

# The Agricultural Labour Enquiry

## Reflections on Concepts and Methods

Daniel Thorner

*The following critique of the Agricultural Labour Enquiry forms part of an analysis of agrarian statistics and agricultural labourers in India which the author is preparing for the Inter-University Study Project on Labour Problems in Economic Development.*

*Dr Daniel Thorner is the author of The Agrarian Prospect in India: Five Lectures on Land Reforms, which the Delhi University Press is publishing in July for the Delhi School of Economics.*

AGRICULTURAL workers form the most disadvantaged economic group in India today. Their wages are typically low; conditions of work are often onerous; and employment frequently irregular. The level of living which their earnings permit is very meagre. Their daily lives, as it were, reflect the problems of underdevelopment, under-employment, and "surplus" population which figure so prominently in current national and international discussion. Prior to 1947, such concern as the Government, of India had evinced in the labour field was focussed on urban workers, particularly those organized into strong or militant unions. Since the attainment of independence, Government has shown heightened awareness that the agricultural labourers constitute the largest single section of the national labour force. Accordingly, the Ministry of Labour of the Central Government in 1949 took the important step of sponsoring a nationwide Agricultural Labour Enquiry, the results of which now lie before us.

The total published output is indeed substantial; if we include the

' Government of India, Ministry of Labour Agricultural Labour Enquiry :

Agricultural Wage' in India. Delhi. 1952. Two Volumes.

Pp 417 and 172 Rs 6/8 and 6 10, Agricultural Labour: How They Work and Live. Delhi 1952.

Pp 137 Rs 3/8.

Rural Man Power and Occupational Structure: Delhi, 1954.

Pp 530 Rs 10 -.

Report on Intensive Survey of Agricultural Labour: Delhi, 1955 Seven volumes.

Vol. I All India Pp 305 and "hhhh." Rs 7.

Vol. II -North India. Pp .118 Rs 2/12.

Vol, III East India Pp 321 Ha 5/12.

Vol. IV -South India Pp 232 lis 5/12.

Vol, \_ V West India Pp 172 Rs 3/12.

Vol. VI Central India Pp 266 Rs 5/12.

Vol. VII—North West India Pp 306

general summary and the supplementary volume of wage statistics, there are eleven volumes totalling nearly 3000 pages, and furnishing 900 tables and numerous charts. Shri V V Giri, then India's Minister of Labour, wrote proudly in 1954:

"This is the first and the largest socio-economic enquiry of its kind conducted in Asia along the lines laid down by international bodies, like the ILO and the UN and according to the scientific principles of sampling under expert technical guidance/' (Foreword to Vol I of Report on Intensive Survey \

The Enquiry' covered some 800 sample villages, each in three phases: (1) a broad questionnaire about the village as a whole (General Survey'; (2) a second questionnaire that was answered by every family resident in the village, 104,000 families (General Family Survey); and (3) a detailed questionnaire answered by 11,000 families, roughly one out of each three families of agricultural labourers. {Intensive Family Survey),

This large-scale operation was preceded by a series of two dozen odd pilot surveys of individual villages in various parts of the country. Eight of these have been published as separate pamphlets. The main Reports present some discussion of the difficulties encountered and indicate those which were considered to be solved and those which continued to offer trouble. As a whole the Enquiry has an impressive appearance and has already been quoted in widely scattered quarters- to mention two examples, in publications by an economist of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and by an Academician of the Social Sciences Division of the National Academy of the U S S R. Five articles summarizing the Enquiry's principal statistical findings appeared in this journal in the latter half of 1955 (Economic Weekly issues for August 6, August 13, September 3, September 10, and October 1, 1955),

The Directors of the Enquiry themselves felt enough confidence in their results not only to issue them for the 800 villages studied, but to project them on a State by State basis for India's 27 Part "A", Part "B", and Part "C" States; to calculate further estimates for the six zones proposed in the General Population Census of 1951 North, East, South, West, Central and North-West India -and finally to provide All-India figures. Thus we now have in print tables which purport to give nationwide estimates for the number of "attached" labourers and for "casual" labourers; the number of labourers with land and the number of landless labourers; size and number of cultivation units; employment and unemployment of agricultural labourers; average daily wages and total national wages bill (for agricultural labourers); income, expenditure, indebtedness and variation in economic levels of living.

