



Rishis of Khulna

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Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and
Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)

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Imprint

Rishis of Khulna

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Preface

The Rishis are an occupational Hindu community who were traditionally skimmers, leather workers and musicians. They are also known as Muchi, Chamar or Charmakar, which are often considered derogatory terms for the community. These terms usually refer to a leather-worker, cobbler, tanner or skinner. In India, the Rishis mainly live in the western states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. They are one of the largest untouchable or ‘Dalit’ communities in the Hindu world. The untouchables are considered to be so impure that they are a fifth category beneath the four other *varna* or castes.

In Bangladesh, the Rishis live in almost every district with their highest concentration in Jashore, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna. According to *Parittran*, a rights-based organization of the Rishis based in Satkhira district, the Rishi population in these four districts of Khulna division is around 1.8 lakh (approximately 186,797). It estimated that Rishi population in the country is around 731,967 (7.3 lakh).

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) took lead in conducting a study on the Rishis with the assistance of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) and *Parittran* under a European Union and ICCO COOPERATION-funded project. The study covered 53 of the most populous paras or villages of the Rishi community in Satkhira, Jashore, Khulna and Bagerhat districts in Khulna division with a population of 51,745.

The key objective of the study is to develop a comprehensive map, analysis, and clarity on the Rishis, which will become strategic tools for the human rights defenders and organizations that work on this community. Detailed information about the Rishis in their most populous and well-known locations as well as the state of their habitation, education, health, income, expenditure, access to different government facilities among others are valuable knowledge asset to make the community statistically visible.

The study findings are separated into two sections—quantitative findings on the demographic and socioeconomic condition of the Rishis in Bangladesh and qualitative findings on their social capital, changes and aspirations.

The Rishis are labelled as ‘untouchables’ in many districts of the country. In some schools, the teachers make the Rishi children sit at the back of the class. Incidents have been reported where the teachers even call them names and humiliate little children because of their identity. In some cases, people do not let the Rishis enter the common Hindu temples or use the big ponds.

In Khulna, the Rishis are not allowed to enter some tea stalls, restaurants, saloons, etc. If they enter, local customers would leave. They cannot sit with others to eat and they are served food in separate plates and glasses in some restaurants and social programs. In some restaurants, their glasses and tea cups are marked so that drinks are not served in those glasses to other customers by mistake.

The main reasons behind the untouchability of the Rishis is their lower caste or *muchi* label, their occupation and negligence of the majority people. The Rishis are the lowest of the lowest caste in traditional Hinduism. Their traditional occupation of making and sewing shoes and skinning animals is considered impure and dirty. Even in this modern era, they are socially excluded because of their name and traditional occupations.

The majority of the Rishis are Hindus but a small portion of them converted to Christianity over the years. In most cases, economic aspirations, receiving a piece of land, access to education, and protection from Muslim and other higher castes neighbours are the reasons behind the conversion. Those who converted are called 'Christian Muchis' to distinguish them from the Hindu Muchis. The common perception is Christian Muchis have made more progress in terms of access to education and employment compared to their Hindu counterparts. However, their social status did not improve.

The Rishis have identified their different capacities as a community in this study. For instance, they are experts in constructing or renovating temples and painting on the buildings of religious institutions. Some of the Rishi villages have their own organizations in addition to being members in local clubs. However, only a small percentage of the community has registered their organizations.

The Rishis have used these capacities to carry out different activities for the development of their community and villages. Many of them have contributed to collecting donations to build or renovate temples and even set up public deep tube wells. Some of them have invested in different income-generating activities by saving up collectively and increasing their savings.

They have also motivated the Rishi youth to work for social development and the Rishi women have become more active in demanding their rights. Involvement of more people in business has ensured some economic success. In some cases, they unified to file official complaints to the local governments regarding the problems they faced. However, the percentage of Rishis involved in such activities is still very small.

This study was conducted by a team of PPRC staff supervised by Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC and lead researcher of the project. The research strategy and tools of the participatory research were developed by the research team of

PPRC, SEHD and members from the Rishi community.

A team of five field researchers carried out FGDs in 53 Rishi villages who are Baharul Islam, Ujjal Kumar Das, Md. Alauddin, Rabiullah Islam and Tarek Sarker. Md. Billal Hossain, field research specialist of PPRC, trained and supervised the field researchers. The collected data was analysed using STATA by Shajadul Islam Shajjad, data programmer. The documentation and data analysis process were supervised by Subodh Chandra Sarker, data manager and Sabrina Miti Gain, research associate. The main report and graphical presentations were prepared by Sabrina Miti Gain under the guidance of Hossain Zillur Rahman.

Special thanks goes to Milon Kumar Das, executive director of *Parittran*, Ujjal Kumar Das, programme officer of *Parittran* and other members of the organization and the community who assisted the research team in every step of the study and participated in the consultation meetings.

Prosad Sarker, Rabiullah and Md. Mozharul Haque of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) have worked in setting up pages, organizing photos and printing of the report. Babul Kumar Boiragi and Borsha Chiran from SEHD have assisted the production team in the SEHD office. Dr. S. G. Hussain, a cartographer, prepared the map used in the monograph. Many thanks to them.

Philip Gain, program director of the project under which this study has been possible guided the entire study team and did the final editing of the texts. He has also contributed photographs used in this report and designed the cover. We are particularly thankful to him.

We hope that the Rishi community and those interested in them find the study findings presented in this monograph useful.

Hossain Zillur Rahman

Sabrina Miti Gain



A Rishi woman making basket
with bamboo in Dholirgati village,
Abhaynagar upazila, Jashore.
Photo: Prosad Sarker

Executive Summary

The Rishis of Bengal are traditionally skimmers, leather workers and musicians. They are also known as Muchi, Chamar or Charmakar, which are often considered derogatory terms for the community. In Bangla, these terms usually refer to a leather-worker, shoemaker, shoe repairer, cobbler, tanner and skinner. In Bangladesh, the Rishis now live in almost every district with their highest concentration in Jashore, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna.

The Rishi population is highly concentrated in Khulna division. Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) conducted a study in 53 of the most populous para or villages of the Rishi community in 20 upazilas of Satkhira, Jashore, Khulna and Bagerhat districts in Khulna division. The study covered 9,088 Rishi families with a population of 51,745.

Around 38.97% of the Rishis surveyed are male whereas 34.57% are female. The average sex ratio is 112.73 in the Rishi community, which is significantly higher than average national sex ratio at 100.3 (BBS Census 2011). Around 26.46% of the community are children.

The average family size of the Rishis is 5.72 in contrast to the family size at the national level at 4.06 (HIES 2016). The number of the Rishi families have increased from 6,705 to 9,088 in the last 10 years at a rate of 35.54% during this decade.

The literacy rate among the Rishis was found to be 41.31% on average and nearly half of the community (46.89%) have letter knowledge only. On top of that, 11.80% are completely illiterate. On average, 77.02% children who are aged between five to 18 years were studying during the study.

Nearly half of the Rishi community still live in *kutchha* houses (48.22%). On average, 30.82% families live in tin-shed houses. Only 1.85% families live in *pucka* houses and 15.72% live in *semi-pucka* houses. On average, 3.39% of the Rishi families still live in *jhupri* houses.

The source of drinking water for more than half of the Rishi families is tube well (59.17%). On average, 21.83% of the Rishi families use water from deep tube well. Around 6.55% of the families still use pond and/or rain water.

The majority of the Rishi families use ring-slab latrines (70.20%) that are not sanitary and do not have a concrete structure. At the national level, 61.37% families use sanitary or

pucka toilet, which are either water sealed and/or has flush (HIES 2016). However, less than a quarter of the community use sanitary ring-slab toilets or *pucka* toilets. Around 8.62% of the Rishi families still use *kutchra* or hanging toilets.

The majority of the community either go to a local physician (29.87%) or rely on *jhar phook* or *kabiraji* (28.57%) during times of sickness. On average, 10-11% of the families go to nearby pharmacies or upazila health complex. Even smaller percentages of the Rishi families go to formal healthcare providers such as district government hospital, community clinic, NGO healthcare centre, union health and family planning centre, private hospital or clinic or private doctor's chamber.

On average, 82.25% of the Rishi households have access to electricity but duration of electricity supply is 19.34 hours on average. The majority of the Rishi households (98.96%) use firewood for cooking. On average, 7.06% of the Rishi families use solar energy and 3.62% families use cylinder gas.

On average, 26.66% of the Rishi families earn a living by working as day laborers. On the other hand, 28.69% of the Rishi families are either involved in making bamboo or cane products or making other kinds of handicraft, which are their traditional occupations. On average, 14.68% of the Rishi families are involved in rickshaw or van pulling or *korimon* driving and 10.13% is agricultural labourers. Around 7.42% of the Rishi families still earn a living by sewing or polishing shoes and only 1.06% still makes shoes, which were once their traditional occupations.

The majority of the Rishi women are housewives. On average, women are housewives in 62.96% of the Rishi families. The Rishi women work as day labourers in 13.02% families and as agricultural laborers in 6.49% families. Women make bamboo or cane products in 9.11% families and handicrafts in 4.17%.

The most common income source of the majority of the Rishi families (27.05%) is making bamboo or cane products. The second common source of income (20.36%) is day labour whereas income of 9.43% families depend on agricultural labour. Pulling rickshaw or van is another important source of income (13.18%).

Average monthly income of the Rishis ranges roughly between Taka 6,000 and Taka 8,000 for their traditional occupations. On the other hand, income of Rishis who work as day labourer, agricultural labourer, rickshaw pullers, etc. ranges between Taka 6,493 and Taka 7,710.

