

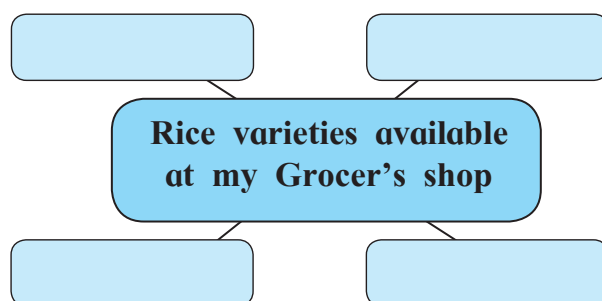
## 1.3 The Call of the Soil

### A Scent of Rice

#### ICE BREAKERS

- Discuss the following with your partner and complete the following sentences. One is done for you.
  - Before eating apples brought from the market, I wash and peel them off.
  - In a farmers' market, we find .....
  - Food adulteration means .....
  - Organic food is grown by using .....
  - Organic fertilizer means .....

Complete the following web diagram :



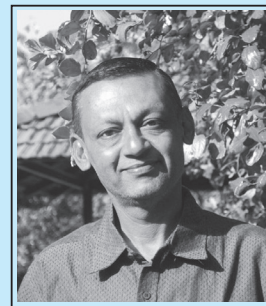
- (i) Find out from your grandparents or parents the names of vegetables and fruits they had eaten in their childhood and mention how the vegetables and fruits are different from the ones today.

Name of the vegetable or fruit	Shape	Colour	Taste
1.			
2.			
3.			

- (ii) You might have learnt about organic farming. Make groups and discuss the difference between conventional farming and organic farming and write it down.

Sr.No.	Conventional Farming	Organic Farming
1.		
2.		
3.		

**Venkateshwaran (Venkat) Iyer** : Born in 1966, Venkateshwaran (Venkat) Iyer is a science graduate and a certified project management professional. He last worked with IBM in Mumbai as a project manager for software implementation. After seventeen years in the IT industry, he quit in 2004 to live on his organic farm in Peth village in Dahanu Taluka, Palghar District, Maharashtra.



His book 'Moong over Microchips' traces his transition from techie to farmer, over a period of 15 to 17 years. "It was not a career change, but a life style change I was looking for," he says about his decision to shift to the quieter environs of a village. He insisted on practising organic farming from the outset. He was resolute inspite of numerous challenges which he faced. Today not only does he deliver lectures on organic farming, but also has joined hands with organic farmers and NGOs working in the organic field to propagate organic farming to "ensure that the land at least is not ravaged while they try to make a living out of agriculture."

## The Call of the Soil

### A Scent of Rice

#### The First Crop

Guess the meaning of the word '**lush**' in this context.

**gingerly**: very cautious or careful

**foliage**: the leaves of a tree or a plant

It was April 2004. I stood in the middle of the **lush** green field of moong (green gram) and looked around me. It was just before sunrise and the sky was turning a bright orange. The ground was damp and the leaves were shining with dew. My bare feet were muddy as I walked around **gingerly**, inspecting the plants.

Around me were rows of chikoo trees and below a dense **foliage** of moong. At that point, I could not have asked for anything more. The moong plants, not more than two feet tall, had green pods hanging out. The pods were not yet ripe and there was a light fuzz growing on them. There was still some time before the harvest. I felt exhilarated.

I stood watching the sun rise above the towering trees across the fence and slowly made my way back to the house, a white structure in the middle of this greenery. I could not believe that I was the owner of this land and that I was looking at my first crop as

a farmer. After I had paid the advance money for the land, I thought I would have some time to get familiar with farming. But Moru Dada, the broker who got us the land, had other ideas. He was keen that we plant moong at once. I was not prepared for this. I was still reading books and trying to figure out what we could sow and how we should go about it. Moru Dada was quite firm. He said the season was right for sowing moong and the best seeds were available in Surat in the adjacent state of Gujarat.

I made a quick trip to Surat and bought around 10 kilograms of moong. Moru Dada rented his tractor to plough the land and quickly planted moong all over the place.

A few days later, we were overjoyed to see tiny green leaves. I had never seen moong growing before and was thrilled at the sight. It was the same thrill I had felt as a young boy when I saw the first of the hibiscus I had planted bloom at the Railway Quarters in Vile Parle in Mumbai. I was grateful to have taken Moru's advice.

