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Tahima studied up to the primary level in school. Her husband is a farmer who grows crops on other people's land. They have a 21-year-old son studying for a degree in Bachelor of Arts in college. They also have a daughter, 17 years old, studying in higher secondary school. Three women from Ghoshpur village of Baduria block discussed their health issues. Their names are Mrs. Tahima Bibi Mondal, Mrs. Firoza Khatun and Mrs. Mafuza Mondal, and they are all housewives.

Tahima studied up to the primary level in school. Her husband is a farmer who grows crops on other people's land. They have a 21-year-old son studying for a degree in Bachelor of Arts in college. They also have a daughter, 17 years old, studying in higher secondary school.



Mafuza also has education up to primary level. Her husband is a laborer working on electrical jobs in the village. They have two daughters: the older one (17 years old) is studying in higher secondary and the younger one (14 years old) is in class 8.

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Firoza studied up to secondary level. Her husband is a mason and they have two sons. One in class 1 and the other is 17 months old. She spends most of her time rearing her two little sons. Tahima and Mafuza each stitches the seams of 36 dozen long and short pants per month and each earns approximately Rs.2000 (US\$28).

They were asked about the key factors of good health. They all said that unadulterated, non-contaminated food like vegetables, fruits, cereals and clean water are the most important factors. By clean water they meant bacteria- and arsenic-free water. This community uses water from the nearby deep tube well installed by the state government.



When they were asked how they take care of their children and keep them from falling sick the response was that they wash the children's clothes and school uniforms frequently. Their hair and nails are cut and kept clean. They bathe, eat meals and sleep at regular hours. The children are repeatedly reminded not to eat food that is not fresh and not kept covered, especially from outside as uncovered food gets easily contaminated with germs carried by flies and other insects.

These days mothers worry about dengue and malaria, which have increased in incidence considerably over recent years. They try to take all sorts of precautions to combat these seasonal diseases.

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None of the members of these three families have fallen seriously ill. They were asked how often they visit an allopathic doctor. They said that if anybody in the area falls sick, including an old person, they go to a health care clinic in the village where a doctor visits on certain days. Other than for coughs and colds, for which they use honey

with holy basil and two other leaves ('basok' and 'shiuli'), they never use any ayurvedic (plant-based) treatments. In times of serious illness, they either go to the nearby hospital or to Kolkata, the nearest metropolitan city.



In this village, women's reproductive health is given good care. Women are educated to maintain small families by following family planning methods.



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They believe that to stay healthy, they need to keep their environment clean. To maintain a clean house and surroundings, they sweep inside the house two to three times a day and wipe it down every day. The front yard is swept every fortnight. The toilets, bathroom and the concrete area (apron) around the tubewell are sprinkled with bleaching powder to remove green algae. They understand the importance of using toilets and bathrooms.

Student at a government-run village school



Nasreen Parveen is 9 years old. She often does her homework in the morning before going to school. Here she is doing her English lesson.

Six days a week, Nasreen walks half a kilometer to school with her mother, Reshmi bibi. Reshmi bibi went to school and studied up to class 8. She is a saleswoman, selling cosmetics



from door to door. Nasreen's father is a mason.



She goes to the Ghoshpur Nimtalapara Free Primary School. She studies in class 4. She loves to study English because she loves stories. Mathematics is her least favorite subject—it confuses her. At school, she works hard on learning her lessons because she does want to pursue higher education. Her ambition is to become a doctor. In India, there are very few female doctors in Muslim communities,



so it is great that she wants to be one.

Student at a government-run village school



Nasreen's school is co-educational. They wear school uniforms: white shirt and navy blue skirt for girls and white shirts with blue trousers for boys. At the beginning of the school day, during assembly, they sing the national anthem and songs about cleanliness. Every day, they learn and recite quotes by famous persons. Before going to their respective classrooms, they are required to take off their sandals and place them at one side of the building. They



have eight periods of lessons every day, at 40 minutes each.



Teachers use blackboards to teach and maps to teach geography. In this school, they teach through storytelling, which make the lessons very interesting. Sometimes they write questions on the blackboard and select students to solve the problems. They also have dancing, singing, recitation and physical exercise classes once a week. There is an annual sports competition day.



Student at a government-run village school



At 1.30 pm, they have lunch recess, when they eat their mid-day meal provided by the school. The food is cooked by women who get paid by the school from government funds. Usually very simple meals are prepared, like rice and lentil soup or curry with soybean or mixed vegetables. Some days, they get eggs or chicken. The students do not need to pay for the meal, and nobody brings their own food from home. The school day ends at 3 pm.

Nasreen is very studious and is first in class out of 31 students. Her hobbies are reading and drawing. She says that in their school every year, they celebrate Independence Day (15th August), Republic Day (26th January), Rabindra Jayanti (May 7th-the day when the Bengali Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore was born). Rabindra Jayanti is a day that makes all Bengalis from West Bengal and Bangladesh proud. The school also observes the birthday (12th January) of Vivekanand, renaissance leader and the reformer of old conservative Hinduism: practices like 'sati' and widow marriage.



