



“Kuroiler”

The Ground Realities



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Stories

Maya – A resourceful woman

Maya is self dependent, confident and a risk taker. She is the major decision maker in the family and the household runs on the income she makes through the small Mother Unit and the pheriwala¹ work. She is the only woman pheriwala in the village and is proud of the fact.

Maya Poria was met by the team on 4th October 2007. She is a 40 years old woman living with her husband, Alok, who is 52 years of age. Her 15 year old son works in a factory in Kolkata on a monthly salary of Rs 500/- . This is a woman headed household as Alok has a heart problem and Maya is responsible for running the household.

Alok used to work as domestic help in Kolkata and earned Rs 300/- . When he got married to Maya, they realized that Rs 300/- was not enough to run a household and decided to come back to the village. Initially he worked as agri-labour and Maya helped out by making paper bags. For 3-4 days of making paper bags, she received Rs 30/- . For the past few years, Alok has developed a heart problem and cannot undertake heavy manual work.



Maya started a Mother Unit three years ago. Alok takes care of the birds at home and when they are around two weeks of age, she goes around the villages selling chicks as a woman *pheriwala*. Initially she would sell them in her own village and a few villages nearby, but later on started going to villages as far as 25-30 km and would use the local bus for this purpose. She likes her choice of livelihood as she sees more profit and less risk in running a Mother Unit compared to rearing birds for table purpose. Presently she is not running her Mother Unit as she is recuperating from an appendix operation. Since there is no other source of income, she would start it again with the help of her son who she says will come back in few months from Kolkata. According to Maya -

'Our lives depend on Kuroiler'

So, in spite of chick-feed price going up from Rs 8/- to Rs 15/- in last four years, and meat rate going down to 45-50 Rs/kg from Rs 60/kg, she still sees it as a viable means to earn a livelihood.

Maya also keeps a few Kuroiler for sale as table birds and few hens for laying eggs. All decisions in their home are taken by her. Her husband contributes by bringing the day old chicks on bicycle from the Keggfarms dealer who is two kms away and taking care of the chicks when Maya goes out to sell. The chicks are fed mash while growers are given husk, paddy, broken rice, rice-gruel and water. They are housed in a 6' x 4' shed made of wood, bamboo, mud, wire mesh. The growers are not let out to scavenge as there is no place to forage. The litter is changed with every new batch. She adds lime powder to the saw dust and ensures that it remains dry at all times. No vaccinations are undertaken. Dead birds are thrown out in the open. During monsoons, there is invariably 30-40% loss due to outbreak of disease (white diarrhoea). She does not use veterinary services since the veterinary centre is far off. The Keggfarms dealer runs a chemist shop and she gets medicines for her Kuroiler from him. He also supplies mash for her chicks. For most problems related to Kuroiler she seeks his advice.

The case analysis brings out the fact that Maya Poria is a resourceful woman. The *pheriwala* job has ensured that she is aware and street smart. In spite of not being a weaver, she is a member of a Self Help Group for women weavers and has received Rs 15,000/- as medical grant for her

¹ Vendor who goes house to house selling chicks

appendix operation from them. Furthermore, she is not a Below Poverty Line card holder but has managed to get a small *Pucca* Hut through the '*Indira Awas Yojana*' meant for BPL card holders.

Kuroiler-keeping leading to Women Empowerment

Chhabi had problems initially when she lost birds to outbreak of diseases. The Keggfarms dealer advised her regarding the advantages of de-worming and feeding multivitamins which she took up. These measures taken by her have borne fruit and she has not lost a single bird in the past year.

Chhabi Poria lives with her family comprising of husband Dilip (42), sons Radhey Shyam (22) married to Uma (18) and younger son Johar (20). They do not own land and live in a *kutchha* hut in the middle of the village. Dilip and their elder son pull a rickshaw between them and manage to earn about Rs 1200/- a month. The younger son Radhey Shyam is a *pheriwala*² and earns a living by selling Kuroiler chicks in neighbouring villages. This fetches him about Rs 500/- a month. Chhabi began Kuroiler keeping seven years ago when both her sons were not working and income from any source was welcome.