In the years ahead, these tables are likely to be used extensively. It may therefore be worthwhile to take a closer look at the basic concepts embodied in the three questionnaires and at the methods by which the principal data have been collected and assembled,

### Agricultural Worker: Casual and Attached

The term "agricultural worker" as used in the Enquiry includes "all those who work in the fields for wages". (Agricultural Wages in India Vol I. p 1). The Instructions issued in connection with the second stage, the General Family Survey, amplify this definition. Investigators are to take as an agricultural worker "a person who reports that he or she is engaged in agricultural operations as a hired labourer for wages for 50 per cent or more of the total number of days worked by him or her during the previous year". An agricultural labour family is defined as "one in which either the head of the family or 50; or more of the earners report agricultural labour as their main occupation". (Rural Man-

Power and Occupational Structure, p. 449.)

Agricultural labourers are then divided into two categories: "attached" and "casual". It should be emphasized that this is the most, fundamental distinction in the Enquiry. In each of the three stages the held investigators were required to record certain data separately for these two types of workers. The "Instructions" accompanying the General Village Questionnaire (the first phase) provide that separate wage quotations be collected "for purely 'casual' labourers who are paid at the market rates and for 'attached' labourers who, whenever required by their master, have to work for him and are not ordinarily free to seek employment elsewhere". (Agricultural Wages in India, Vol I, p. 400) This definition takes into account only two aspects of the conditions of employment, viz., rate of pay and freedom to seek alternative work.

A second of definitions is to be found in a footnote to the report of the final phase of the Enquiry, although we are not informed whether it was ever issued to the investigators. Attached workers "are more or less in continuous employment and are under some sort of contract with employers during the period of employment", while casual workers are "workers other than attached. They are employed from time to time according to exigencies of work". (Report on intensive Survey of Agricultural Labour, Vol I. p 211) Two additional features, then, are indicated for the identification of "attached" workers: continuity of employment and the existence of a contract.

Many other possible criteria appear in the descriptions of the various kinds of farm labour noted in each of the States in the General Village Survey. (Agricultural Wages in India, Vol I). In most cases the difference between "casual" and "attached" workers is stated initially in terms of the period for which a man is engaged and whether or not he receives daily wages. Thus we find that in Assam attached workers "were employed and paid on a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly or annual basis", while casual workers "were employed on daily wages for short periods during busy seasons". In Madras attached workers "were engaged for the whole year or during the busy season for a period of three to six months", casual workers being "engaged either on time or on

piece rates". In PEPSU, "casual workers were paid on a daily basis while attached workers were generally employed for longer periods on yearly, half-yearly or monthly agreements". (Agricultural Wage' in India, Vol I. pp. 55, 114, and 247. Cf for Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, pp 151, 165, and 182. respectively. In the case of Bihar, on the other hand, "a striking feature of agricultural employment... was the payment of daily wages both to casual and attached workers". Similarly, in the Kayahiseema area of what is now Andhra., "since of the attached workers got daily wages even though the contract of employment was annual". (Op cit, pp 68 and 120)

What, is the evidence that a worker' has agreed to serve on an "attached" basis? In Punjab. "contracts for annual employment, generally reduced to writing, were made in the month of deth (mid-May to mid-June)." In Assam the contract of employment "was often an oral understanding." In Hyderabad, "there were very few written agreements between attached workers and their employers; the agreement was usually oral and was renewed every year if the employer WAS satisfied with the work". (Op cit, 151, 55. 200)

#### **"Concessions" to Attached Labourers**

In every State, we read of "concessions" to attached labourers. Perhaps the most common of these was a loan or an interest-free advance. In Bihar, "an attached worker was usually advanced a sum of Rs 50 to Rs 100 at the beginning of the year and unless and until he returned the sum, he was not permitted to leave his employer". In the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, employers were able by means of an interest-free advance to ensure that labourers would work for them on any day required by the employers with the understanding that they would be paid on a par with casual labourers for the days on which they worked. In Uttar Pradesh it is noted that the workers usually remain attached to the same employers for successive years, "the reason being that employers generally advance loans varying from Rs 200 to Rs 400 per annum to the attached workers and also gave them a plot of land (generally 2 bighas) either on a nominal basis or free of rent". (Op cit, pp 68, 136, and 166). Land allotments

of this type, -sometimes with temporary permission to use the employer's implements and/or draught animals for ploughing, are very widely reported for attached workers. Some times the land allotment was given on a cropshare basis. Houue Sites or other provisions for accommodation were frequently supplied for attached workers, but often for casual workers as well. This was also true for perquisites such as meals, clothing, footwear, and bedding.