Student at a government-run village school



Mainak Sarkar, 9, studies in the same class as Nasreen. Mainak's father, Mahendra Sarkar, is a primary school teacher. Mainak's mother helps her only son get ready for school. Mainak's grandfather takes him to school on his bicycle.

Mathematics is Mainak's favorite subject--he enjoys solving problems. He finds Bengali (first language) and English (second language) quite boring.

His teachers give him homework every day, and check his work the following day. Like Nasreen, Mainak also wants to study medicine. He likes to sing and play harmonium, and has birds and fish as



Nasreen's parents are very proud of her. They say that they send their children to school to become self-reliant through achieving their goals, and so they can make a name for themselves. Both parents work hard to provide Nasreen with what she needs. Though her school is free, they need to pay around Rs.1000 (\$14) per month for her to have private tuition on two subjects. Nasreen loves to study and wants to become an example in her community as a female doctor, and to make her hardworking parents proud.

Mainak's parents say they will help and support Mainak as he continues his studies and decides what he wants to do.

Cultivation as occupation

In India, 69 % of the populations live in rural areas where agriculture (subsistence and cash crops) and animal farming (husbandry) are the most common occupations.



Monimohan Ghosh (62) has been a farmer since he was nine years old. He lives with his wife and one daughter. The daughter is married. She was married five years ago and lives very close to the parents' house. On a typical day, Monimohan wakes up at 5 am.

His first task is chopping about two bamboo baskets of paddy straw to feed the bullocks. By 6 am, he is out in the field, taking his bullocks to plough the field for the next crop. In India, most farmers still practice this labor-intensive farming method instead of using machinery. Labor-intensive farming produces higher quantity of yield per hectare than large-scale farming with machines.

Around 1.30 to 2 pm, Monimohan goes back home for lunch and to feed the cattle. Then it's time for an afternoon nap and to spend some leisure time with family and sometimes with neighbors. At night, he feeds the cattle, eats his dinner at 9 pm and goes to sleep at around 10pm.

Monimohan grows variety of crops, including two types of paddy/rice (*kharif* in summer and *rabi* in winter), jute (which is grown during monsoon season because it requires plenty of water), mustard, yellow split peas, red lentils (masur), peas, coriander and other vegetables. He says that jute, red lentils and mustard provide a better profit.



Cultivation as occupation



This year, the yield of rice and mustard looks very promising. When rice harvesting time comes, laborers are hired to cut the straw manually. Clump of straws are bound together with another straw. Several such broom-like bunches are piled together on the field or taken home, ready to be threshed. 'Threshing' is the process, done manually, to

separate the grains from the stems/straws.



The separation is either done manually by beating bunches of grain bearing straws against a tilted woven plank made of bamboo strips, or by hiring a foot-powered grain thresher. Then this process is followed by 'winnowing,' or using the breeze to separate the grains from the bits of straws. Women are often engaged in this field work.



Cultivation as occupation



That is not the end to obtain rice grain at the end. The grain is then soaked in water overnight in huge earthen containers called 'chari'. The next morning, the grain is boiled and then dried in the Sun. Drying takes more than a day, before the rice is taken to the mill for de-husking and polishing, resulting in white grain parboiled rice ready for the market.

After the harvesting of *kharif* rice in summer and *rabi* rice in winter, the field is prepared for mustard, jute or sesame depending on the season. He uses bullocks to till the soils, and uses water to level the turned dry or semi-dry soil. Then he spreads the seed by hand on the prepared field that is now a nursery bed. After a couple of weeks of planting the seeds, weeding is done manually.

To protect the plants from diseases and insects, pesticides and insecticides are used.

Monnimon also grows vegetables such as pointed gourd (pawtol /parval), bitter gourd, spiny gourd (kakrol), snake gourd (chichinga), ridge gourd (jhinga), cucumber and eggplant. These vegetables are grown on trellises. Potato, yam, onion, eggplant, ladies finger/okra, cauliflower and chilli are grown on or in the soil. He also has fruit trees like papaya and mango.

He was asked about whether he was concerned about the chemical fertilizers he uses. He said that he knows that the field will get barren after a few years of chemical fertilizer application, but the yield is much higher than the yield from using organic fertilizers. He needs money now for his family and doesn't know what will happen in the future.

It is indeed very unfortunate that in India the *poor* farmers, who work the most, do not have any savings for the future. Hence desire for son(s) in the family is common.



Occupation (men) – fish/pisciculture



In West Bengal, the average annual rainfall is 69 inches (175 cm); in comparison, the average annual rainfall in California is about 21 inches. India is the second-largest fish producing country after China, and West Bengal is the second largest producer of fish in India.

This is Bhupal Biswas, 60 years of age. He lives in the Deganga block of North-24 Parganas, West Bengal with his wife and one son. His wife is a homemaker and son (35) works as a clerk in a school. Bhupal's occupation is farming fish - aquaculture or pisci-culture.

He and his four brothers inherited about 2 acres (6 bighas) of land each.