Monthly average income of a Rishi family is Taka 7,295 whereas total expenditure is Taka 14,353. Therefore, monthly expenditure of a Rishi family is nearly double than their income. On average, only 38.49% of the Rishi families can bear their monthly expenditure

with their income. Nearly half of the Rishi families (42.70%) have to take loans in order to meet buy day-to-day necessities. Around 14.26% families depend on their savings to meet their monthly expenditure. The major yearly expenditures of the Rishi families are medical treatment, arranging social events, construction and repairing of houses, education of their children including admission or session fees, private coaching fees, donations, school dress cost, etc.

Around 10.25% of the Rishi families are totally landless. Around 9.90% Rishis families occupy land but do not own it. The majority of the Rishi families (71.10%) own homestead but do not own any arable land and the average size of the land they own are 5.66 decimals. On average, 8.75% of the Rishi families own both homestead and arable land.

On average, nearly 80% of the Rishi families are in debt and 74% of the families have savings. However, the average savings of a Rishi family is really small in amount at only Taka 2,658 whereas the average amount of debt for a Rishi family is Taka 20,925. Around 7% of the Rishi families have bank accounts and 23.49% of the families use mobile banking, mainly bKash.

On average, students of 21.44% Rishi families receive primary stipend and 14.74% families receive secondary stipend. On average, 18.36% of the Rishi families receive Gratuitous Relief (GR) and 8.77% receive Open Market Sales (OMS). On the other hand, 6.30% of the Rishi families receive Old Age Allowance and almost the same percentage of families are included in the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme.

The Rishis have identified their different capacities as a community in this study. For example, they are experts in work related to constructing or renovating temples including painting the buildings of religious institutions and filling up temple fields. A significant percentage of the Rishi community established a village organization or an organization of their own in addition to becoming a member in local clubs even though only a small percentage of the community has registered their organizations.

The Rishis have used these capacities to carry out different activities for the development of their community and villages. For example, 65.33% of the community clusters has contributed in collecting donations to build or renovate temples and even setting up public deep tube wells. Around 16% of the community clusters have invested in different income-generating activities by saving up collectively and increasing their savings.

More than half of the community clusters (55.22%) have Rishi voters and 13.43% of the clusters have Rishi members who competed in local government elections. They have

cast vote in local and national level elections in 61.19% of the Rishi community clusters.

For this study, several dimensions were considered in order to identify the recent changes that occurred in the Rishi community including occupation, education, migration, social status, communication and title change.

The major problems of the Rishi community identified by the respondents are drinking water and sanitation problems, bad roads and floods, landlessness, no temple or church, unemployment or seasonal unemployment, poverty, no cremation ground, untouchability, child marriage, lack of security, loans, cobbler identity, low education rate, habitation-related problems, drainage-related problems, lack of government support, racial discrimination and pond-related problems among others.

The major needs and aspirations of the Rishis are job opportunities, setting up deep tube wells, land ownership, women's handicraft skills, building roads, renovating temples and cremation grounds and eradicating untouchability. Other demands of the Rishis are access to education stipends, opportunity to participate in Special Area for Development (SAD) project, access to agricultural loans and loans without interests, fair election, receiving training, opportunity to form traditional musical bands, access to higher studies, separate allocation for Rishis in the budget, setting up industries, building drains, access to grants, ensure law and order, fixing water clogs and access to sanitary toilets.

Introduction to the Community

The Rishis of Bengal are traditionally skimmers, leather-workers and musicians. They are also known as Muchi, Chamar or Charmakar—which are often considered derogatory terms for the community. In Bangla, these terms usually refer to a leather-worker, a shoemaker/shoe repairer or cobbler, a tanner and a skimmer. Considered untouchables, the 'Chamar' in India mainly live in the western states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. They are one of the largest untouchable or 'Dalit' communities in the Hindu world (Joshua Project 2018). The purity of the Brahmin and the pollution of the untouchable is at the basis of the whole caste system of Hinduism (Zene 2007). The untouchables are considered to be so impure that they are a fifth category beneath the four other *varna* or castes.

Many of the 'untouchables' including the Rishis now use the intensely political term 'Dalit' to address themselves, which means 'oppressed' or 'crushed'. It reflects social oppression, subordination, poverty and discrimination all together and promotes a different and self-ascribed identity in an attempt to change their position in the society.

Most of the Rishis have left behind their traditional occupation of skinning and making shoes. However, the stigma still sticks with their identity which is the root of their social, economic and political deprivation.

According to Luigi Paggi (1990), the earlier generation of Muchis were never good at agricultural work and they were not aware of the value of their land, which is crucial for survival in the villages of Bangladesh. Therefore, over time they lost most of it to their neighbor Muslim villagers and became landless, which is one of the main reasons behind their generational impoverishment and infringement.

Majority of the Rishis are Hindus but a portion of them converted to Christianity over the years. In most cases, economic aspirations, receiving a piece of land, access to education and employment opportunities, protection from Muslim and other higher castes neighbors were the reasons behind the conversion (Paggi 1990). Those who converted are called 'Christian Muchis' to distinguish them from the Hindu Muchis. According to Luigi Paggi (1990), though Christian Muchis have made some progress in terms of access to education and employment, most of these aspirations do not materialize for the majority.

The Rishis have their own language known as *Thar*, the origin of which is not yet clear. It could be a distortion of Bangla or a dialect of other indigenous languages (Paggi 1990). They use this language to recognize each other and communicate freely as others do not understand it. It can also be a useful tool for secret communication during crisis situations.

In Bangladesh, the Rishis now live in almost every district of Bangladesh with their highest concentration in Jashore, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna. It should be noted that not everyone from the community consider themselves 'Rishi'. Some among them, particularly in the northern districts, identifies themselves as 'Robidas'.

Background to the Study

The study is a mapping exercise on the demographic and socioeconomic conditions of the Rishis in Bangladesh under a European Union-funded project "Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status and strengthening their capacity and partnership." Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) took lead in conducting the study with assistance from Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) and a local organization, *Parittran*. The study is conducted to prepare a comprehensive map on the current situation of the Rishis and the difficulties they face, which will be an important tool for dialogue and advocacy for the community. The research outcomes added to the existing literature will add value to the discussion on social exclusion of Rishis in

Bangladesh. (For more on the Rishi and other excluded communities of Bangladesh, see “The State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities.”)

Objective of the Study

The key objective of the study is to develop a comprehensive map, analysis, and intellectual clarity on the Rishis, which will become strategic tools for the human rights defenders and organizations who work on this community. Detailed information about the Rishis in their most populous and well-known locations as well as the state of their habitation, education, health, income, expenditure, access to different government facilities among others are valuable knowledge asset to make the community statistically visible. The study also aimed to identify the most recent changes in their lives, their problems and possible solutions as well as their needs and aspirations. Another aim of the study was to engage the community members in the participatory research process for the broader goal of capacity building.

Methodology

Research team: The lead researcher of the project, the programme director and the in-house research team developed the strategies and methodologies for the participatory research. They had discussions with the community representatives to finalize the choice of research instruments and study locations. Training of the field researchers and community key informants were also conducted by the team.

Sample design: Rishis live in community clusters, which is the case for most of the excluded communities in Bangladesh. The research approach was to identify these community clusters and select a reasonable sample of such clusters to collect both cluster-level as well as household-level information. According to *Parittran* – a rights-based organization of the Rishis in Bangladesh – Rishi population in Bangladesh is approximately 731,967. Rishi population in Jashore, Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat districts of Khulna division is 186,797. The rest of the 545,170 Rishis live all over the country.

The community leaders and researchers of the project selected the number and location of the villages that are to be mapped. Selective or purposive sampling method was applied to select the samples. After consultations with the community leaders, a sample of 53 most populous villages of the Rishis were selected that would represent the community most accurately. The sample covered four districts of Khulna Division.

Data collection and analysis: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with participation of 15-20 community members at the cluster sites were conducted to collect data for the study. The FGD questionnaire was structured, which was utilized to generate quantitative information on household characteristics as well as qualitative information on cluster characteristics. The study was conducted from 14 July 2018 to 10 August 2018. A team of five field researchers carried out the FGDs in the 53 cluster sites, which was supervised by the field research specialist. The collected data was analyzed using a statistical tool—STATA and Microsoft Excel.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in Khulna division only. The Rishis are scattered all over the country and it was not possible to identify all of their settlements. No official survey or information is available about the entire Rishi population in the country. Therefore, a sample was selected from Khulna where the Rishis are densely concentrated. Accessibility and availability of information during both primary and secondary data collection were other major constraints of the study. Moreover, the study was based on FGDs. A household survey could have generated a more concrete database, which was not possible due to resource constraints.



Participants in a training in Jashore for preparation of the study on the Rishis.

