” (SEWA) in the coal field areas with active participation of wives of employees. These cells and associations undertake different programs for the benefit of women employees. The Corporate Women Cell celebrates the International day for women on 8th March every year by conducting a variety of entertainment programs such as quiz competitions, sports & cultural events, and presents mementos to the first three winners. All the same, the women’s cells of different locations look after welfare, improvement in working conditions, and redressal of grievances of women employees relating to their employment. The wives association also educates and enlightens women employees about the need for health & hygiene, literacy, children’s education, safety and post-retirement planning. The collective role played by these cells and associations received wide applause from employees, their families, and the management of SCCL.

CONCLUSION

In India, public sector undertakings are model employers as they are known for their liberal employee welfare practices. SCCL the giant public sector enterprise as a model employer provides various welfare facilities to its employees. However, the company needs to reinforce the welfare programs continuously as welfare is an important factor of industrial relations, the extra dimension, giving satisfaction to the workforce in a way, which even a good wage cannot. To sum up, SCCL is truly employee welfare oriented.

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