



A portrait of everyday life in an Indian village>>

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Background

- Field research since Feb'10 in a tribal village Neemkheda, in North-West Madhya Pradesh, India; helping out with Digital Green activities
- Staying on a partner NGO campus
- Close observation of village life
- 1 week “rural immersion”-- homestay at a farmer household

The Village- Mansinghpura

- 3 hours by road from Indore, MP; near Neemkheda
- Near the main road
- 250 households, 1500 people approx.
- 7 tribal groups
- Dichotomy of small and big farmers (< 1 acre, > 10 acres)
- 2 Govt. schools; 1 Anganwadi
- 8 household toilets made by the NGO SPS
- Electricity between 9 PM to 12 midnight, 3 AM to 7 AM
- Flaky cellphone connectivity
- 8 SHGs of 12-20 members each (1-8 yr old)

The Family >>



Family

- 6 member household; 4 sons away
- HH expenditure INR 3000 p.m. seasonal income (USD 60)
- Father a farmer; supplementary seasonal jobs until recently
- < 1 acre land; Dried well – depend on rains
- Mother helped in fields; Daughter-in-law taken over
- Parents < 5th grade education
- Sons studying, in service (one at DG); between 8th grade to Graduate degree
- Only daughter in private school (fees INR 2800 p.a.) USD 56

A day in the life of
a rural farming family >>

4:30/6:00 – 7:30 am

- Wake up; morning ablutions in fields
- Have 1 cup of tea
- Wife, daughter-in-law prepare food; do seed grading in sowing season
- Son leaves cows to graze, women clean cowshed, give cattle feed
- Farmer leaves for fields with oxen in sowing season; with daughter-in-law in Mahua season

- Forest produce collection to supplement income
- Morning time revolves around livestock--
Current cattle batch are offspring from wife's dowry cattle



Wash area, water from public handpump



Handpicking Mahua in the forest, 6:45 am



Cattle jail, 7:00 am



7:30 am – 12 noon

- Daughter leaves to school 5 kms away;
Son leaves for work
- Wife, daughter-in-law, grandchild reach fields with food, seeds in sowing season
- Everybody eats and gets to work—
Daughter-in-law cleans fields, farmer ploughs, levels, harrows, wife puts seeds

- Multiple dry crops, rainfed fields, dried well— no deep tubewell (would cost INR 90,000) USD 1800 approx.