Study Locations

Following are the locations of 53 sample clusters of the Rishi community in 4 districts of Khulna Division:

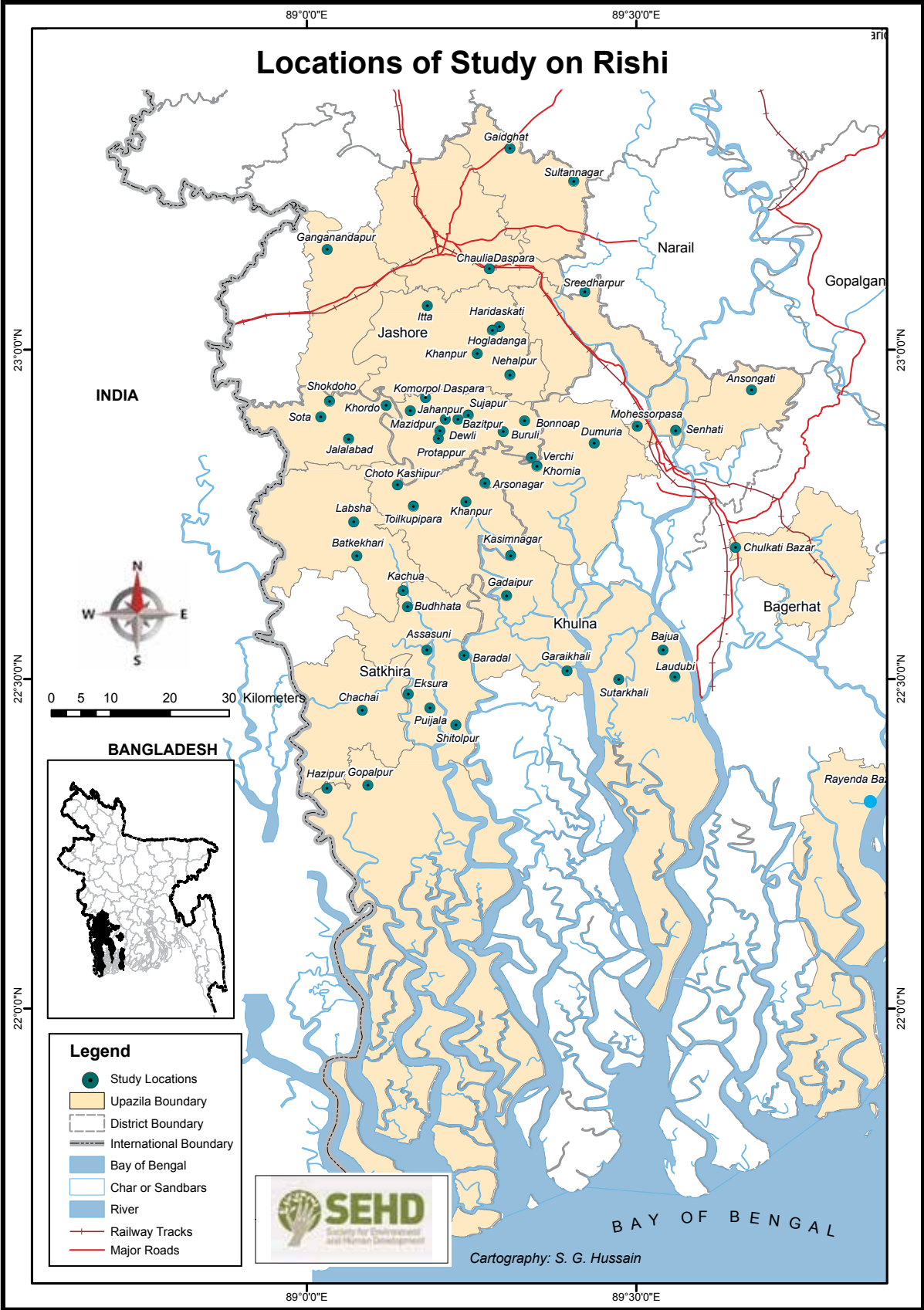
District	Upazila	Post office	Union	Para/village
Satkhira	Kaliganj	Dakshin Sreepur	Bishnupur	Chachai
		Roghunathpur	Krishnanagar	Sota
	Satkhira Sadar	Satkhira Sadar	Ward 5	Batkekhari
		Labsha	Labsha	Labsha
	Assasuni	Sreeula	Khajra	Eksura
		Anulia	Ward 9	Shitolpur
		Budhhata	Budhhata	Budhhata
		Kadakati	Kulla	Kachua
		Puijala	Sreeula	Puijala
		Baradal	Baradal	Baradal
		Assasuni	Assasuni	Assasuni
		Kalaroa	Hamidpur	2 No. Jalalabad
	Khordo		Deara	Khordo
	Panikawria		10 No. Kushudanga	Shokdoho
	Tala	Sarulia	Sarulia	Choto Kashipur
		Patkelghata	3 No. Sarulia	Toilkupipara
		Zebura Bazar	8 No. Magura	Nehalpur
		Tala	Tala	Khanpur
	Shyamnagar	Nokipur	3 No. Shamnagar	Gopalpur
		Nurnagar	Nurnagar	Hazipur



Bamboo baskets in the process of making.
Photo: Prosad Sarker

Jashore	Keshabpur	Pazia	8 No. Sufalakati	Bonnoap
		Shikarpur	3 No. Majidpur	Protappur
			3 No. Majidpur	Dewli
		Verchi	9 No. Gaurighona	Verchi
			9 No. Gaurighona	Buruli
		Chalitabaria	10 No. Satbaria	Jahanpur
		Keshabpur	6 No. Keshabpur Sadar	Sujapur
			3 No. Majidpur	Mazidpur
			6 No. Keshabpur	Bazitpur
		Notun Mulgram	10 No. Satbaria	KomorpolDaspara
	Jashore Sadar	Rupdia	14 No. Narendrapur	ChauliaDaspara
	Manirampur	Kashimnagar	2 No. Kashimnagar	Itta
		Panchbaria	5 No. Haridaskati	Haridaskati
		Joypur	4 No. Horidaskati	Hogladanga
		Manirampur	13 No. Khanpur	Khanpur
	Bagherpara	Shimakhali	7 No. Bandabilla	Gaidghat
		Dhalgram Bazar	5 No. Dhalgram	Sultannagar
	Abhaynagar	Sreedharpur	5 No. Sreedharpur	Sreedharpur
	Jhikargacha	Ganganandapur	1 No. Ganganandapur	Ganganandapur
	Khulna	Dumuria	Maguraghona	6 No. Maguraghona
Khornia			Khornia	Khornia
Dumuria			Dumuria	Dumuria
Terokhada		Terokhada	Terokhada	Ansongati
Dakop		Sutarkhali	Sutarkhali	Sutarkhali
		Bajua	Bajua	Bajua
			Laudoba	Laudoba
Digholia		Senhati	Digholia	Senhati
Paikgachha		Gadaipur	Gadaipur	Gadaipur
		Garaikhali	Garaikhali	Garaikhali
		Kopilmuni	Kopilmuni	Kasimnagar
Daulatpur thana		Daulatpur	Ward 3	Mohessorpasa
Bagerhat		Bagerhat Sadar	Chulkati Bazar	8 No. Khanpur
	Sarankhola	Rayenda	2 No. Rayenda	Rayenda Bazar
Total: 4	20	48	53	53

Locations of Study on Rishi



Findings

Population

According to Cosimo Zene (2002), the Rishi population in Bangladesh was estimated to be 234,315 who were concentrated in the districts of Dhaka (30,159), Mymensingh (35,622), Kustia (44,739), Khulna (30,668) and Jashore (58,588) in 1975. In 1980s, there were around 38,219 Rishis in 307 Rishi para of 14 upazilas in Khulna and Satkhira districts with their biggest concentrations in Tala, Dumuria, Satkhira sadar and Kalaroa and an estimated 8,000 Rishi residing in Bagerhat district (Zene 2002). He estimated Rishi population to be 120,000 in Khulna and Jashore districts during his research, which constituted 1.43% of the total population in the districts (Zene 2002).

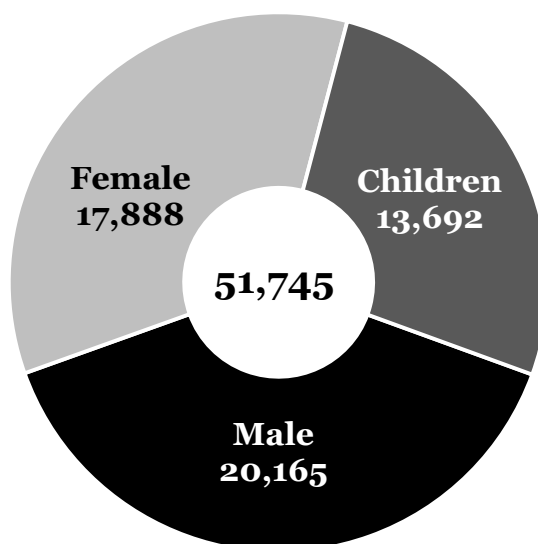
The Rishi population is highly concentrated in the Khulna division in Bangladesh. According to *Parittran*, a rights-based organization of the Rishis in Bangladesh, Rishi population in the Khulna division alone is at around 186,797. Therefore, the PPRC study was conducted in 53 of the most populous para or villages of the Rishi community in 20 upazilas of Satkhira, Jashore, Khulna and Bagerhat districts in Khulna division. The study covered 9,088 Rishi families with a population of 51,745.

Table 1: Number of sample Rishi clusters, HHs and population

Upazilas	No. of sample clusters	No. of sample HHs	Sample population	Male	Female	Children
Kaliganj	2	315	1,602	630	525	447
Satkhira Sadar	2	195	1,117	440	369	308
Assasuni	8	1,240	6,794	2,640	2,283	1,871
Kalaroa	3	260	1,469	605	494	370
Tala	4	1,125	6,052	2,480	2,030	1,542
Shyamnagar	1	110	600	230	200	170
Keshabpur	10	1,598	9,322	3,528	3,235	2,559
Kotwali	1	250	1,500	590	550	360
Manirampur	4	820	4,745	1,900	1,770	1,075
Bagherpara	2	300	1,820	690	600	530
Abhaynagar	1	175	1,224	472	402	350
Jhikargacha	1	550	3,030	1,200	1,100	730
Dumuria	3	700	3,870	1,500	1,340	1,030

Terokhada	1	150	800	320	280	200
Dacope	3	440	2,740	1,040	980	720
Dighalia	1	140	720	300	250	170
Paikgachha	3	410	2,540	900	870	770
Daulatpur	1	170	920	380	320	220
Bagerhat Sadar	1	80	460	170	150	140
Sarankhola	1	60	420	150	140	130
Total	53	9,088	51,745	20,165	17,888	13,692

Number of sample population



Around 38.97% of the community are male whereas 34.57% are female. The average sex ratio is 112.73 in the Rishi community, which is significantly higher than average national sex ratio at 100.3 (BBS Census 2011). The sex ratio is determined by calculating the number of male against every 100 female. There is not a single upazila where female population is higher than male population in the Rishi community. Around 26.46% of the community are children.

