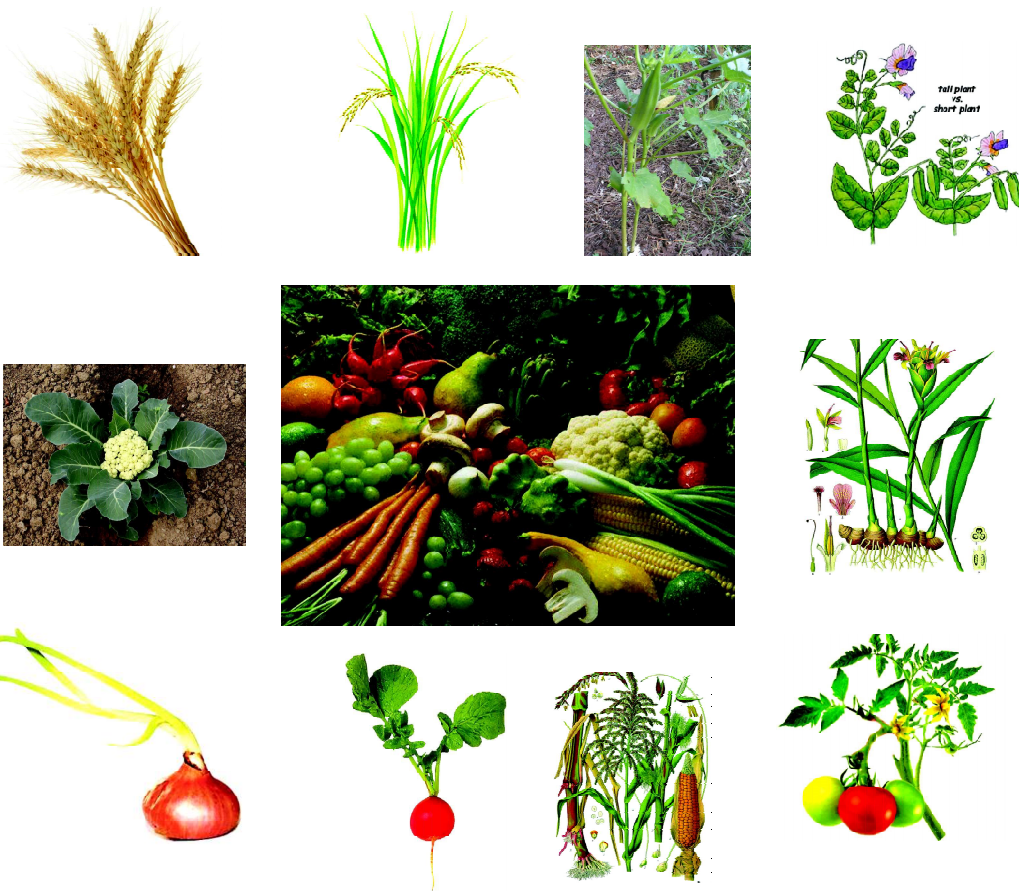


LESSON No. 14



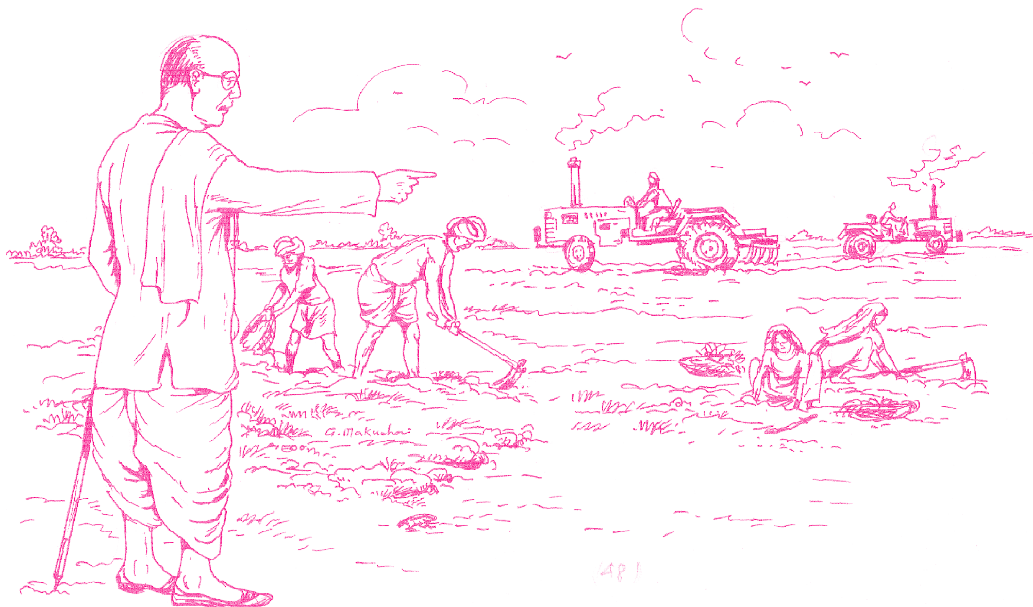
WHO PRODUCES THE FOOD WE EAT



Look at the pictures above. Can you recognise them? They are grown by farmers. Sixty percent of the people in our country are engaged in farming.

There are three kinds of farmers in our country. They are Big farmers, Marginal or Subsistence farmers and Tenant farmers.

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Big farmers have large plots of lands. Farming is done by workers employed by them. They are very prosperous. They sell their crops and produces in the market. There are farmers who own small plots of land or farm. They produce only that much, which is sufficient for their family. They are called **marginal (or subsistence) farmers**. They cannot produce much to sell in the market. Farmers in our state are mostly marginal farmers.