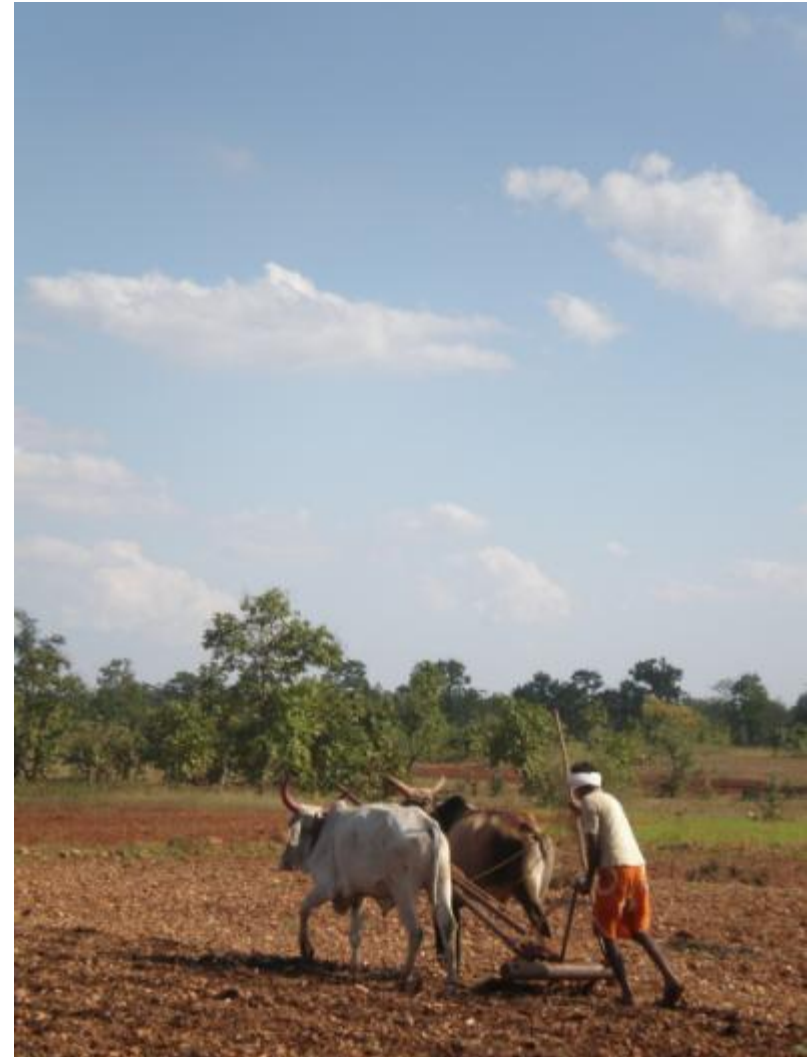


Photo credit: Kevin Gandhi

In the fields, 11:30 am, 46° C, 118° F



Agricultural laborers, Rs. 50/- per day, USD 1 per day



Imported farmhand, for free



Attitude to poverty

- General acceptance of one's economic situation as one's fate
- Possibly due to deep-entrenched caste-class structures?

Primary school (< Grade V)
Teachers Grade X- XII, trusted sources of information
11:45 am



“I’m glad I’m not a farmer.
If I were one, I could not
have worked in an
enclosed office, or got
Sundays off”



Son in office, 11:50 am

12 noon – 4:30 pm

- Wife, daughter-in-law, grandchild return from field in sowing/harvesting season
- Fetch water, clean, sweep, swab, bathe
- Daughter returns from school

- 2 public handpumps, 1 govt. well
- Time consuming preparation time before any household activity



Clothes washing at a public handpump, 1:30 pm, 47°C, 120°F



Neighbors come by for work
2 pm





In the courtyard, 3:30 pm, fetched water



4 pm, Rest time, Moving furniture items

4:30 pm – 7 pm

- Visits to neighbors' house
- Son comes back from work, hangs out with friends, buys at local merchants'
- Cattle return from jungle/field, fed, taken to drink water, tethered
- Farmer (and daughter-in-law) return(s) from fields(jungle)

- Home return and socializing time
- Public and semi-public social spaces, guests all the time, privacy protocols; face-to-face interactions





5 pm, Put Mahua out to dry

At the local retail merchant's, 6:30 pm
“Non-benevolent benefactor”



Photo credit: Kevin Gandhi

7 pm – 9:30 pm

- Power comes back on; neighborhood kids come to watch TV as well
- After a hard day's work, dinner prepared by daughter-in-law
- Farmer bathes, rests, has a drink
- Everybody eats and retires to bed in the courtyard at 9:30-10 pm





What's on TV+DVD?

- Minimal broadcast TV
- DVDs most of the time: Tribal songs on mobile phones and “missed calls”; Old B-grade Bollywood
 - Technology part of folksongs*
(Local market flooded with DVD song albums such as “*Brother-in-law* giving a missed call”, “*Girl* giving a missed call”, etc.)—
Discreet symbolic action? Technology as enabler?
- Discuss urban references in “Ghajini”
- Play “Bablee Tero Mobile” video
- Play “Tere Sang Pyaar Main” video



Seasonal Events

-Highly social, prolonged events: Weddings et. al.

- Weddings before sowing season such that daughter-in-law is additional farmhand
- No *party poopers* even for 3 AM loud speaker music (“We’ll also need to play music at 3 am some day”)



Assets, Liabilities

- Huge loans from friends, family, SHG for social events (INR 60,000 -- USD 1200 -- for son's wedding);
- Dried well; Unused pump; No deep tubewell ; No loan yet for deep tubewell (INR 90,000) USD 1800
- No bank account ("nothing to save")
- Utensils, silver from wife's dowry

Disproportionate expenses (social-events) and household income; social pressures over pressing needs

Seasonal Events

- “Bhagoria” village fair during spring



Medical infrastructure

- Clinics available in bigger villages (> 500 households)
- Practicing doctor usually is a non-MBBS “Jhola-Chaanp” doctor
- Children these days born in hospitals– government pays money for children to be born there

Memorable Quotes

Level of Disconnection

- “Rs. 22 for a biscuit packet!!” (50 cents)
- “A computer is like a TV on which you can do impossible things”
- “Bangalore is a big city south of Mansinghpura”

Motivations

- “If you learn computers, you can get a job that pays up to Rs. 5000 per month!” USD 100

Key Takeaways

- Work involves incredible physical labor day-to-day
(in total sun exposure, with very little food)
- Strong social ties: social pressures over pressing needs
- Significant expenditure on entertainment
 - Minimal broadcast TV; High usage of DVDs players; Technology part of folklore
- Unquestioned acceptance of economic situation
- Advantage of the trusted insider in the rural milieu

>> Thank You

