

JAALO YADAV: Weaving A Different Fabric

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Making use of the fallow land to rear *tasar* cocoons and working hard to make this livelihood option a viable one proves to be one of the best decisions that Jaalo Yadav ever took, increasing the family income, steadily inching him forward to self-sufficiency and earning him the reputation of a successful and well-informed farmer

JAALO YADAV LIVES IN SMALL VILLAGE NAMED Bhorsar in the forest area of Katoria block, Banka district, Bihar. He lives in a joint family with his parents, four brothers, three sisters and their families. His elder brother studied up to matriculation and was the only sibling who had had access to education. The rest of them, including Jaalo, were illiterate because the family could not afford to educate the children. Despite this, Jaalo has acquired the reputation of being one of the best farmers of *tasar* in the region and this activity has brought many changes in his social and economic life. His story was documented in 2014, towards the end of the Special Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) Project on *Tasar*, implemented by PRADAN, in collaboration with the Central Silk Board (CSB).

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THE STRUGGLE TO MAKE TWO ENDS MEET

About 15 years ago, Jaalo and his family lived in a very small house. The family had 15 acres of land, of which only 1.5 *bighas* was fertile. The lack of irrigation facilities was the main reason for the limited productivity. They had only one well, the water of which was used for drinking and, to some extent, for irrigation. The crops they grew were dependent on rain. The productive land was used to cultivate paddy, *kurthi*, and potato crops, providing food for the family for five months of the year. For the remaining seven months, the main sources of income of the family were rearing of *tasar* cocoons in the forest and migration to the cities for work. The rearing of cattle, and the harvesting and sale of *mahua* flowers and seeds provided some additional income.

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income, therefore, was not very stable. Being entirely dependent on the quality of cocoons that he could get, his income fluctuated greatly. On an average, he could earn an income of Rs 6,000 to 7,000 per year from this activity.

He also used to migrate for some time to Kolkata in search of work. He worked in the railway lines, and also as a daily wage worker. His family had 10 cows, five calves, a pair of oxen and eight goats. The sale of milk provided some income, though much of the milk was consumed by the family members. In the summer season, when water and fodder were in short supply, the family had to send their cows and calves away to some other region to tide over the stress period. Hence, during those four months even the little income from the sale of milk was also not available to them.

His family also owned 500 *mahua* trees. The harvest from these trees helped in the struggle for subsistence. In those days, market facilities had not developed adequately and they had to sell the product in the village itself, where the price was rather low.

Due to their poor economic condition, many times the family had to skip one meal a day and

the quality of life was very poor. They often fell prey to diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea and were compelled to borrow money for medical purposes at a high interest rate of 10 per cent from the local *zamindar*. (The interest rate could be brought down to 3 per cent if they were willing to mortgage some property). When Jaalo's younger brothers became older, they also started migrating to urban centres for work, which helped supplement the income of the family. In spite of the additional income, the family continued to struggle and could barely manage food security.

DAWN OF A NEW ERA

In 2002, a representative of an NGO called PRADAN visited Bhorsar village and that proved to be the turning point for Jaalo and his family. The man held a meeting in the village and convinced Jaalo Yadav and some others to take up *tasar* rearing in a more scientific way under the guidance of their agency. Jaalo received two packets of seed material and two nets from PRADAN. He was also given training in the scientific rearing of cocoons. In the first season itself, he produced 12,000 cocoons and earned Rs 5,000.

Jaalo found this activity far more profitable than the other economic opportunities available in the village. Not only could he earn a decent amount within a short span of time, he could also gainfully employ other family members for at least six months of the year.

The following year, he underwent training in grainage (seed) production at Raigarh and prepared one in his own house. That year, he earned Rs 15,000. In the next two years, he made his own grainage with the help of PRADAN. In 2013, he learned to prepare his own nucleus seed from which he produced 10,000 cocoons. To this, he added 19,000 cocoons purchased from outside for his grainage. In that grainage, he made 80 packets of seed and sold it at Rs 600 per packet, resulting in an income of Rs 48,000. He began his own commercial farming in which he produced 32,000 cocoons and his total earnings during that year added up to around Rs 1,35,000.

During this period, he had the benefit of attending many specialized training camps, covering topics such as the use of microscopes to check bacteria in the seed, maintaining cleanliness of the grainage, employing the correct techniques for washing, ensuring correct measuring and improved packaging of DFLs, improving the rearing of nucleus and commercial seed, and taking measures to increase productivity. PRADAN also provided *tasar* rearers some assets such as 3,000 small plastic boxes for the laying of eggs, two microscopes, one cupboard for placing DFLs,

a small drum, two buckets, two mugs, 10 pieces of slides and small pots. During the first four years, Jaalo had to bear only the cost of the seeds. Other inputs such as Roger (insecticide), bleaching powder and lime, were given as a grant from PRADAN, under the SGSY Programme of the government. Monetary help was also provided under this programme for preparing a building for the grainage.

The price of cocoons improved. Earlier, cocoons were sold to the local merchant at Rs 600 per *khaari* (set of 1,300 cocoons); with the intervention of PRADAN, the prices improved. In 2007 and 2008, Jaalo got Rs 1,600 and Rs 1,700 per *khaari*, respectively.

