

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR, A DIMINISHING FORCE

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Introduction

The results of the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry (ALE; 1950-51), Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry (ALE; 1956-57) and the Third Enquiry on Income of Rural Labour Households (RLE; 1963-64) lead one to believe that agricultural labour in India is a diminishing force. Even taking note of the fact that a degree of incomparability exists between the first and second enquiries, the conclusion that the agricultural labour households in both absolute and percentage terms had been declining during the three enquiries is inescapable. The percentage of agricultural labour households to total rural households declined from the figure of 30.4 of first ALE to 24.5 during second ALE and further to 20.9 during RLE. The object of this paper is to locate the factors responsible for this declining trend for the period intervening between second ALE and RLE through sifting analysis. The explanation that the decline in agricultural labour noticed between the first and second enquiries was 'due to structural changes taking place in the rural economy as a result both of land reforms and threat of land reforms, which has led to evictions, resumption of land for personal cultivation, partition of large ho'dings and a reduction in the average size of the cultivated holding with its consequent greater emphasis on self-cultivation and decline in demand for hired labour'¹ cannot be extended to the period between second and third enquiries for, the analysis points out that these structural changes could have only a minor effect in reducing the agricultural labour force. Undoubtedly there was a huge backlog of surplus labour in the agricultural sector and this has become more acute during the period under consideration because of inadequate increase in opportunities in this sector. This together with fall in demand for hired labour had strengthened the push factor of agricultural sector which more than the pull factor of other sectors was responsible for the large-scale exodus of agricultural labour. There is no doubt that a great part of this reduction in agricultural labour was due to migration to urban areas. The fact that

¹ Rao, V.K.R.V., *Agricultural Labour in India*, Studies in Economic Growth No. 3, 1962.