His brothers are farmers, as were their father and grandfather.

In 1989, Bhupal decided to convert 1/3 acre of arable land into a pond to practice aquaculture, which provides a better income than agriculture. The boundary around the pond was almost one acre where he grew plants like banana, papaya and guava. In the first year, his aquaculture business did well. But the following year, due to some neighborly strife, someone applied insecticide in the pond and killed all the fish. It was a big loss. It took one-and-a-half years to clean the pond completely. A friend helped him with 44 pounds of fish fry for his pond. Once again, the outcome was very good. He has been farming fish ever since.



Occupation (men) – fish/pisciculture



constantly into the chamber. This type of farming is expensive from the egg stage until the fish are sold at the market.

As per Bhupal in his area mainly two types of fishing is practiced – hybrid and freshwater. Fish like catfish, basa and perch are reared in the hybrid method. In the hatchery, there are two chambers. In the concrete chamber, one variety of fish is kept to lay eggs. It is important to aerate the water in this chamber. As seen in the picture, water is being sprayed



After the larvae grow for 6 to 8 weeks into fingerlings, they are transferred to earthen chambers. In these earthen chambers, the fish grow to an adult stage in 3 to 5 months, depending on the breed of fish.

Since they grow in small chambers in huge numbers, the fish aren't able to move freely and often develop skin diseases due to abrasion. Hence, they are pre-treated with antibiotics. And to accelerate their growth, they are also treated with hormones.



Occupation (men) – fish/pisciculture



After the fish grow to a certain size, they are transferred to another pond with more space so they can continue to grow. In three to five months, they weigh more than two pounds and are ready for the market. They are usually sold for export to other states or countries.

Bhupal practices fresh water farming. This type of farming is done in a small pond or large 'jheel' or lake. This is considered long-term fish farming because the cycle is a minimum of six months.



The pond needs to be prepared before releasing fry into the pond. First, 30-40 sacks of Mahua oil cake is applied in the pond. This treatment kills all the fish in the pond and acts as organic pond fertilizer. Then the pond is cleared of any branches and floating water hyacinths and dead leaves before releasing the baby fish purchased from a hatchery into the pond. At the initial stage, the fish food comprises husks of peanut and mustard, and pellets made of rice husk dust, soyabean, fish oil and some additional protein powder.

The food is applied twice a day by Bhupal himself. Indian carp (katla and rui/rohu), mullet, tilapia, mrigal, bata, monopia and shrimp are some of the fish grown in ponds and consumed locally.

Bhupal says that nowadays, children do not adopt the occupation or trade of the father or forefather, but his wife and son do help him in his business. At the end of the day, he is very satisfied with his business.



Housewives



This is a story of two wives living as an extended family – Sufia bibi (47 years) and Mumtaz bibi (38 years). Sufia bibi's husband is a farmer and Mumtaz bibi's husband owns and drives a four-wheeler auto rickshaw. They live in a village in Swarupnagar, in the district of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The family owns 0.6 acres of farming land. Sufia Bibi has four daughters who are all married and live elsewhere. Three daughters studied up to high school (class 12) and the youngest daughter got married last year while she was in her final year of bachelor's degree. Mumtaz bibi has two sons. The older one is studying in college and the younger one is in class 9. Both the housewives are homemakers and spend their time working at home.

Every day they wake up at around 6 am. The call of the roosters and the 'ezan/adhan' or early morning call to prayer announcement from the mosque wakes them up.



Every morning, the first chore is to sweep the courtyard and make the beds. Today, it is Mumtaz bibi's turn to sweep the courtyard. Then they wash the utensils that were used for dinner the day before, using water from their private tubewell (they do not yet have a well provided by Project Well) and ashes collected after cleaning their firewood oven. They do not wash dishes at night because their washing area is outside the house and they don't have



electricity because they cannot afford.

Housewives



It is Sufia bibi's turn to feed the cows. She is also cooking the morning breakfast—rice with a vegetable dish such as mashed potato and lentil soup or cauliflower/pumpkin curry, depending on the season. The husbands will eat before they go to work, and the sons before they go to school.

For lunch, they will eat rice and some other vegetable dishes. The vegetables are from their own land and also from the market, depending on the season.



While Sufia bibi starts the fire and washes the rice grains, Mumtaz bibi cuts the vegetables. She also grinds the spices that will be used that day—the spices are ground fresh daily. They generally cook vegetables and on some days they prepare meat or eggs. They cannot afford to buy fish except during times when the price of fish is less expensive that is during the monsoon months.

The two women grew up in separate households doing housework. Sufia bibi's daughters used to help with the housework, but they moved out after marriage. They still help around the house when they visit them. The women have always worked at home and have never worked at jobs outside the house. During the harvesting period, they help their husbands.

Some afternoons, they have a nap. Most days, Mumtaz bibi sews to make extra money, usually about Rs.800 (US\$12) in a month. They take orders to stitch petticoats—long skirts worn under saris to secure them. In the evenings, they cook again. So most of their time is spent cooking for the six to eight members in the family—sometimes more when there are visitors.