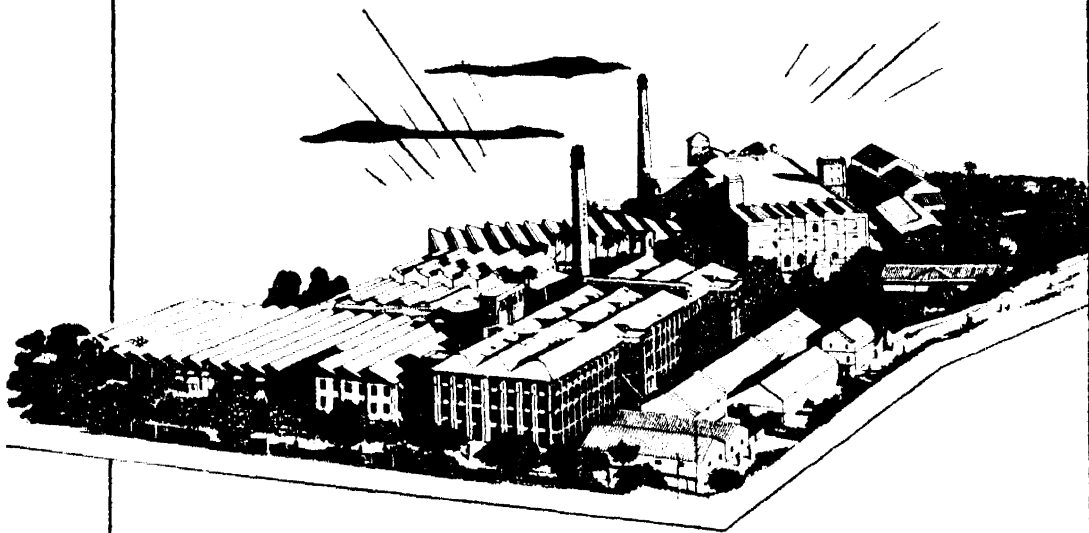
In some areas attached workers were required to work longer hours than other employees. In Bihar, 'they had to render customary services such as household work or running errands". In Mrdhya, Pradesh they "also looked after the employers' cattle and I were required I to do non agricultural work as well if so desired". In Travaneore-Cochin, "the attached workers in most cases worked from morning till night and did all kinds of domestic service". (Op cit pp 69, 99, 285)..

#### **freedom to Serk Other Work**

Let us return for a moment to the question raised in the original definition of the degree of freedom to seek other work. We have already noted for Bihar, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh that in effect, the workers were tied down by loans which they could scarcely hope to repay. Similar case' are cited for Mysore and West Bengal Op cit pp 183 and 236). Quite the opposite would seem to be the lot of attached workers in Saurashtra. Although employed on a yearly basis, "the workers were free to terminate then' employment at their will. They received free food, clothing, footwear, bedding and accommodation in addition to an annual cash wage; but they did not normally take loans or wage advances, nor was it customary to allot rent-free land to the workers, (Op cit p 275.1

Clearly very many factors have to be considered in setting up meaningful categories to cover this bewildering variety of relationships. We have to deal with periods of employment ranging from a day to a lifetime, with conditions all the way from full freedom to near-serfdom, with payment in regular cash wages as well as traditional harvest shares plus perquisites in kind, with formal written contracts and with oral understanding', with debt-bondage and with tie-in land allotments. In the context of Indian agriculture, the term "attached labourer" has a connotation of unfreedom. There is

**I**n the Indian textile world  
the name **KOHINOOR** has  
been associated with finest  
quality yarns, threads and  
fabrics for over half a  
century.



## **THE KOHINOOR MILLS CO., LTD.**

*Managing Agents:* **KILLICK INDUSTRIES LTD.**  
KILLICK BUILDING, HOME STREET, FORT, BOMBAY.

no doubt that such a category of especially disadvantaged workers exists, and it would probably be feasible to draw up a set of criteria by which it could be decided whether labourers fall into this class. Certainly no single test such as liberty to take up another job, "steady employment or the existence of a contract will suffice to separate out the genuinely "attached" workers. When a labourer is described as not "free to seek employment elsewhere," it may simply be the case that he has freely agreed to remain in a particular job. On the other hand a labourer committed to a particular employer by reason of debt or land-allotment may be employed only "from time to time according to exigencies of work". Thus an attached worker may be employed on a casual basis while a completely free worker may be employed continuously on a long-term contract.