Her management practices involve buying 8-10 day old 15 Kuroiler chicks and selling them at three months of age. Lack of land forces her to keep her flock confined to their pens without letting them out to scavenge at all. Chhabi feeds the chicks mash for a month and then a combination of paddy husk and boiled rice is given. Although she does not vaccinate her birds, she ensures that they are de-wormed and are given multivitamins with the feed. She changes the deep litter with each batch and adds lime and ash to fresh saw dust. Chhabi does not allow her *Pheriwala* son to keep his chicks with her flock and takes care of her Kuroiler all by herself. Her daughter-in-law sometimes helps in caring for them. She was able to sell 60 Kuroiler last year and did not lose even one bird, a fact she is very proud of.

Chhabi had problems initially when she lost birds to outbreak of diseases. The Keggfarms dealer advised her regarding the advantages of de-worming and feeding multivitamins and she took it up. These measures taken by her have borne fruit and she has not lost a single bird in the past year. She wants to increase flock size but non availability of land comes in her way. Chhabi sells her birds from home to the neighbours as well as to buyers from the nearby town. These buyers pick up seven-eight birds at a time and pay Rs 5/- less than the market rates. Money is handled by her and she decides how it would be spent. After reinvesting in Kuroiler chicks Chhabi spends the remaining amount for buying food for the family. Ever since she has started rearing Kuroiler consumption of eggs and meat has increased.

During the months of July to October, the family faces food shortage as both her sons do not get work. Her Kuroiler come to their rescue and basic food requirement is met with their sale. Chhabi is glad that she has Kuroiler to fall back on in times of need. Kuroiler have consolidated her position in the family as is reflected by her statement.

“Money in hand gives me position in my family”

Today she feels that anyone can progress with his/her efforts as she has been able to do so. Her status in the village has also risen and women seek her advice. She is happy that she is contributing in her own way to the family income.

² Vendor

Case Studies

Tarabela Ghosh is a frail 37 year old woman. She is a widow and has the responsibility of bringing up 3 sons who are minors. She lives in a one room house with an attached kitchen. This is her share in her in-laws house. Her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and three brother-in-laws with their respective families stay in the same house. Each brother runs his own kitchen and the family shares a common yard. The family does not own any land. The house is 50 meters away from the main road and has coconut, betel nuts and guava trees growing around them. Tarabela rarely gets her share of the fruit produced but she does not protest since she has to live with the family and does not want to antagonize them. They do not support her financially or morally.

Tarabela Ghosh

"So what if my name is good, my fate is terrible!"

This is how Tarabela sums up her life. Life has been difficult for Tarabela Ghosh. She lost her husband at the age of 28 years with three minor sons to bring up and no means of livelihood the situation was bleak.

Today sale of poultry and par-boiled rice are her sources of income. The waste from her rice business goes into feeding her Kuroiler and she is happy with this arrangement. She sees Kuroiler rearing a win-win situation.

Tarabela is deeply attached to her flock and looks after them relentlessly. Their presence is an anchoring factor of her life. She is so happy with her Kuroiler that she would love to increase her flock size, but cannot do so. Her sister-in-laws will not like it if her flock size is bigger than theirs. Since she has to live next to them and share the yard, she cannot dare to go against them.

Tarabela lives with this reality and feels powerless to do anything. She sees no way out.

Tarabela Ghosh's husband died 9 years back after suffering from a prolonged illness. He owned an auto-rickshaw which was sold when he was still alive and the money went towards his treatment. When her husband died, Tarabela was left with three young sons all under 10 years of age and no means of livelihood. Her mother-in-law taught her to make par-boiled rice from paddy and Tarabela earns her living by making and selling par-boiled rice from home. Last year she took loan of Rs 3,000/- from an NGO to buy pots and pans for her rice business.