The average family size of the Rishis is 5.72 in contrast to the family size at the national level at 4.06 (HIES 2016). The highest Rishi family size was found to be at 7 in Abhaynagar upazila in Jashore district and Sarankhola upazila in Bagerhat district.

Table 2: Average HH size and sex composition

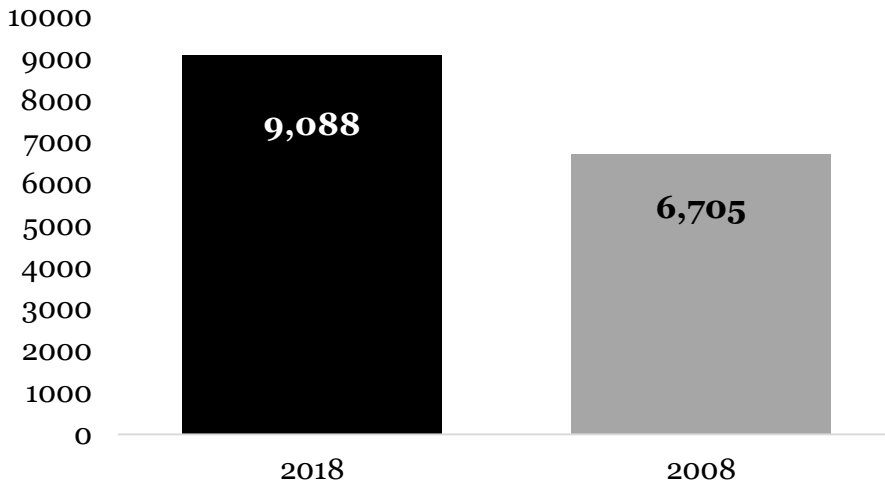
Upazilas	Average HH size	Sex ratio	Upazilas	Average HH size	Sex ratio
Kaliganj	5.09	120.00	Abhaynagar	7.00	117.41
Satkhira Sadar	5.78	119.24	Jhikargacha	5.51	109.09
Assasuni	5.55	115.64	Dumuria	5.81	111.94
Kalaroa	5.67	122.47	Terokhada	5.07	114.29
Tala	5.28	122.17	Dacope	6.16	106.12
Shyamnagar	4.45	115.00	Dighalia	5.14	120.00
Keshabpur	5.74	109.06	Paikgachha	6.21	103.45
Kotwali	6.00	107.27	Daulatpur	5.41	118.75
Manirampur	5.90	107.34	Bagerhat Sadar	5.80	113.33
Bagherpara	6.08	115.00	Sarankhola	7.00	107.14
Total			5.72		112.73

The number of Rishi families have increased from 6,705 to 9,088 families in the last 10 years at a rate of 35.54%. The highest number of Rishi families were found in Keshabpur upazila in Jashore district. Number of Rishi only decreased in Sarankhola upazila from 110 families to 60 families.

Table 3: No. of HHs now and 10 years ago

Upazilas	No. of HHs (2018)	No. of HHs (2008)
Kaliganj	315	216
Satkhira Sadar	195	125
Assasuni	1,240	808
Kalaroa	260	161
Tala	1,125	790
Shyamnagar	110	75
Keshabpur	1,598	1,195
Kotwali	250	200
Manirampur	820	650
Bagherpara	300	220
Abhaynagar	175	125
Jhikargacha	550	490
Dumuria	700	600
Terokhada	150	100
Dacope	440	265
Dighalia	140	80
Paikgachha	410	330
Daulatpur	170	110
Bagerhat Sadar	80	55
Sarankhola	60	110
Total	9,088	6,705

Number of HHs



Education

The literacy rate among the Rishis was found to be 41.31% on average whereas nearly half of the community (46.89%) have letter knowledge only. Around 11.80% of the community are completely illiterate. On average, 20.50% of the community have completed primary education and 13.05% have completed secondary education. Only 3.92% of the Rishis have studied up to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and a meagre 2.50% have a Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) or equivalent degree. Less than 1% of the community have graduated and an insignificant 0.37% have a Master's degree.

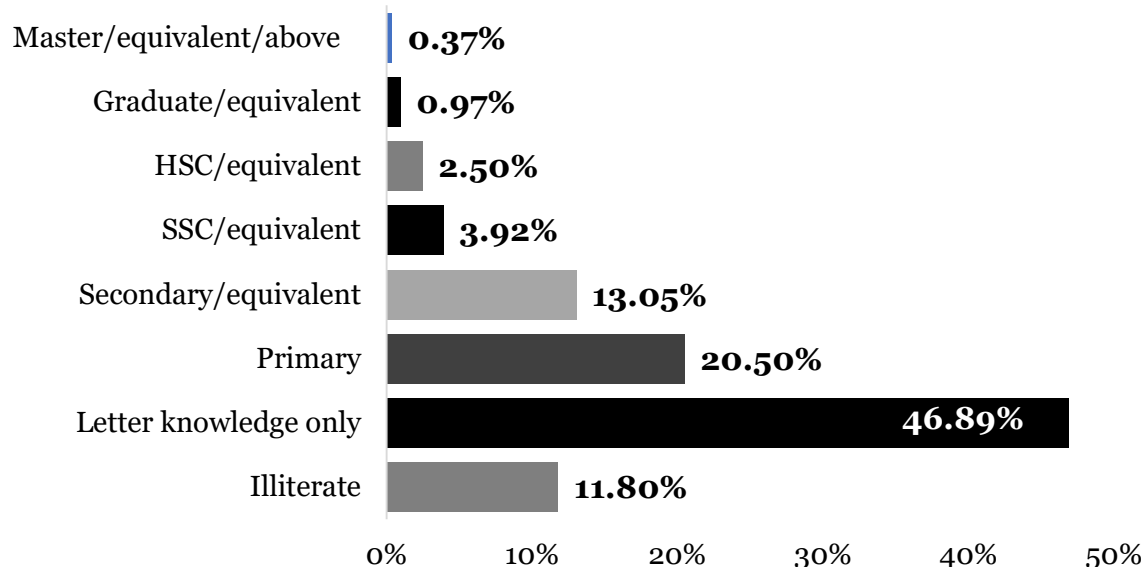
In Bagerhat Sadar and Sarankhola upazilas of Bagerhat district, as high as 62% and 83% of the Rishis are completely illiterate. Majority of the Rishis have letter knowledge only in Abhaynagar upazila of Jashore district (76.12%), Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira district (65.80%) and Terokhada upazila of Khulna district (63%).

Around 8% of the Rishis in Keshabpur in Jashore district and Dighalia in Khulna district have passed SSC examinations. In Daulatpur and Dumuria upazilas of Khulna district, 7% and 5% of the Rishis have studied up to HSC respectively.

Table 4: Education (% of 18 years and above)

Upazilas	Status							
	Illiterate	Letter knowledge only	Primary	Secondary/equivalent	SSC/equivalent	HSC/equivalent	Graduate/equivalent	Master/equivalent/above
Kaliganj	6.64	65.80	14.92	10.11	0.61	1.15	0.78	0.00
Satkhira Sadar	10.00	49.50	24.00	13.50	0.50	1.29	0.79	0.43
Assasuni	10.20	54.21	21.79	10.28	1.18	1.11	1.13	0.11
Kalaroa	11.00	52.07	18.67	13.33	2.73	1.47	0.57	0.17
Tala	10.88	37.50	23.38	16.75	6.84	3.32	0.66	0.68
Shyamnagar	13.97	52.79	18.60	11.62	1.86	1.16	0.00	0.00
Keshabpur	8.31	35.45	24.09	17.24	8.15	4.83	1.29	0.65
Kotwali	9.00	44.00	26.00	17.00	2.00	2.00	0.00	0.00
Manirampur	10.50	58.00	15.00	10.50	3.25	1.88	0.75	0.13
Bagherpara	14.00	50.50	16.00	9.50	5.50	2.50	1.50	0.50
Abhaynagar	3.42	76.12	7.43	5.49	3.66	2.74	0.91	0.23
Jhikargacha	8.70	52.50	21.70	13.00	2.20	1.30	0.40	0.20
Dumuria	7.00	37.67	25.33	14.33	7.67	5.00	2.33	0.67
Terokhada	9.00	63.00	22.00	6.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dacope	13.67	48.33	17.33	16.33	1.83	1.50	0.67	0.33
Dighalia	9.00	36.00	18.00	27.00	8.00	1.00	1.00	0.00
Paikgachha	4.67	56.67	24.00	10.33	1.33	1.33	1.00	0.67
Daulatpur	7.00	38.00	29.00	14.00	3.00	7.00	1.00	1.00
Bagerhat Sadar	62.00	23.00	6.00	5.00	2.00	1.38	0.62	0.00
Sarankhola	83.00	14.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	11.80	46.89	20.50	13.05	3.92	2.50	0.97	0.37

Education (18 years and above)



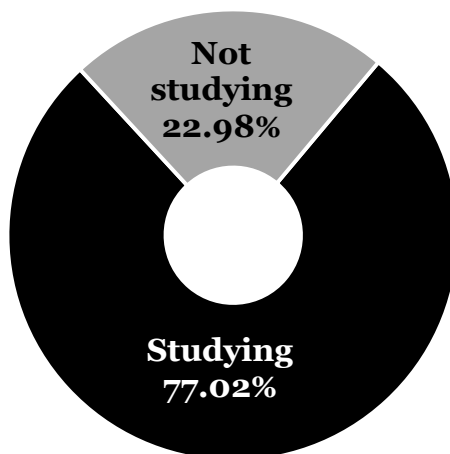
On average, 77.02% children of the Rishi community who are aged between five to 18 years were studying during the PPRC study and 22.98% were not studying. On average, 91% in Kotwali upazila of Jashore and 94% of the children in Daulatpur in Khulna were studying. On the contrary, the percentage of children who were not studying in Terokhada upazila in Khulna and Bagerhat Sadar and Sharankhola upazilas in Bagerhat district was 80%, 79% and 92% respectively.