Apart from such workers as can, all things taken together, be classified as "unfree" or "bound" or "attached" (whether for a long or short period), there would appear to be several types of relatively free labourers. These would include regular, indeed, even permanent, workers; and migratory or transient workers; labourers who do a full season's work and those who find employment only at peak periods. To construct proper rubrics under which to separate out these various short and long-term workers with differing degrees of job mobility and a wide variation in bargaining strength would admittedly be a difficult task. It is a task the Agricultural Labour Enquiry has declined.

Rather than abandoning the terms "attached" and "casual" after they had proved in practice to be mutually non-exclusive catch-alls for non-homogeneous groups, the Enquiry adopted a somewhat disingenuous expedient. The terms have remained unalterable, while the specific content and meaning have been left vague, to be filled in at the State and local level.

The profoundly unfortunate consequences of this lack of clarity show up most vividly in the treatment of South India: Madras (including Andhra) Mysore, and Travancore-Cochin. This area is the home of India's heaviest concentration of agricultural labourers. About half of the rural families in the 124 villages studied in Madras (including Andhra), Mysore, and Travancore-Cochin in the General Family

Survey were recorded as agricultural labour families. In the final phase of the Enquiry 2,184 of the agricultural labour families in these three States were selected for Intensive study. Only 28 of these 2,184 families were classified as belonging to the group of "attached" workers. On the basis of these 28 cases, we are given percentages of "attached" workers as 1.4 for Madras, 1.6 for Mysore (six families), and 0.0% for Travancore-Cochin. (Report on Intensive Survey of Agricultural Labour, Vol IV, pp 15, 76, and 122.)

Such figures for the proportion of "attached" labourers in this region are ridiculously small. One of the most striking features of the South Indian rural scene is the large number of farm servants who work year after year if not generation after generation for the same families of landowners. Frequently they are bound to their masters by deep-rooted traditions of mutual obligations and responsibilities. They render a variety of customary services and receive a variety of customary payments and perquisites. The names of such labourers are legion: Pudiyaals, Pannaiyaals, Pulayals, Pateru, Jita, etc, etc. The first phase of the Enquiry, the General Village Survey, gave considerable detail on the Pannaiyaals of Travancore. The chapter on Travancore-Oehin, in fact, refers to a series of tripartite conferences among employers, workers and the State Government to settle the wages and conditions of employment of "attached" workers. It was decided in 1948 to set up a standing Industrial Relations Committee with a view to eliminating friction between these workers and their employers. (Agricultural Wages in India Vol I, p 286.1

The failure of the Intensive Family Survey to find more than an insignificant handful of such families in its entire South India sample is particularly surprising since the report of the General Village Survey described a considerable number of different types of "attached" labourers for this region. "Attached" workers were found at this first phase of the Enquiry in each of the seven zones of Madras, in 17 of the 24 sample villages of Mysore, in half the sample villages of Travancore, and in all the Cochin sample villages.

The conclusion would seem inescapable that a sizable number of the agricultural labour families in Madras, Mysore and Travancore-

Cochin whom the Intensive Survey has classified under "casual" belong, in any sensible interpretation of the Enquiry's categories, under "attached" If this is so, it follows that the proportion of "attached" workers calculated for the country as a whole (on the basis of the data for Madras and the other States) is seriously underestimated. It also follows that the secondary tables comparing days worked, annual Income, expenditure, etc, for "casual" and "attached" workers rest on a defective base, since the averages attributed to "casual" labourers undoubtedly refer to a mixed group made up of both "casual" and "attached".

By contrast with Madras, very high percentages of "attached" labourers are reported for Punjab and especially, PEPSU. Among these "attached" workers are included several distinct groups of cultivators who receive as their principal income a share of the crop in kind. The Sanjhis, for example, worked on a kind of "partner" or "helper" basis with the biswedars, a type of big proprietor. The Sanjhi cultivated lands of the bisweddar with the use of the latier's bullocks and implements. When the crop was harvested the Sanjhi, according to the Enquiry, gave a one-fourth share to the bisweddar; and also gave him two other minor payments. For his part, the Sanjhi kept the rest of the produce; he was responsible for paying one-half of the land revenue and irrigation charges.