The death of her husband brought a major change in Tarabela's life but one thing that remained constant was her flock of hens. Ever since she can remember, she has kept 8-10 hens at all times. Previously it was *desi*³³ but now it is a mixed flock of *desi* and Kuroiler. She saw Kuroiler the first time at her mother's house and liked its colour, size and built. Her mother informed her of Kuroiler ability to lay more number of eggs that were of a good size and taste. At the same time the Mother Unit person who is also her neighbour advised her to try rearing Kuroiler. He pointed out that she would not have to spend money on feed as there was enough broken rice and paddy left over from her par-boiled rice enterprise. Moreover he was willing to give her a few chicks on credit to be paid once she sold the Kuroiler. That was the beginning of Kuroiler keeping and she has continued with them. She sources her Kuroiler from Mother Unit person at a rate lesser than what it would cost to other people. She is able to sell her Kuroiler and eggs from home.

Tarabela neither vaccinates her flock nor does she de-worm them. *Desi* and Kuroiler are kept together in a pen (enclosure) made up of bamboo and mosquito net in her kitchen. Her management practices include cleaning the pen daily, giving mash initially and paddy and broken rice later on, dusting the birds with ash to clean them and allowing Kuroiler to scavenge only for one or two hours daily. She opines:

³³ Non descript fowl

“Kuroiler is Royal bird and should not be seen scavenging”

She does not trust anyone as far as feeding is concerned. For this reason she avoids overnight visits away from her home. She is very attached to her birds and looks after them tirelessly. Tarabela earns around Rs 700/- from her rice business. Therefore any income from the sale of eggs or birds is welcome. She uses it to buy vegetables, pulses clothing and school items for the children. Her father helps her financially whenever he can. He has kept Tarabela's eldest and youngest sons with him to lessen her burden. The eldest son helps his grand father in his hardware shop while the youngest son is a student.

The son who stays with Tarabela is in class VII and is 15 years old. He neither helps Tarabela with the rice business nor with her poultry. According to Tarabela, her son feels that he is too educated to do such menial jobs. Tarabela is fed up of her son and does not know how to cope with the situation. She opines:

“Only a person who has a useless son knows the pain of having one”

Tarabela would increase her rice business if only any of her sons join her. It is a labour intensive work and now she cannot handle the heavy pots on her own. Other option that she would like to exercise is to increase her Kuroiler flock. Here too she is constrained by the flock size of her sister-in-law. She cannot have more number of Kuroiler than her sister-in-law as it would create tension in the family. Being a widow, she cannot be seen doing well by them and therefore will continue with 9 birds only. Tarabela dreams of the day when she would not have to work and still get to eat, maybe when one of her sons earns well enough to support her. Tarabela is powerless as she cannot increase her flock size because of social barriers. Being a widow she cannot question the unfair distribution of the produce from land. Her social standing in the family is at the bottom.



Gauri Nauskar lives with her family of 4 comprising of Goshto her husband, Devdas and Devika, her son and a daughter respectively. They live in a dilapidated hutment with tin and bamboo roof. The initial two feet of the walls is made of brick and cement and rest is made of palm leaf matting. The roof leaks during rainy season and she would like to get the house in better shape but cannot as she has no funds. Goshto buys potatoes from whole sale dealer and retails it. Income is barely sufficient to meet their basic needs. They own one *bigha*⁴ land where paddy is cultivated. Most of it is used for consumption at home while some is sold for cash.

Gauri Nauskar

Gauri Nauskar is a poor Hindu woman for whom **Kuroiler keeping is a source of income and food**. Her two children get eggs to eat daily while she and her husband also get to consume eggs once a week. Surplus eggs are sold and money utilized for purchasing notebooks, stationary etc needed by her school going children.

Her good management practices have ensured zero morbidity and mortality in her flock and rise in her status amongst peers. She is now **leader of her SHG** and has also undertaken training in Poultry keeping organized by Panchayat.