Tenant farmers cultivate the land owned by other people. They do not have land or farm of their own. They share the produce with the owner.

In the hills, jhoom cultivation is done by farmers. Jhoom cultivation is a system of farming under which areas of forest are burned and cleared. Cultivation is done there and then usually abandoned after two or three years. They migrate from one place to another for cultivation. They are also **subsistence farmers**. Because of migration of the family, there may be children who miss school.

Tell the story of a boy or girl who missed school due to such migration.

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From where do farmers get seeds?

Let us hear the story of a farmer as told by a paddy seed. I am a **rice seed**. My name is **Phouren**, which means superb rice. I have been staying in a small sack at the corner of a family deity. I want to tell you my story. This is a long story-but not mine alone. It is also the story of my farmer Chaoba.

I was born at Kakching in Manipur in the year 1940. That year there was good crop of rice. Our area was famous for its crop and vegetables. Each year Chaoba kept aside some grains of rice from a good crop in a sack. This way our rice family went on from generation to another. He also kept different selected seeds in different boxes for next season.

In those days Chaoba and his family lived together. It was a large family. Everyone in the family helped each other, even in farming. When the crop was ready and harvested, everyone celebrated together with big feasts and lots to eat.



Farmers would grow many different kinds of crops - grains and vegetables - according to the season. The farmers kept enough for their needs and sold the rest to market and shopkeepers from the city. Some farmers also grew cotton and mulberry. At home family members spun cotton and silk on spinning wheel to make cloth.

Over the years, many changes took place in the village. Some places could get water from the canal. A dam was built on the river. Then electricity came. Switch on the button and there was light ! People found that only a few crops like rice and potato, got better prices in the market. So most farmers began to grow more on these. But alas ! We were forgotten and dismissed

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even from chaoba's fields. Farmers began to buy seeds from the market. People said they were new kinds of seeds and were high yielding. So farmers did not need to store seeds from the old crop.

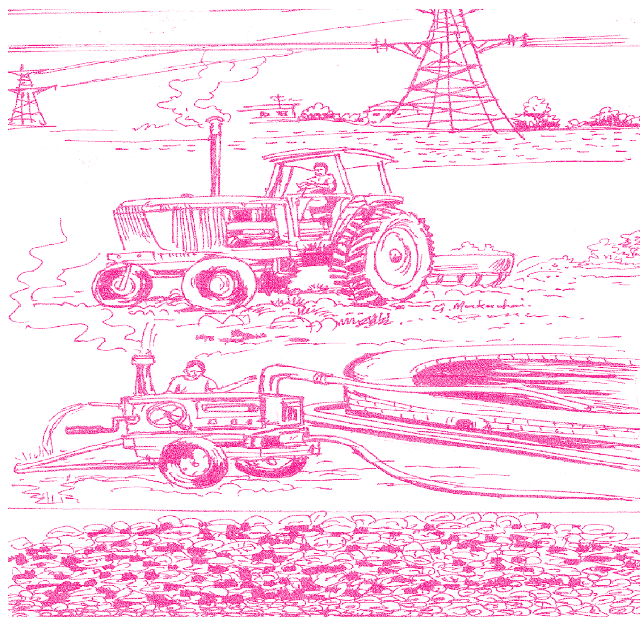
On special days people in the village cooked and ate together. As they ate, they could remember how tasty the rice of my variety used to be in the past. When the variety of seeds changed, how could food ever taste the same?

Chaoba was getting old. His son Thoiba looked after the fields and family. He brought new machines for farming. He used an electric generator to pump water and also a tractor to plough the field. The tractor could do in a day what the bullocks would take many days to do.

Thoiba would say, "Now we are farming wisely. We are using high yielding variety. With profits from our fields we can improve our life. We can make progress".

Lying forgotten in the small sack, I and other seeds had our doubts. Is all this really progress? There is no longer any need for seeds like us, and animals like the bullocks.

After the new machines have come, people are not willing to work in the field.



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The next twenty years saw even more changes. Without cows and buffaloes, there was no cow dung, to be used in the fields as manures. Thoiba had to buy expensive fertilizer. The new kinds of seeds were such that the crops were easily affected by harmful insects. Insecticides had to be sprayed on the crops to keep away the insects. Oh, what a bad smell these had and how expensive and poisonous they were !

The canal water and the rainfall were not abundant enough for the new crops. The price of seeds and fertilizers became higher and higher. Farmers had to use water pumps to feed the plants in time. To meet all these expenses, loans had to be taken from the bank. Whatever little profit was made, was used to repay the loan.

The soil itself was no longer the same. Growing the same crop over and over, and using so many chemicals had affected the soil. Plants could not grow well there. Farming becomes more difficult year after year.

Thoiba too changed with the times. He was tense and angry most of the time. His educated son Khunjao did not want to do farming. He now started work as truck driver. After all, the bank loans still had to be repaid. Often Khunjao did not come home for days. At times he was away for a week. A few days back he came home. During a luncheon, Khunjao asked his mother , “How could we ever have the taste of phouren rice”?

Now do you understand why I told you my story ?

Let us now talk

- * The Phouren seed saw differences in the way Chaoba and Thoiba did farming, for example in ploughing, irrigation, etc. What were those differences.

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- * What happened to Thoiba's farm after some years?

- * Chaoba's son, Thoiba, choose to become a farmer like his father. Thoiba's son Khunjao was not a farmer, but a truck driver. What made him do so?

- * Have there been any changes near your area in farming ? Ask your mother or an elderly person of your locality. What changes are those?