In the instructions to investigators on how to classify Bataidars, Barga-dars, Adhiars, and other cropsharers, these cultivators are described as "very closely akin to tenants." It is pointed out that "they share the produce along with the owner or tenants," their share being usually "half or one-third." All such families are to be tinted "under the sub-head 'cultivating tenants.'" (Kural Manpower and Occupational Structure, p 450.) Had this rule been applied to Punjab-PEPSU, the Sanjhis and some other cropsharers would have been excluded from the category of agricultural labourers and classified as tenants.

#### LABOURERS' FAMILY BUDGETS

I shall not burden this review with any detailed comment on the figures presented in regard to the "family budgets" of the 11,000 labourers' families intensively surveyed. Serious questions about the procedures employed were raised in this journal by

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, when he reviewed the Enquiry's pilot village study in Bihar.' In dealing with the "receipts" aide of these family budgets Prof Dandekar observed that the Enquiry's questionnaires required the entering of figures for annual net income from land owned, land taken on rent, land obtained free of rent, and household occupations other than farming. "This is too much to expect", he commented, "both from the investigator and the respondent. Net income is too complicated a concept and the reported figures would have little meaning unless its contents were precisely defined. Secondly' even after precise definitions, it does not seem possible mentally to arrive at figures of net incomes. Thirdly, in an integrated and particularly subsistence family economy, net income separately of land owned, of land taken on rent, of land obtained free of rent and of household occupations other than farming are inconceivable. Therefore, it must be emphatically pointed out that all figures appearing on the receipts side of this schedule against the items mentioned above, can be no better than meaningless guesses mostly of the investigators' It should be noted that matters would not improve substantially, even if the same schedule IB filled for every month rather than once in a year." (The use of this schedule on a monthly rather than on an annual basis was precisely what was done for the year 11'50-fit in the Intensive Family Survey.) Prof Dandekar's conclusion is that "the kind of family budget attempted in this enquiry is in many parts meaningless; in others the reported figures are unlikely to be anything better than plausible guesses . . . ." The final reports of the inquiry as now issued furnish no grounds for greater confidence in this aspect of the investigation than that expressed by Prof Dandekar.

The procedures of the Enquiry with regard to employment, unemployment, and wages are no more satisfying than those with regard to

Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Agricultural Labourers in Village Dorwan, Bihar State (New Delhi, Government of India Press, 1951) Economic Weekly, Vol III (September 15 and 29, 1951), pp 897-99 and 940-49. Professor Dandekar's general criticisms of the Agricultural Labour Enquiry, given in the earlier of these articles, remain quite apposite today.

family budgets. With regard to unemployment, we are told, for example, that "data on the number of days during which the agricultural adult male labourers were fully unemployed were collected month to month for a period of one year. In doing so, only those labourers were taken into account in any month who reported wage-paid employment for at least one day in that month.' The Enquiry goes on to assert that it has "firm" data on those workers who did report wage unemployment every month (84 per cent of all labourers) but that "in regard to the rest, forming only 16 per cent who did not work for wages even for a single day in any month, no data could be collected on the days they were self-employed and the days on which they were unemployed/' The Enquiry therefore resorted to the assumption "that such men were self-employed and unemployed in equal proportion . . . ."

The difficulty involved in comparing the rate of compensation of "attached" and "casual" labourers was dealt with in an unusual fashion. To give the results first, in the words of the Enquiry: "The computed daily wage of the attached labourer was less than that of the casual labourer in all the zones and States of the Indian Union. This was perhaps the price which the attached labourer had to pay for the security of employment and stability of income during all agricultural seasons." For the wages of casual workers the computation is stated to have been direct all payments in cash and kind for the various types of agricultural work were recorded, including customary "perquisites" like cloth, clothing, meals, beverages, etc. The latter were "evaluated in cash in terms of the ruling retail prices." From these data, average wage rates were obtained by weighting them by the number of man-days worked.