Gauri had seen poultry being reared since childhood and switched from *desi* to Kuroiler after seeing it thriving at her mother's place. She bought her first flock three years ago and so far her experience has been good. She has not lost a single bird. She takes good care of her hens by allowing them to go out to scavenge for some time (about an hour) and then confines them to the shed. She feeds onion, garlic, mustard oil and green chilli paste to all birds at least four times a week. She also gives them a Dolkolmi (*Ipomoea*)⁵ herb to eat and claims that its medicinal properties keep the birds immunity high. Her birds are trained to eat algae at the pond. Paddy and kitchen leftovers are given as main feed. On outbreak of any disease in the neighbourhood she puts her flock on antibiotic as a preventive measure.

Gauri opines that Kuroiler are easy to maintain and ensure egg and chicken supply to the family. She sells them at 5 months of age and money is used in children's education. She may sometimes indulge in buying a *sari* for herself. She can spend the money as she pleases. Her husband treats her well and she revels in this fact. Gauri takes all decisions pertaining to Kuroiler herself while decisions regarding major issues are jointly taken.

She is the leader of her self help group under Swaranjayanti Rojagar program. Being a leader of this group has improved her standing amongst her peers. She saves Rs 30 every month and can avail a loan of Rs 2000/- at 2% rate in rotation. She had taken loan to help out her husband in his business and managed to repay it on time.

She had attended a 10 days training program on poultry management run by the government and is aware of bird flu. She keeps her poultry shed clean by sweeping and washing with phenyl occasionally. Gauri houses her Kuroiler inside her kitchen in a partitioned area. She wants to build a proper shed and would then think of getting more birds. Right now she has no money to invest. Gauri would take up any work that can be done from home. She can't do Zari embroidery work because of her Spondylitis (neck pain). She helps her husband in cultivating their own land. She puts in labour early in the morning to avoid sun induced headaches. She wants to educate both her children and does not want any more kids. She has gone in for a family planning operation. In her spare time she teaches neighbourhood children free of cost along with her own children. Children in the neighbourhood respect her and she too is happy with her role of a teacher. She keeps a clean house and in her free time watches television and listens to music. Television, cupboard, and chairs have been obtained through an NGO who provide money to buy household items but not to repair/built shed for the birds.

⁴ 1 hectare=4 bigha

⁵ *Ipomoea* is locally eaten by people as anti-malarial and liver tonic.

Gauri finds keeping birds an easy activity. She opines that Kuroiler do not need much space and feed requirement is also less compared to other livestock. Work load increases if goat or cows are kept as they have to be fed twice and shed cleaned daily. After receiving training in poultry keeping, she has started giving Vitamins to the birds in addition to de-worming medicines. She sources medicines from veterinary centre in closeby towns of Julpia and Amtala. She goes to veterinary hospital herself and has no trouble in accessing these facilities. She claimed that if she had the means she would like to keep 50 birds. She keeps layers for 2-2 ½ years and then sells them or they are consumed.

She wants her son to get educated and get a salaried job while for her daughter graduation and tailoring would be good enough. Gauri won't get her daughter married at an early age and would wait till she is 20 years old.



When taking this photo Gauri insisted on wearing a good sari because "*yeh photo dilli jayegi!*"
(this photo will go to Delhi!)

Anjali Maiti

The team met Anjali Maiti on 30th Aug 07 in village Budkhali. Anjali Maiti is a middle aged woman who single-handedly runs her household comprising of bed-ridden old father-in-law and husband. She has 2 sons who are married and live in Kolkata with their families and work as motor mechanics. 10 *Kattah*⁶ land that belonged to Anjali was given away as dowry to her daughter in marriage. Her sons happily consented to give up their share in the land as it was important for their sister to get married at the right age. Anjali lives with her family in a single room *kutchha* hut made up of mud bricks, bamboo and has thatched roof. She has a small patch of land on which she grows vegetables. She also keeps a cow and a goat there.