Table 5: Education (% of 5-18 years)

Upazilas	Status	
	Studying	Not studying
Kaliganj	81.50	18.50
Satkhira Sadar	78.50	21.50
Assasuni	82.63	17.38
Kalaroa	74.33	25.67
Tala	78.50	21.50
Shyamnagar	82.00	18.00
Keshabpur	84.26	15.74
Kotwali	91.00	9.00
Manirampur	78.75	21.25
Bagherpara	48.80	51.20
Abhaynagar	88.00	12.00
Jhikargacha	75.00	25.00
Dumuria	79.33	20.67
Terokhada	20.00	80.00
Dacope	85.00	15.00
Dighalia	75.00	25.00
Paikgachha	87.33	12.67
Daulatpur	94.00	6.00
Bagerhat Sadar	21.00	79.00
Sarankhola	9.00	92.00
Total	77.02	22.98



Education (5-18 years)



Housing

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), there are four categories of housing structures—*jhupri* (temporary structures made of plastic, polythene, board, scraps, etc.); *kutchra* (semi-durable structures with wall and roof made of bamboo, wood, leaves, etc. that require some annual upgrading); *semi-pucka* (semi-permanent structures with brick wall and corrugated sheet roof) and *pucka* (permanent structures with brick wall and concrete roof). An additional category of housing structure—tin-shed—has been

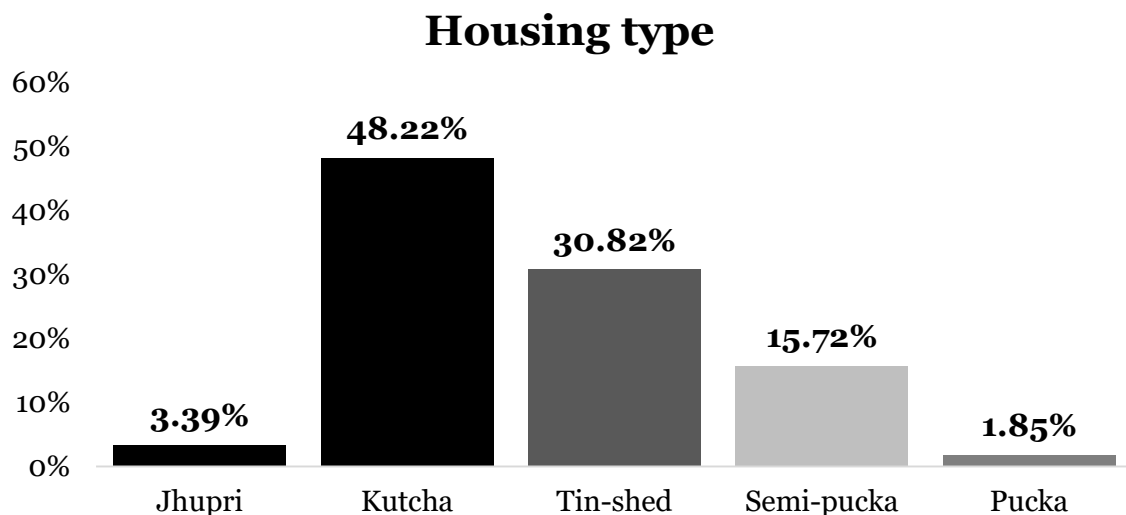
added in the study, which has corrugated sheet roof and wall.

Nearly half of the Rishi community still live in *kutcha* houses (48.22%). On average, 30.82% families live in tin-shed houses. Only 1.85% families live in *pucka* houses and 15.72% live in *semi-pucka* houses. On average, 3.39% of the Rishi families still live in *jhupri* houses.

In Dighalia upazila of Khulna district, 21.50% of the Rishi families still live in *jhupri* houses. In Bagerhat district, all the Rishi families of the Sarankhola upazila and 99% Rishi families of Bagerhat sadar upazila live in *kutcha* houses. Half of the Rishi families or even more live in *kutcha* houses in a significant number of upazilas. On average, 61% Rishi families in Shyamnagar upazila and 45% families in Daulatpur upazila live in tin-shed houses.

Table 6: Housing condition

Housing type	% of HHs
Jhupri	3.39
Kutcha	48.22
Tin-shed	30.82
Semi-pucka	15.72
Pucka	1.85

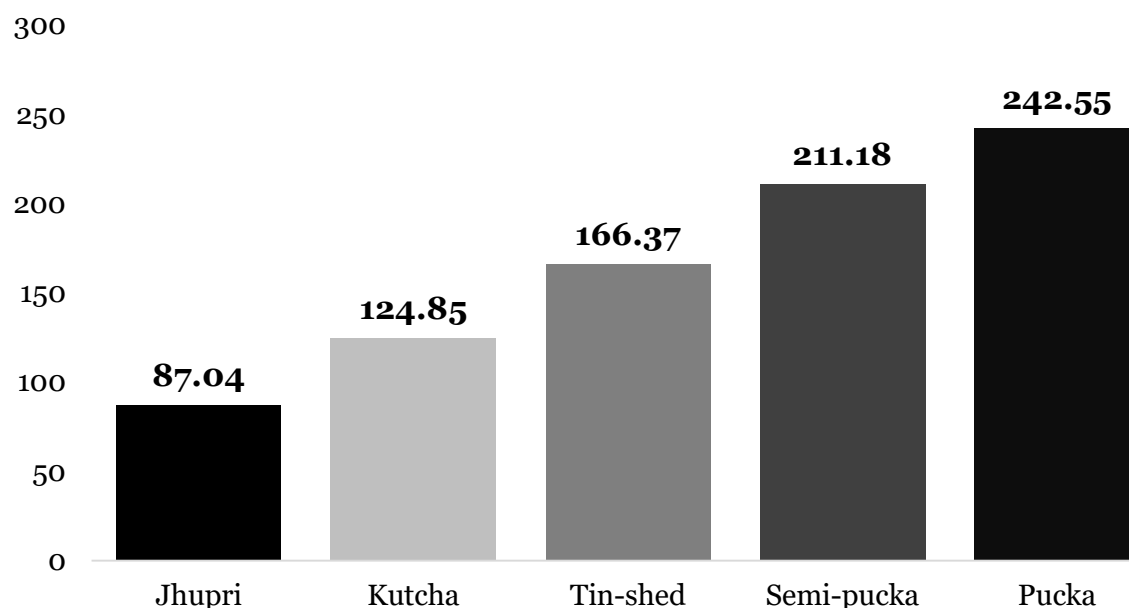


The average size for *jhupri* houses of the Rishi families is 87.04 square feet. Average size of *kutcha* house is around 124.85 square feet and tin-shed house is 166.37 square feet. Semi-*pucka* house is around 211.18 square feet and *pucka* house is 242.55 square feet on average.

Table 7: Average size of houses

Housing type	Size (square feet)
Jhupri	87.04
Kutchha	124.85
Tin-shed	166.37
Semi-pucka	211.18
Pucka	242.55

Average size of house (sq ft)



Health and Sanitation Facilities

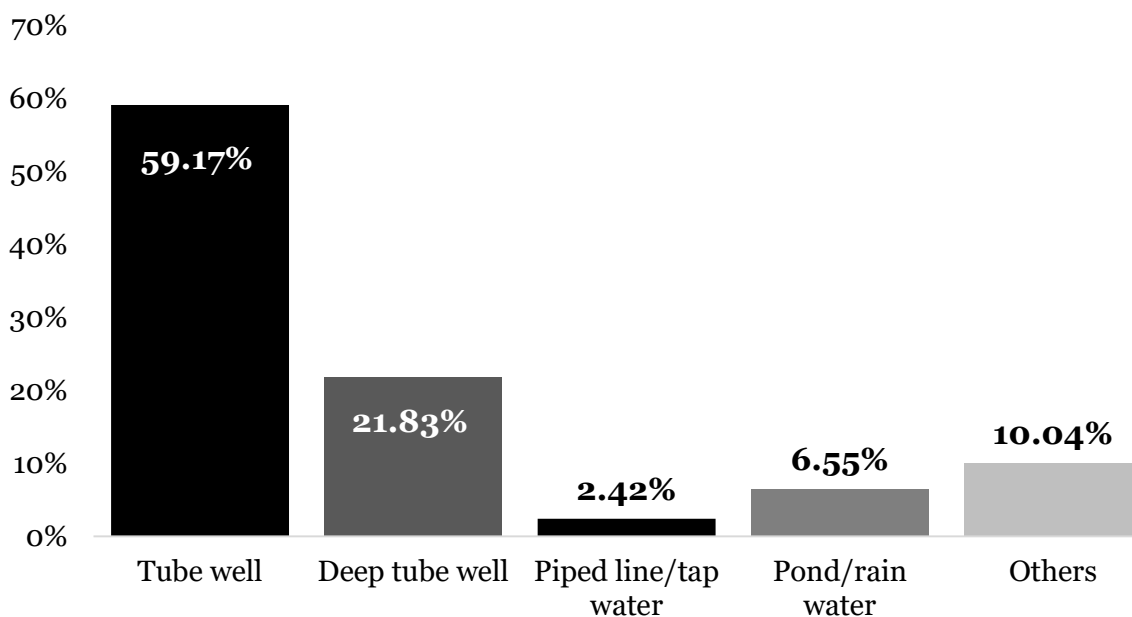
Sources of drinking water: At the national level, 85.18% families use tube well water (HIES 2016). The source of drinking water for more than half of the Rishi families is also tube well (59.17%). On average, 21.83% of the Rishi families use water from deep tube well. Around 6.55% of the family still use pond and/or rain water. Only 2.42% of the Rishi families use pipeline or tap water whereas at the national level 12.01% families use supply water (HIES 2016).