The procedure with regard to those workers listed as "attached" was quite different. "The methods of remuneration and employment contracts for attached workers," the Enquiry states, "were of such a bewildering variety that the wage rates could not be suitably tabulated." To solve this problem the Enquiry resorted to the following expedient: "The computed daily wage of attached adult male labourers has been obtained by deducting the wages earned by adult male casual workers from those earned by all adult male agricultural labourers and dividing

the figure so obtained by the man days worked by attached adult male labourers/' (Sic I I I)

One is reminded of the old story about a shepherd who was asked how he would get the number of sheep in a, particular pasture. "It's easy," he replied, "you takes the number of feet and you divides by four."

Where data on exactly the same subjects have been collected at two different stages of the survey, the tables given in the separate volumes exhibit wide variations. Two quite different sets of figures for average daily wages of operations such as ploughing and harvesting are provided by the General Village Survey (Agricultural Wages in India Vol II, p 5) and the Intensive Family Survey (Report on Intensive Survey of Agricultural Labour—Vol I, p 61.) No serious attempt is made to explain or reconcile these discrepancies, in part, these may be due to the fact that the data obtained from the three questionnaires relate variously to 1948-49, 1949-50, and 1950-01. In many tables, data from more than one questionnaire are intermixed. Although there is no explicit discussion of this problem, the fact is that the Enquiry used not one but three base years.

The principal data of the Enquiry, what one might call the structural data, show even more astonishing discrepancies. One would certainly have expected that for a given State the relative number of "attached" and "casual" labourers would remain roughly the same from 1943 to 1951, particularly when the data were collected in the self-same villages on the basis of the same "Instructions" and under the same State Supervisor. The table on the next page presents for live States parallel figures from different phases of the Enquiry for the percentages of attached labour families to total agricultural labour families, and the percentages of attached workers to all agricultural workers, n is impossible to discover any consistent relationship within either of these two sets of figures.

For the purpose of a study of agricultural labour in India, the State of prime significance is Madras, it seems particularly unfortunate that at the second stage of the Enquiry it was decided for this State alone "to investigate only one out of every two families" in the sample village/ In the end the General Family Questionnaire was filled up for roughly

three-fifths of the families in the State's 84 sample villages. (One may note in passing that this important fact is mentioned only among the introductory notes to the volume, Rural Man-Power and Occupational Structure, p 2, No other reference to this drastic reduction is to be found, either in the chapter in this same volume on Madras or in the State-by-State Tables at the end of the volume, although the returns from the 60 per cent sample appear under such captions as "Total Population", "Total Number of Families," etc.)

Of the agricultural labour families already listed in the General Family Survey the number in each Village selected for the Intensive Family Survey was stated to be "generally 50 per cent." (Report on Intensive Survey of Agricultural Labour, Vol I, p 2.) For the country as a whole the final count of families actually included in the Intensive Survey worked out to about one-third of the total agricultural labour families in the sample villages. In Madras the fraction was much smaller. Only 1,535 families of the 8,232 agricultural labour families listed in the (General Family Survey were treated in the Intensive

Family Survey. But these 8,232 families represented only two-thirds of the 12,447 agricultural labour families found in those 84 villages in the original General Village Survey. In this way the Intensive Family Survey's sample of 1,535 families for Madras ended up as one out of every eight agricultural labour families in the sample villages. It must be said that the most important State for the purposes of this Enquiry received the minimum or intensive study.

In the introductions to the various volumes and in the sections on methodology, numerous claims are made for the reliability and precision of the data on the ground that, the Survey utilized advanced statistical techniques. The design of the Enquiry is described as "a stratified two-stage random sampling the village being the primary or first stage unit and the agricultural labour family the second stage or ultimate unit." (Report on Intensive Survey of Agricultural labour, Vol I, page 2.) India was divided into 77 "homogeneous" zones on the basis of "broad agricultural and economic considerations"; the number of villages to be allocated to each zone was then calculated on the basis of

equal weightage to number of villages and total rural population, The villages were then selected at random with equal probability and without replacement. For the final stage of the Enquiry, the required number of families were selected from the list of agricultural labour families prepared during the earlier phase. One again they were chosen at random with equal probability and without replacement, the sampling factor being uniform within each zone.