Jaalo found this activity far more profitable than the other economic opportunities available in the village. Not only could he earn a decent amount within a short span of time, he could also gainfully employ other family members for at least six months of the year. It led to greater involvement of the women in the family in productive work. In the past, the woman's role was restricted to arranging food for the men; now the women could also participate in rearing and grainage work.

According to Jaalo, there were some risks associated with this activity—the main one being the preservation of eggs. If the eggs were not placed in an airy and smoke-less place, they can be eaten by insects. Also, if the seeds get infected, the entire cycle of rearing will be spoiled. It is important, therefore, to check the seeds thoroughly when taking them. There is also some risk of birds and insects attacking and eating the moths during the copulation stage; therefore, the moths have to be protected with nets—in what is known as a *chowkie* garden.

A *chowkie* garden has to be prepared with special care. It needs to be cleaned properly and sprayed with a mixture of bleaching powder and lime. The leaves of the Asan bushes have to be soft and free from disease. And care has to be taken that the moths never remain hungry, otherwise they die. Cocoons have to be separated from the tree, only after they are dry, otherwise it affects yarn productivity.

Once his income started increasing, Jaalo no longer went to the city in search of work. In a year, he was engaged in sericulture for six to seven months, and with agricultural activities and cattle rearing in

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the remaining months. His three younger brothers worked with him only during rearing. They continued to migrate to Kolkata and/or Bengaluru, which helped to add to the family income.

TASTE OF A BETTER LIFE

With the income from *tasar* sericulture, Jaalo began using

high-quality seed, fertilizers and insecticides to raise better agricultural crops. He purchased one *bigha* of land and a water pumping machine. Now he and his family enjoy food sufficiency the whole year. Their food habits have also improved. Earlier, rice, maize and millets were the main food items and, sometimes, they even had to skip a meal; now, they can afford to eat various types

of vegetables, pulses and wheat along with the regular cereals. Jaalo and his family do not skip any meals and celebrate festivals without taking any loans. They also spend money on buying new clothes and recently they purchased a motorbike for easier transportation.

Jaalo has five children, and he wants all of them to study. Two



Tasar silkworm rearing under a nylon net in a chowkie garden

In addition to the improvement in their economic condition, their social status has also improved. Jaalo Yadav's family is a one of the more respected and prosperous families in the village. With increased prosperity, there has also been a change in Jaalo's confidence.

of his children are studying in private schools, one in Kolkata, and another in the village itself. The family is also healthier as the frequency of illness due to diseases has decreased. They can afford to use mosquito nets to prevent malaria and are conscious about the drinking water. Hence, now the overall quality of their life has improved significantly.

His father has a savings account in the Post Office, in which he keeps all the savings of the family. At present, these are estimated to be around Rs 1.5 lakhs. Jaalo has a separate savings account in the bank. With the increased income, his family has built a *pukka* house made of bricks and they have also bought another house at a cost of Rs 4.80 lakhs. One of his sisters lives in that new house with her family. Jaalo and his brothers have taken the responsibility of caring for their sisters. The expenses for the marriage of their three sisters were Rs 80,000 for the eldest sister, and Rs 2 and 2.5 lakhs for the other sisters, respectively. They have also helped in the marriage of their two nieces, when they spent Rs 3 lakhs for one and Rs 70,000 for the other. They bought land for their elder sister for Rs 2.80 lakhs.

However, life is not always easy and, in 2012, in a major setback, the Yadav family got robbed by dacoits. The dacoits took whatever they could find—utensils, ornaments, land deeds, etc. They also took away cash of around Rs 2.80 lakhs that was in the house. On account of the fact that they had reached a stable economic condition, they could survive this shock. There were no changes in the food habits or the standard of living because of the robbery. That year, they were planning to buy a tractor, which they had to defer to a future date.

In addition to the improvement in their economic condition, their social status has also improved. Jaalo Yadav's family is a one of the more respected and prosperous families in the village. With increased prosperity, there has also been a change in Jaalo's confidence. Earlier, he was afraid of the police, the *mukhiya*, the forest officers and other government officials. Now all that has changed. In fact, if the forest officers have any queries or issues, they come directly to the Yadav family to get them resolved. In 2013, the villagers had a meeting with the forest rangers, where Jaalo asked the officers to cultivate trees of Asan,

the host tree for *tasar*.

Jaalo is very optimistic about his future. Apart from this activity, he is also trying to make improvements in his agricultural practice. In the coming year, he is planning to improve the water harvesting structures for improved irrigation. He is saving money to buy the tractor. He is also planning to diversify and open a general store in the village for someone in the family to manage.

Jaalo is keen on expanding his sericulture as well, but the lack of available host trees is a major constraint. To this end, he is coordinating with the forest officers so that more and more Asan trees can be cultivated in the forest. Because he is very experienced in *tasar* rearing, he helps the villagers with this activity. Last year, he went to a place named Suiya to orient new farmers for *tasar* rearing.

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