Anjali's husband used to work in Kolkata as a cook for 8 months in a year. For the past 2 years he has stopped going out for work as his health is failing. Anjali Maiti has taken on the entire burden of running the house on her and does a number of activities to make a livelihood. These include –

- ❖ *Kuroiler, cow and goat keeping*
- ❖ *Weaving and repairing fishing nets.*
- ❖ *Cooking lunch for 15 people at local teacher's house.*



Anjali had experience of rearing *desi* birds. She was persuaded by mother unit person to try rearing Kuroiler. Today she finds Kuroiler rearing a better option as they put on weight faster than *desi* and their meat and eggs taste as good as *desi*'s. She had started with few Kuroiler initially but when she got 2500/- in loan from Self Help Group, She expanded her flock to 50. Now she buys 50 Day Old Chicks from mother unit and sells at 2.5 months age when they weigh 2 kg approximately.

Anjali does all house hold work. All chores related to Kuroiler, cow and goat are also carried out by her. She cooks food for 15 labourers working on a betel vine plantation of local teacher. Since she is hard pressed for time, Kuroiler keeping suits her very well. She finds it least labour intensive and

major source of her income. It accounts for 50% of her total earnings and in her words –

***"Kuroiler Nahi to Jeevan Nahi"* (No Kuroiler – No life)**

Whenever she has time she mends and weaves fishing nets. She earns about Rs 25/- a week through this. She has trained with forest department to grow saplings but lack of space restrains

Anjali Maiti

***"Kuroiler Nahi to Jeevan Nahi"*
(No Kuroiler – No life)**

Such is the impact of Kuroiler on Anjali Maiti's life. For her, **Kuroiler rearing contributes to almost 50% of her income**. Her household comprises of invalid old father-in-law and husband with medical problem and presently she is the **sole bread winner**. All she has is a small *kutchha* one room hut that she shares with her family and 50 Kuroiler!

In Kuroiler she finds a steady source of income with minimum inputs both in form of labour as well as investment.

Other village women admire Anjali for her skills in Kuroiler rearing and seek her advice. She is happy to have her Kuroiler and cannot think of life without it.

⁶ 1 hectare=4 bigha=20 kattah

her from taking it up commercially. Anjali purchases DOC from MU and gets them vaccinated by the MU person who is also a neighbour. Since she has no land to spare, she has housed her flock inside her hut. The rear portion of hut is partitioned by wire mesh into 2 parts. In one part young chicks are kept while in other older birds are housed. Kuroiler scavenge for few hours in a day and are fed mash initially and paddy and boiled rice later on.

She gives Kuroiler credit for ensuring that there is enough to eat in her household. Keeping Kuroiler has increased her belief in her capabilities and is happy with the respect she gets because of it. Her social standing amongst other women has risen and they come to her for advice on Kuroiler. She is confident that her Kuroiler based livelihood will generate enough income for her to live on even if her husband does not contribute at all. Consumption of eggs and meat has increased after Kuroiler rearing as eggs are available and get consumed once a week. However Kuroiler is consumed at home occasionally when her sons come over to visit her.

Her only fear is price-crash of Kuroiler. In spite of losing 16 birds in the past year, she is up beat. If she had her way she would like to increase flock size but lack of space and capital for investment stops her from doing this.

Shantana Purkait

Shantana Purkait aged 32 years, lives with her husband Joideb Purkait (40 years), daughter Madhumita (11 years), Son Raju (5 years) and father-in-law Dhananjay (68 years) in the village Harindaga in 24 South Paraganas. The team met her on 31 Aug 07.

Shantana belongs to landless Schedule Caste Hindu family. The hut she lives in is made on a raised platform of stones and mud. It has walls made out of bamboo and plastered with mud and straw, and has a thatched roof. Her brothers-in-law have huts close by.

Shantana's husband Joideb is a daily wage earner and works in Diamond Harbour town for a wholesale fish trader. He earns Rs135/- a day. He finds employment for 10-15 days in a month. During summers there is no work available at the fish market since the cold storage facilities do not operate and fishing is not carried out during this time of the year. He opines that there is no work available as agri-labour during summer months and it becomes difficult to get even one meal. Shantana's father-in-law used to make bamboo mats for constructing walls of huts but doesn't do it any longer as he is old and feels there is no market for it. Shantana helps out by doing zari-work embroidery and earns around Rs.5/- to 7/- daily.