In practice the delineation of zone was a highly arbitrary operation. The first decision was that each one of the 27 Class A, B and C States should be treated as a separate unit thus such tiny enclaves as Ajmer, Bilaspur, Coorg, Delhi, Kutch and Tripura automatically qualified as "zones". The Punjab, with a population of twelve and a half million and an area of 37,000 square miles including plains and hills, irrigated and dry tracts was also treated as a single zone. Its little neighbour State of PEPSU, which has a population and area only one-third of this size and which is situated within the borders of the Punjab, was divided into six zones. By contrast Marathwada and Telegana, the two zones into which Hyderabad was divided, each display a wide variety of geographical, agronomic economic and social features. To treat this array of disparate and internally variegated areas as a grid of homogeneous cells is statistically impermissible.

The decision to use random sampling for the selection of the families for Intensive Survey from those which had already been categorized in the course of the General Family Survey as "agricultural labour families" is difficult to understand. The returns to the General Family Questionnaire included a great deal of information about these agricultural labour families: whether they were landless or had land, and, if so, on what terms, whether "casual" or "attached", number of earning members, subsidiary occupations of earning members, possession of work animals and ploughs etc. On the basis of these data it would have been possible to construct a stratified representative sampling of the required size in terms of one or more important variates. For example, the Intensive Sample in each village might have been selected so that the proportion of landed and landless families chosen was the same as in the total number

**Proportion of "Attached" Labour to all Agricultural Labour by Families and by Workers.**

State	Percentage of "Attached" Labour Families to Total Agricultural Labour Families		Percentage of "Attached" Workers to all Agricultural Workers	
	According to		According to	According to
	General Family Survey <sup>1</sup>	Intensive Family Survey <sup>2</sup>	General Village Survey <sup>3</sup>	Intensive Family Survey <sup>4</sup>
Assam	25.2	11.2	6.2	10.4
Bihar	28.8	1.2	22.4	0.6
Madhya Pradesh	18.0	26.5	13.6	15.8
Madras	5.7	1.4	7.6	3.4
Punjab	34.7	52.7	23.5	50.8

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from Appendix VI, Table 1, "Percentage distribution of different categories of families in terms of the total number of rural families in the different States." Rural Manpower and Occupational Structure, pp 504-05.

<sup>2</sup> Reports of the Intensive Family Survey : Vol III, pp 205 and 49, Vol VI, p 41; Vol IV, p 61; Vol VII, p 89.

<sup>3</sup> Agricultural Wages in India, Vol I, p 31.

<sup>4</sup> The Intensive Family Survey reports that practically all "attached" workers in Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, as in most other States, are adult males. The figures for male attached workers in those four States have been taken, accordingly, to represent all attached workers. The figures for these attached workers and for all "casual" workers in those States which have been drawn upon to calculate the percentages given above, come from the Reports of the Intensive Family Survey: Vol III, pp 206-07 and 50-51; Vol VI, pp 42-43; and Vol VII, pp 90-91. The figure of 3.4 per cent for Madras, which reports a significant number of children working as "attached" labourers, comes from the Intensive Family Survey, Vol IV, p 29.

## **RENEWAL OF OUR PLEDGE TO EXPAND INDIAN TONNAGE UNDER THE SECOND FIVE YEAR PLAN**

Having added six ships totalling 38621 deadweight tons during the First Five Year Plan period and having also acquired m.t. "JAG JYOTI", India's first commercial tanker, we rededicate ourselves to the building up and expansion of the national mercantile marine under the Second Five Year Plan.

### **Jag Ships**

*Always at your service.*

**Regular service on the coast and tramping all over the world**

For Quick and Efficient Carriage

Entrust your Shipments

to

## **THE GREAT EASTERN SHIPPING COMPANY LTD**

*Managing Agents:*

**A. H. Bhiwandiwalla & Co. (Bombay) Private Ltd.,**

14, Jamshedji Tata Road,

BOMBAY-1.

Tel. Nos. 37137-8-9.

Tel. Add. "GREATSHIP"

of agricultural labour families in that village.

The ruination of the Enquiry, in fact, may be said to be due to an obsession with the theoretical virtues of random sampling, coupled with an indifference to the formidable problems involved in its application. The published volumes contain several discussions of possible sampling errors, questions of bias, and co-efficients of variation. Nothing is said about the possibilities of non-sampling error inherent in any enquiry conducted by the question survey method. The extent of non-sampling error for a study of this type depends upon whether the designers of the enquiry have formulated with sufficient clarity the concepts about which they wished to gather data; whether the questionnaires and other schedules were properly understood by the field investigators; whether the respondents interviewed by the investigators understood the particular questions put to them; whether the questions posed were such as could be answered verbally with any reasonable degree of accuracy; and, lastly, whether the questions were such that the villagers would be willing to give, or would feel safe in giving, correct information. The plain fact is that in agrarian enquiries in complex economies and societies like that of India the non-sampling errors are likely to be many, many times larger than the error of sampling.