Around a quarter of the Rishi families in Assasuni upazila in Satkhira district and Dacope upazila in Khulna district use pond and rain water. From 90% to all of the families in Satkhira sadar, Shyamnagar, Bagherpara, Jhikargacha and Bagerhat sadar upazila use tube well water.

Table 8: Sources of drinking water

Sources	% of HHs
Tube well	59.17
Deep tube well	21.83
Piped line/tap water	2.42
Pond/rain water	6.55
Others	10.04

Sources of drinking water



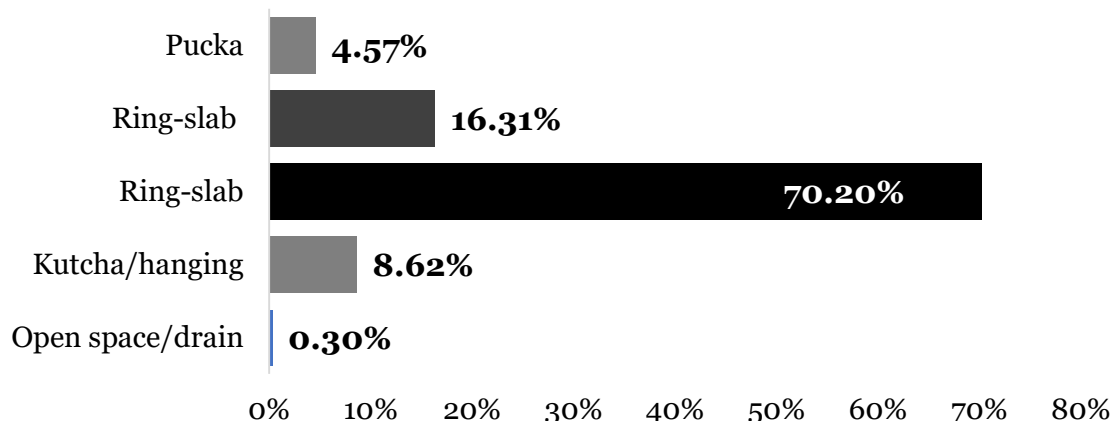
Latrine facilities: Majority of the Rishi families use ring-slab latrines (70.20%) that are not sanitary and do not have a concrete structure. At the national level, 61.37% families use sanitary or *pukka* toilet, which are either water sealed and/or has flush (HIES 2016). On the contrary, less than a quarter of the Rishi community (16.31%) use sanitary ring-slab toilets or *pukka* toilets. Around 8.62% of the Rishi community still use *kutcha* or hanging toilets.

All of the Rishi families in Sarankhola upazila in Bagerhat district use *kutcha* or hanging toilets. On the other hand, all of the Rishi families in Terokhada upazila and 72.72% families in Shyamnagar upazila use sanitary ring-slab toilets. Half of the Rishi families in Kotwali upazila use *pukka* toilets. Around 5.5% of the Rishi families in Bagherpara upazila in Jashore district defecate in open space or drains.

Table 9: Latrine facilities

Latrine type	% of HHs
Open space/drain	0.30
Kutch/hanging	8.62
Ring-slab	70.20
Ring-slab (sanitary)	16.31
Pucka	4.57

Latrine facilities

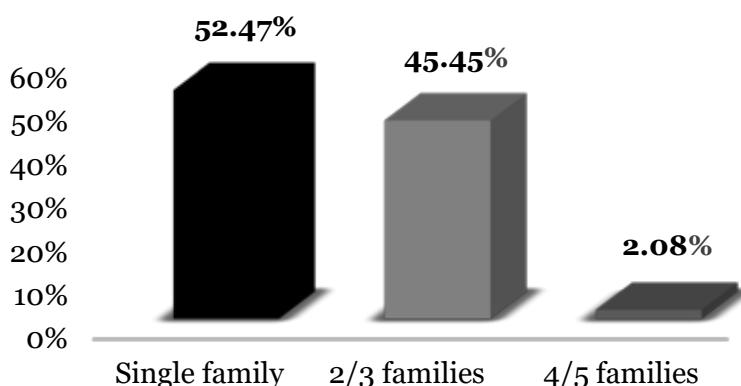


On average, around half of the Rishi do not have to share their toilets with other families (52.47%). However, 45.45% of the Rishi families have to share their toilets with two to three families. All the Rishi families in Sarankhola upazila have to share their toilets with 2/3 families. On average 2.08% of the families have to share their toilets with four to five other families. On average, 18.5% Rishi families in Satkhira sadar upazila share toilets with 4/5 families.

Table 10: Types of latrine use

Latrine usage	% of HHs
Single Family	52.47
2/3 families	45.45
4/5 families	2.08

Types of latrine usage



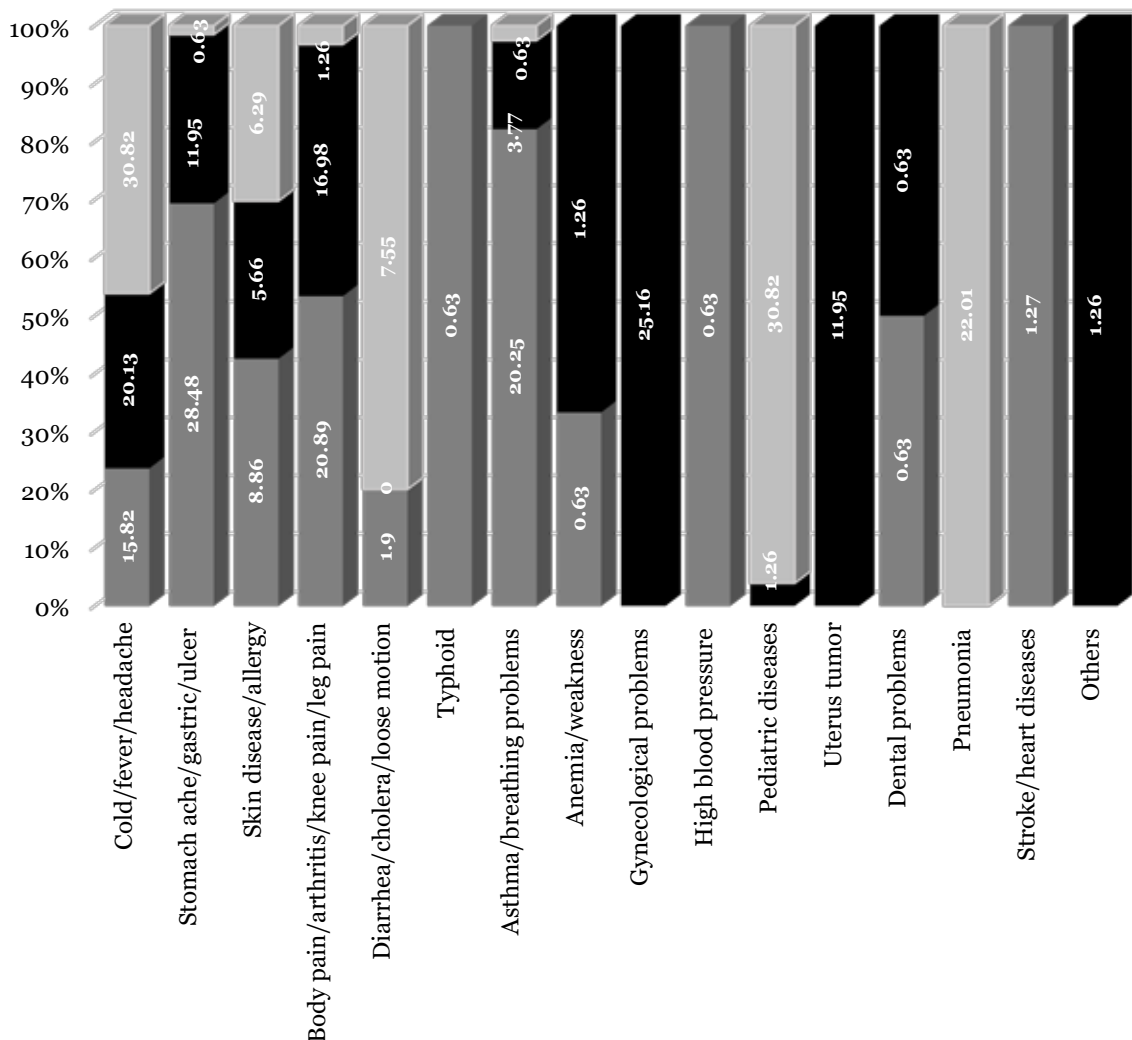
Most frequent illness: The most frequent illness in the Rishi community was found to be cold, fever and headache. Other common diseases were pediatric diseases (13.8%), stomach ache, gastric pain or ulcer (12.96%) and gynecological problems (11.27%). Around 14% of the community suffer from this. Stomach ache, gastric pain or ulcer was the most common disease that affects men of the Rishi community (28.48%). Men also reported to have suffered from asthma and breathing problems more than women and children (20.25%).