The next thing Moru Dada wanted to do was spray some pesticide on the plants. He claimed that it would give a higher yield. This was something we did not want to do. We were clear that we would not use any chemicals and tried to explain it to him. He reacted as if we had suggested **hara-kiri**. It took a lot of convincing to ensure that Moru Dada and his friends did not use any chemicals on the farm. They refused to understand how crops could grow without sprays.

Contrary to what everyone had told us, nature did her job and she needed no bribes to get the work done. Soon it was harvest time and we managed a respectable 300 kilograms. An awful lot of moong and with it a lot of confidence. Now I was certain the land was fertile and that it was possible to grow crops without chemicals. It was a major morale booster.

### **The Scent of Rice**

The first year I was late for the rice-sowing season and had to resort to growing the GR4 variety that

*Find words related to agriculture.*

*The writer disagreed with Moru Dada because*

**hara-kiri** : a formal way of killing yourself by cutting open your stomach with a sword.

*The writer wanted to grow the traditional variety of rice because*

1. ....
2. ....

*The writer almost gave up hope of finding the desi variety of rice because*

1. ....
2. ....

*Mention the varieties of rice from the passage.*

**enlightening:** give greater knowledge and understanding

was short term and recommended by the agricultural officers at Kosbad. The next year we decided that we would start early and try to find some good traditional variety of rice to grow. We had read about traditional varieties of rice and knew that they did not require very high inputs of fertilizers. These varieties were also quite strong and resisted pests. We were sure that it was this type of rice that would grow well in our farm where we did not use any chemicals at all. Our previous year's experience and low yield had taught us a lesson and we were sure we would not plant hybrids this year.

In April 2005, we started to look for a good variety of traditional rice. It was one of our neighbours in the village, a businessman from Mumbai who owned land, who suggested that we plant a local scented variety of rice. Most of the farmers in and around the village of Peth had switched over to hybrids. The younger generation of farmers thought I was crazy to ask for the 'desi' variety, as they called it. My regular visits to the villages around searching for a good traditional variety also did not yield any results and we were almost giving up hope.

I decided to give it one last try and spoke to Baban's father and some other elders. After many meaningful conversations, they mentioned the name of Kasbai.

Kasbai is a traditional long-grained rice variety which has a distinct aroma, though much milder than *Basmati*. It's a long-duration crop and most of the older people remembered growing it years ago. But they all shook their heads when I asked them about the seeds and told me that it had 'disappeared'.

The tales of Kasbai made us more determined to get it. We decided that if we did manage to get some seeds this would be a great rice to grow. I thought the government may know something about it. A visit to the agricultural officer was **enlightening**. He had not even heard of this rice variety. He said the villagers were taking me for a ride and there was no rice by

this name. He **rattled off** the names of a number of latest hybrids and even offered to give me some of them free of cost for a trial. Cursing myself for wasting time with him I moved on to the next destination.

This time it was the Adivasi Mahamandal at Kasa which buys rice from the Adivasi villagers on behalf of the government. Kasbai did not figure in their files. A good indication why people did not grow it any more. The market itself did not recognize the rice, so if you grew it you would not be able to sell it. However, the officer incharge here had more knowledge of rice and did remember Kasbai being sold to him a few years ago.

So when I in Dhanivari, Baban and I started looking for Devu Handa and found a greying old man wearing a cap, sitting outside his house on a charpoy. An ex-sarpanch of the village, he had acres of land, a huge house and a large family. After exchanging the usual pleasantries we came to the topic of Kasbai. The mere mention of Kasbai and Devu Handa drifted into the past. His eyes turned dreamy and with a tremble in his voice he told us how the entire village at one time grew only Kasbai. He said, "There was a time when people passing our village during lunchtime would be forced to stop and ask for a meal. Such was the alluring aroma of Kasbai." The entire area would have this heady aroma hanging in the air as all the houses cooked the same rice. Today, he said, no one grew Kasbai and everyone had shifted to growing the new hybrid varieties. He claimed he had to force himself to eat this rice that was so insipid!

With the advent of irrigation, farmers were tempted to grow a second crop and Kasbai, being a long-duration rice, was replaced by the shorter duration hybrids so that the harvest could be done earlier. This ensured that the farmers could take up a second crop.