At this stage of our knowledge it would appear that one of the research methods most difficult to apply to the study of India's involved landlord-peasant-labourer relationships is the nation-wide sample survey. In these matters the truth yields itself very slowly, and requires to be sought first in more traditional ways. The problems of analysis, the definition of concepts, the preparation of tentative notions and hypotheses capable of being put fruitfully to empirical testing, all these require patient and systematic work, possibly for some years still to come. To rush in with large-scale sample surveys is simply to waste time and throw away money. The hunger for the questionnaire, the larger the number of investigators, the more elaborate the scale of operations as a whole, the greater the extent of non-sampling error.

In 1949, when the Agricultural Labour Enquiry was launched, it would have been advisable to keep

down the size of the investigation. A dozen or two research officers possessed of commonsense, training, and some insight into the rural scene would perhaps have been enough. These could have been posted to the various regions of India and allowed 18 to 24 months for analyzing the agricultural labour relations characteristic of those areas. They could have been instructed to test part of the information given to them verbally on such items as harvest shares, amount of grain consumed daily, and number of hours worked in a day, by measuring, weighing, and counting for themselves.

To the extent that the General Village Survey included descriptive work, it has produced useful results. The non-quantitative sections of the first volume of the Enquiry (Agricultural Wages in India, Vol 1. furnish for each State a thumb-nail sketch of its characteristic employer-labourer relationships. Although brief, these accounts provide much interesting information on division of labour, types of payment; the various demands upon labour in the course of the agricultural year, the terms in the local languages for types of labourers, types of services, perquisites, payments, cropshares, etc. The collection and publication of these qualitative data is the most valuable service of the Enquiry.

The parts of the Enquiry that are likely to attract the greatest attention, however, are the Tables and the sweeping quantitative generalizations made up from them. The trouble is that in our statistical age the temptation to use any tables, no matter how compiled is well nigh irresistible. The more tables, the greater the temptation. One is seduced into believing that no matter how shaky may be the basis of any individual figure, an average or other arithmetical product of a large number of such figures must yield an approximation to the true position. Reflection will show that no amount of manipulation can make more out of the figures than was originally put into them. If the basic categories confuse the essential distinctions, it matters little how many cases fall under each head. Thus if it is not clear what constitutes an attached worker, it does not matter whether the Agricultural Labour Enquiry says that in a given State there are 1.3 per cent or 78 per cent of them. An average of such figures, weighted or unweighted,

is even less worthy of attention than the original figures themselves,

In the preface to each volume of the Intensive Family Survey we are told that:

"In the design of the survey, analysis and presentation of data, the recommendations of the ILO in their monograph "Family Living Studies" and that of the UN Statistical Sub-Commission on Sampling were kept in view to the extent possible. The enquiry was conducted in close collaboration with the State Governments and under the technical guidance of the Departmental Committee of Statisticians and Economists. It is hoped, therefore, that the results as also the methods and techniques adopted would be of value not only to the Government and public in India but also to countries in similar stage of economic antisocial evolution and to international agencies like the ILO, and the United Nations."

These surveys may indeed prove valuable to other countries if they serve as an object lesson in how not to conduct agrarian enquiries.

**The  
Economic Weekly**

A Journal of Current, Economic and  
Political Affairs  
(Founded 1949)

*What others say:*

"Over the past three years a remarkable series of articles has been appearing in that enterprising periodical, the Bombay-published **Economic Weekly**. These have given preliminary accounts of no less than fifteen Village Studies by British, American and Indian anthropologists and sociologists" **New Statesman & Nation**, April 9, 1955.

**The Economic Weekly, Bombay.** "A genuinely liberal independent journal focussing on current events. Rather like the **Nation**, but weightier. Occasional articles on China indicate Indian Slant" **W W Rostow** in "The Prospects for Communist China".

**15, Tamarind Lane,  
Fort, Bombay**

**Annual Subscriptions  
Rs. 24. • Foreign: Rs. 27**