One quarter of the women of the community suffer from gynecological problems and 11.95% of the women reported that they had uterus tumor. Significant percentage of both men and women suffer from body pain, arthritis, knee pain or leg pain. Nearly 31% of the children of the Rishi community suffer from different pediatric diseases and 22% of the children had pneumonia. Only men reported cases of stroke or heart diseases, high blood pressure and typhoid. Other less frequent diseases in the Rishi community were found to be skin disease or allergy, diarrhea or cholera, anemia or weakness and dental problems.

Table 11: Most frequent illness of men, women and children (in %)

Types of diseases	Male	Female	Children	% of total cluster/community
Cold/fever/headache	15.82	20.13	30.82	14.08
Stomach ache/gastric/ulcer	28.48	11.95	0.63	12.96
Skin disease/allergy	8.86	5.66	6.29	6.20
Body pain/arthritis/knee pain/leg pain	20.89	16.98	1.26	10.42
Diarrhea/cholera/loose motion	1.90	-	7.55	3.66
Typhoid	0.63	-	-	0.28
Asthma/breathing problems	20.25	3.77	0.63	9.30
Anemia/weakness	0.63	1.26	-	0.85
Gynecological problems	-	25.16	-	11.27
High blood pressure	0.63	-	-	0.28
Pediatric diseases	-	1.26	30.82	13.80
Uterus tumor	-	11.95	-	5.35
Dental problems	0.63	0.63	-	0.56
Pneumonia	-	-	22.01	9.86
Stroke/heart diseases	1.27	-	-	0.56
Others	-	1.26	-	0.56
Total	100	100	100	100

Most frequent illnesses ■ Male ■ Female ■ Children

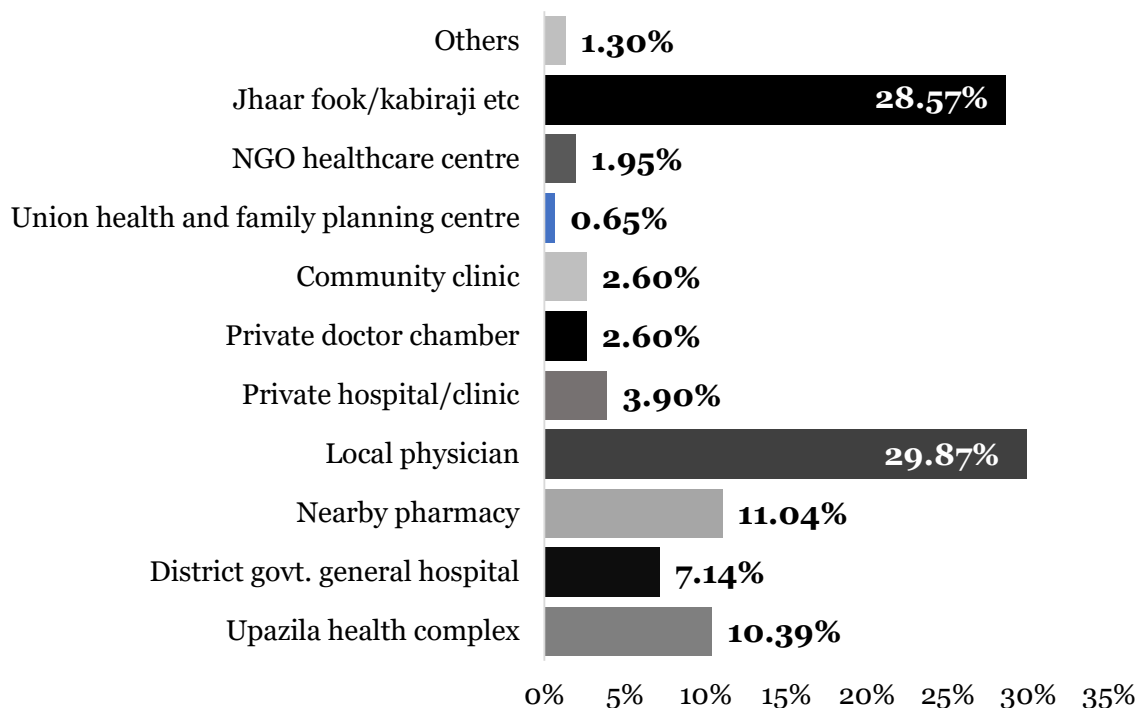


More than a quarter of the Rishi community (29.87%) go to local physicians when they are sick. Similar percentage of Rishis rely on *jhar phook* or *kabiraji* (superstitious or traditional healing methods). Therefore majority of the community either go to a local physician or a traditional healer during times of sickness. On average, 10-11% of the community go to nearby pharmacies or upazila health complex and only 7.14% go to district government hospitals. A small percentage of the Rishi community go to private hospital/clinic, private doctor's chamber, community clinic, union health and family planning centre or NGO healthcare centre.

Table 12: Treatment taken from

Treatment from where	% of HHs
Upazila health complex	10.39
District govt. general hospital	7.14
Nearby pharmacy	11.04
Local physician	29.87
Private hospital/clinic	3.90
Private doctor chamber	2.60
Community clinic	2.60
Union health and family planning centre	0.65
NGO healthcare centre	1.95
Jhaar phook/kabiraj	28.57
Other	1.30

Treatment from where



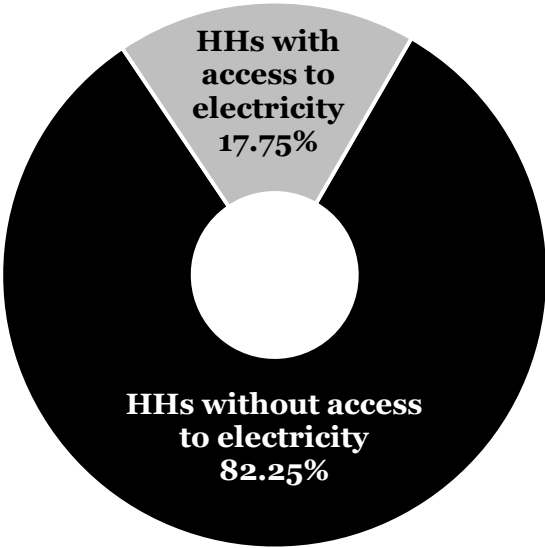
Electricity and Other Energy Sources

On average, 82.25% of the Rishi households have access to electricity but duration of electricity supply is 19.34 hours on average. All the households in Terokhada and Daulatpur upazilas have electricity. On the other hand, half of the Rishi households in Dighalia upazila in Khulna do not have access to electricity. Around 43% families in Paikgachha and 33% families in Dacope upazilas in Khulna district do not have any access to electricity as well. On average, 17.75% of the Rishi families do not have electricity supply.

Table 13: Electricity supply

Status	% of HHs
% of HHs with access to electricity	82.25
% of HHs without access to electricity	17.75
Average duration (hours) of daily supply	19.34

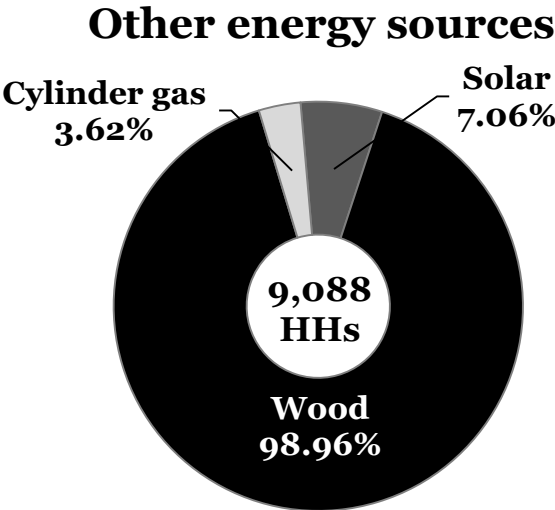
Access to electricity



Other energy sources: Majority of the Rishi households (98.96%) use wood as fuel for cooking. On average, 7.06% of the Rishi families use solar energy and 3.62% families use cylinder gas. Majority of the solar power user from the Rishi community were found in Paikgachha (30.67%), Tala (29%) and Kalaroa (22%) upazilas. Solar energy is used only for lighting purposes whereas wood and cylinder gas is used only for cooking.

Table 14: Other energy sources

Status	% of HHs
Solar	7.06
Wood	98.96
Cylinder gas	3.62



Income and Expenditure of the HHs

Major Occupations: On average, 26.66% of the Rishi families earn a living by working as day laborers. On the other hand, 18.58% of the Rishi community was found to be making bamboo or cane products and 10.11% of the families earn a living as making handicrafts. Therefore 28.69% of the Rishi families are either involved in making bamboo or cane products or making other kinds of handicrafts, which are their traditional occupations. On average, 14.68% of the Rishi families are rickshaw, van or korimon drivers and 10.13% of the families are agricultural laborers.