Shantana's neighbourhood has a Mother Unit and most of her neighbours rear Kuroiler. She too wanted a means to augment her household income but had no experience in poultry keeping. She consulted her husband and took the decision of rearing Kuroiler. Joideb took a loan from his employer and constructed a shed for the birds using bamboo, wire mesh, mud and bricks. He also bought chicks and commercial mash for them. They began with 20-(three week old) chicks from the Mother Unit. Since Shantana does not have an open area around her house for birds to scavenge she keeps the Kuroiler in the shed all the time and feeds them paddy. She gets them vaccinated by the Mother Unit person. They seek the advice of the Mother Unit owner if birds fall sick and visit the veterinary hospital for treatment. They do not try to treat the birds themselves as they do not want to take a risk. Shantana's experience so far has been very encouraging as she has not lost any Kuroiler despite Ranikhet (Newcastle) Disease outbreak in the village.

She sold 15 birds and kept three hens for egg laying purpose. In this batch she claims to have made a net profit of Rs 2000/-. She makes a sale when birds are about 5 months old and weigh between 2 to 2 ½ kg. She has been able to make all her sales from home during the marriage season. Now she has a flock of 20 Kuroiler including the three egg laying hens from the previous lot. This flock would be ready for sale in two months time.

Shantana Purkait

Rearing Kuroiler as a source of supplementary income was a major step for Shantana Purkait. She neither had any previous experience in poultry keeping nor the capital for investment. Her husband's employer provided the starting capital in form of loan while know-how of Kuroiler keeping was sourced from the mother unit owner and neighbours.

She has already made a net profit of Rs 2000/- within 6 months of Kuroiler keeping and has three hens that lay eggs for her children and family to consume. The Kuroiler money is used to fulfil educational needs of children and buying rations. Her second flock is now ready for sale and she is up-beat about it.

Shantana father-in-law has emerged as her most vocal supporter and sees nothing wrong in her attempt at Kuroiler keeping as business venture. As far as society is concerned he has this to say –

"Kaun Bolbe...!? (Who will say anything..?)"

Meanwhile Shantana can't stop smiling.



Shantana is happy to have taken up rearing of Kuroiler. The money generated through Kuroiler sale is used in fulfilling children's educational requirements and giving snacks in their lunch-boxes. She sees Kuroiler as a solution to her problems. She would like to increase the flock size but lack of land and capital stops her from doing that. Her three hens are laying eggs regularly and consumption of eggs by the family has increased. Children are given eggs to eat on every alternate day.

The surplus eggs are sold to the neighbours. All money transactions are done by Shantana. Taking decisions of selling Kuroiler and eggs, buying feed etc has made her more confident and sure of herself. Her position in her house hold has got consolidated with success in Kuroiler rearing. Shantana has found a supporter in her father-in-law. He sees nothing wrong in Shantana's attempt at keeping Kuroiler as a business venture and as far as society is concerned he has this to say

“Kaun bolbe!? (Who will say any thing?)”

Kuroiler has had positive impact on nutritional intake of children both directly (eggs) as well as indirectly (food in the tiffin). Impact on education is through Kuroiler money being utilized in buying of books and stationary for the children.

Mother unit owner's role is pivotal in guiding and helping Joideep and Shantana in all possible ways. They draw strength from his presence and were able to take up Kuroiler rearing only due to his moral support. Having a cooperative neighbourhood also helped the new entrants by way of advice on different management practices associated with poultry. Shantana's lack of scavenging space has not come in the way of Kuroiler rearing. The fact that Kuroiler are kept in coops could be the reason for no morbidity in her flock in spite of New Castle Disease outbreak in her village leading to heavy mortality all around. Although her husband got a loan from his employer at no interest to start Kuroiler rearing, having access to a financial institution would encourage more marginalized people to take up small scale enterprises to supplement income.