I asked why he had shifted if he was so unhappy with the hybrids. No one forced him to, did they? He smiled and replied that their fields did not have fences and once the harvest was over the cattle were released

**rattled off** : talked rapidly and at length

*List ways in which the Government officer cooperated with the author*

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

*Find synonyms for 'insipid'.*



**lamented** : made a passionate expression of grief

**insatiable**: impossible to satisfy

**reminiscing**: remembering a story about a past event

**ramshackle**: in a state of severe disrepair

into the fields. 'If my field alone has Kasbai it will be a treat for the cattle,' he explained.

'Sometimes, we have to fall in line with the community,' he **lamented**. Hybrids need more water, fertilizers and pesticides. He said that yields were good initially but of late, had reduced a lot. Besides he said that each year they had to increase the quantity of urea and pesticides they used. It was as if the newer hybrids had an **insatiable** appetite for chemicals. He told us that even when there were flash floods in the sixties, Kasbai had stood its ground. He fondly remembered how the rice was still standing when they all returned to the village after the floods had receded. 'Such was the strength of the rice. But look what we have done,' he rued.

As he went on **reminiscing** about the rice, we gently guided him back to the reason for our visit, the Kasbai seeds. He was sure that there was not a single villager in his area who would have the seeds of Kasbai. According to him, the only people who still grew it were the Adivasis in a hamlet at the foothills of the mountains in the next village Asarvari. We bid farewell to Devu Handa who lovingly blessed us and said, 'Mahalaxmi, the local Goddess, will give you the seeds of Kasbai.'

In Asarvari village, we asked the sarpanch to help us as we were not very fluent with the local dialect. He sent his assistant Jeevan with us into the hills. After a half-hour walk through thick vegetation, crossing numerous streams and ditches and scrambling over rocks and gravel, we reached the sleepy hamlet of Boripada. There were just two **ramshackle** houses in front of us and we wondered if this was the right place. A wrinkled old woman sitting before one of the houses looked at us with curiosity. As we approached her we signalled to Jeevan to ask the crucial question. She muttered in reply and we looked at Jeevan for a quick interpretation. He broke into a smile and informed us that she did have the rice and wanted to know who we were and why we wanted it.

It was a difficult task to keep a straight face and I had to control a strong desire to hug her. After searching for months, we had found the **elusive** Kasbai. We explained to her that we were from Peth nearby and we needed the seeds to grow it. We asked for 10 kilograms of rice. She muttered and scowled. Jeevan interpreted that she had never heard of Peth village and also did not have a weighing scale. She was willing to give the seeds only in baskets. We asked for a single basket of rice and Jeevan told us to pay her something. I handed over a 100-rupee note and for the first time in the last ten minutes, her face broke into a smile. She nodded her head in approval.

As we walked back, against the fading sunset, leaving behind a smiling old lady, I couldn't help but wonder that here, nestling in the foothills of an unknown mountain away from the hustle and bustle of the road or the city, were the real people of India. These were the people who still held on to the rich biodiversity of our land and no one even cared about them. They had never heard of hybrids, fertilizers or pesticides. They just grew their rice and ate what they got. The old lady we met had probably never left Boripada. Her world was unspoilt by 'progress'. And for once I was grateful for that.

*-Venkat Iyer*

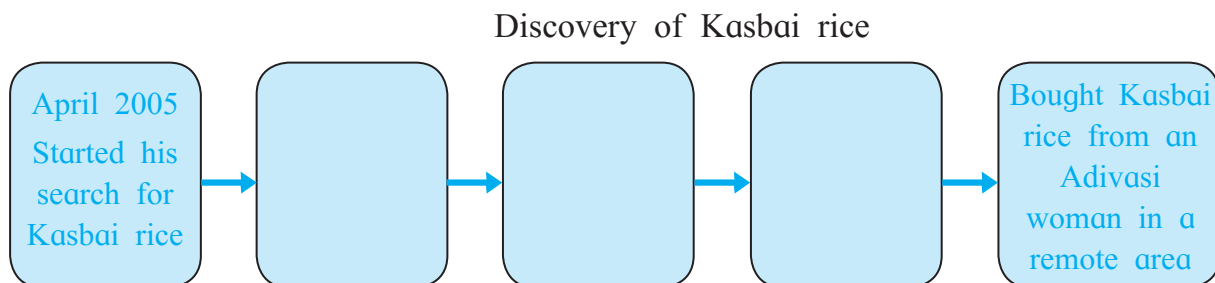
**elusive:** difficult to find catch or achieve

### BRAINSTORMING

(A1) (i) **Read the extract and state whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false statements.**

- (a) Growing in abundance is more important than the quality of the crop.
- (b) The author wanted to grow the desi variety of rice.
- (c) The author did not succeed in finding Kasbai.
- (d) The aroma of the 'desi' rice would spread around the village.
- (e) Newer hybrid crops have a great appetite for chemicals.
- (f) The author is an example of 'reverse migration'.

- (ii) Complete the flow chart. Consider this to be an example of Note-Making.



- (iii) Read the text and fill in the blanks. One is done for you.

- (a) The author wanted to grow **organic moong**.
- (b) Moru Dada wanted to spray ..... on the moong crop.
- (c) Baban's father and some elders mentioned the name of.....
- (d) "Hybrids need more .....", said Devu Handa.
- (e) The author bought ..... of rice from an Adivasi woman who lived in remote hills.

- (A2) (i) List the reactions of the agricultural officer to the author's inquiry about Kasbai rice seeds. One is done for you.

- (a) He had not heard of Kasbai.
- (b) .....
- (c) .....

- (ii) Go through the text once again and note down Devu Handa's fond memories of Kasbai in your exercise book. One is done for you.

Devu Handa has fond memories of Kasbai. They are as follows.

- (a) It needs ..... rain.
- (b) .....
- (c) .....

- (A3) (i) The writer says he grew 'an awful lot of moong'. Explain the word 'awful' in this sentence.

- (ii) The word scent is different from its synonyms 'aroma', 'fragrance' or 'perfume'. Explain how the word 'scent' in the subtitle 'Scent of the Rice', has a deeper meaning than 'perfume' or 'fragrance'. Tick phrases having a similar meaning from the following:

- (a) In pursuit of
- (b) To smell a rat



- (c) To be keen
- (d) On the trail of
- (e) To feel under the weather

**(A4) Read the following sentence:**

- (i) She muttered in reply and we looked at Jeevan for a quick interpretation.**
- (ii) These are two complete sentences underlying the above sentence.**
  - (a) She muttered in reply.
  - (b) We looked at Jeevan for quick interpretation.

These two sentences are put together by using the co-ordinating conjunction 'and'.

Such sentences which are joined by co-ordinating conjunctions (and/ but/ either...or; neither...nor) are called compound sentences.

Sentence 'a' and 'b' are Simple Sentences.

Each of them has only one subject and one predicate.

Sentence 'a' and 'b' can be written in another way.

'As she muttered in reply, we looked at Jeevan for a quick interpretation.'

This sentence begins with a subordinating conjunction 'As'.

This is a complex sentence.

Two simple sentences joined by subordinate conjunctions are called complex sentences. The subordinate conjunction need not always be in the beginning of the sentence.

Make pairs and groups and find out some more simple, complex and compound sentences from the text.

Prepare a list of subordinating conjunctions.

- (A5) (i) Planting and growing more crops a year seems to be progress by normal standards; but the chapter makes a case against it. Give reasons.**
- (ii) Describe in about 150 words your experience similar to the writer's when you pursued something and reached your goal.**
- (iii) The writer goes in search of an invaluable indigenous variety of seeds. List three reasons for the importance of keeping records of our indigenous agricultural practices.**
- (iv) Write a blog in about 100 to 150 words on organic farming.**

- (v) Write a short paragraph in about 120 words, to be used as Counter-View for the following topic. 'Buy a bigger cloth for your coat'.

**View Section:**

- (a) We cannot survive by the dictum 'Cut your coat according to your cloth' in today's world.
- (b) In the modern world we should 'Think Big'.
- (c) Think of increasing your income instead of reducing your needs.
- (d) We cannot deny ourselves, what the new world offers us.
- (vi) 'Organic farming is the need of the time'. Write your views in favour and against the statement.

Views	Counter-views
1. 2. 3. 4.	

- (vii) Appeal to your classmates to say 'No to Junk Food'. Write an appeal to prefer organic food over junk food.

**(A6) Projects:**

- (i) Plant the seed of a flower or fruit of your choice in a pot or in your garden. Note its growth every day and maintain a diary recording its progress.
- (ii) Find out more career opportunities in the field of agriculture, organic farming, sales, storage, distribution and marketing research.

Educational qualifications	Job opportunities	Work Profile
1. 2. 3. 4.		

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