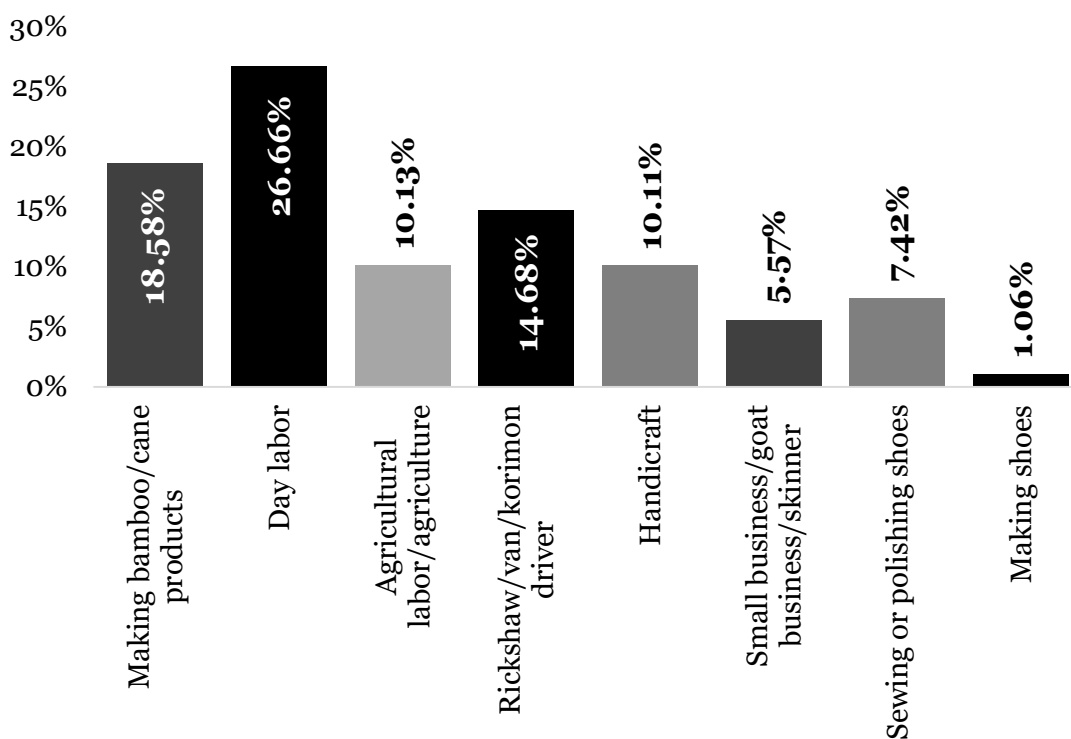
It should be noted that around 7.42% of the Rishi families still earn a living by sewing or polishing shoes and only 1.06% of the communities still make shoes, which were once their traditional occupations. On average, 5.57% of the Rishi families are involved in small business, goat business or work as skinners, which was also one of their traditional occupations. Only 0.34% Rishi families are service holders. A small percentage of the families are garment workers, play musical instruments for a living or work as a barber, carpenter/mason and boatman.

Significant percentage of families are still involved in their traditional occupations in some upazilas than others. On average, 91% of the Rishi families in Jhikargacha are involved with small business, goat business or skinning. On the other hand, 83% Rishi families in Sarankhola upazila sew or polish shoes and 36% families in Dighalia upazila still make shoes to earn a living. On average, 14.33% of the Rishi families are garments workers in Dacope upazila. Rishi service holders were found only in Daulatpur upazila.

Table 15: Major occupations

Occupations	% of HHs
Making bamboo/cane products	18.58
Day labor	26.66
Agricultural labor/agriculture	10.13
Garments worker	0.81
Rickshaw/van/korimon driver	14.68
Handicraft	10.11
Playing musical instruments	0.98
Small business/goat business/skinner	5.57
Cutting hair/salon	1.81
Sewing or polishing shoes	7.42
Making shoes	1.06
Begging	0.62
Boatman	0.40
Service holder	0.34
Carpenter/mason	0.83

Major occupations



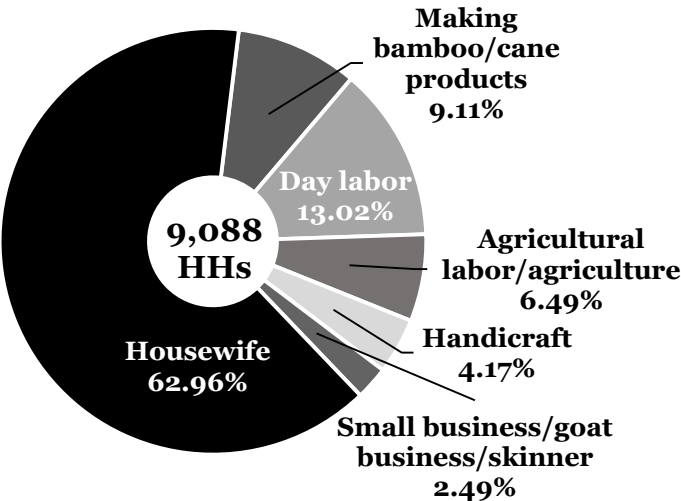
Occupations of women: Majority of the Rishi women are housewives. On average, women are housewives in 62.96% of the Rishi families. Rishi women work as day laborers in 13.02% families and as agricultural laborers in 6.49% families. Women make bamboo or cane products in 9.11% families and handicrafts in 4.17%. A small percentage of the Rishi women are garments workers, tailors and house servants. Women in 3% of the Rishi families in Keshabpur upazila are sweepers. None of the women in the Rishi families were found to be service holders except 10% in Dighalia upazila.

On average, women in 2.49% of the Rishi families are involved in small business, goat business or work as skimmers. On average, women in 33% of the Rishi families are house servants in Sarankhola upazila.

Table 16: Occupations of women

Occupations	% of HHs
Making bamboo/cane products	9.11
Day labor	13.02
Agricultural labor/agriculture	6.49
Garments worker	0.23
Handicraft	4.17
Small business/goat business/skinner	2.49
Sweeper	0.57
Housewife	62.96
Service holder	0.19
Tailor	0.15
House servant	0.62

Major occupations of women



Sources of income: The most common income source of majority of the Rishi families (27.05%) is making bamboo or cane products. The second common source of income for the Rishi families is day labor as it is the main source of income for 20.36% of the Rishi families whereas income of 9.43% families depend on agricultural labor. Driving a rickshaw or van is another important source of income (13.18%). Their traditional occupation of sewing shoes is the income source for 8.32% Rishi families and 1.18% earn from making shoes. Only 1.44% Rishi families still earn from working as a skimmers.

Around 6.5% of the Rishi families earn from doing small business. Government and private service are sources of income for 0.79% and 3.31% of the Rishi families

respectively. Around 4.21% of Rishi families earn from playing musical instruments and 2.83% earn from cutting hair.

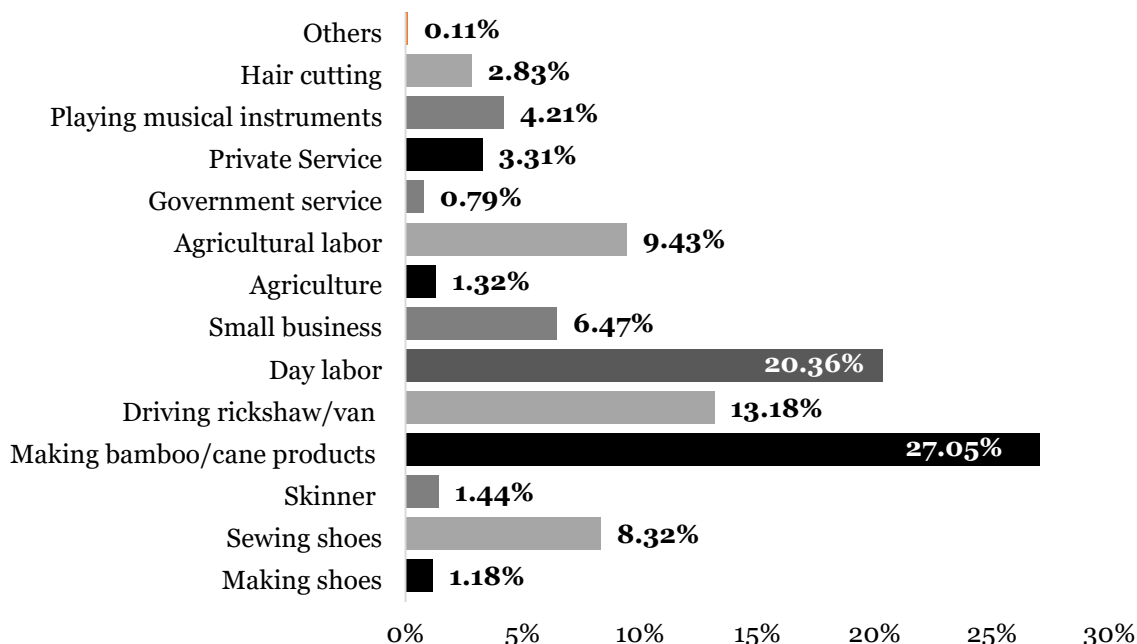
Table 17: Sources of income

Occupations	% of HHs
Making shoes	1.18
Sewing shoes	8.32
Skinner	1.44
Making bamboo/cane products	27.05
Driving rickshaw/van	13.18
Day Labor	20.36
Small business	6.47
Agriculture	1.32
Agricultural labor	9.43
Government service	0.79
Private Service	3.31
Playing musical instruments	4.21
Hair cutting	2.83
Others	0.11



Hewing knife the Rishis use for bamboo work.

Sources of income (% of HHs)



Average, highest and lowest monthly income: Average monthly income of the Rishis ranges roughly between Taka 6,000 to Taka 8,000 for their traditional occupations. Income from making shoes is Taka 6,785 and sewing shoes is Taka 6,357. A Rishi who skins animals as an occupation makes Taka 7,471 a month on average. A Rishi day laborer earns Taka 6,493 per month whereas an agricultural labor from the same labor earns around Taka 6,857 monthly. However, those who work on their own agricultural land earn an average Taka 7,710 per month. On average, income of a Rishi rickshaw or van puller is Taka 6,502 per month.

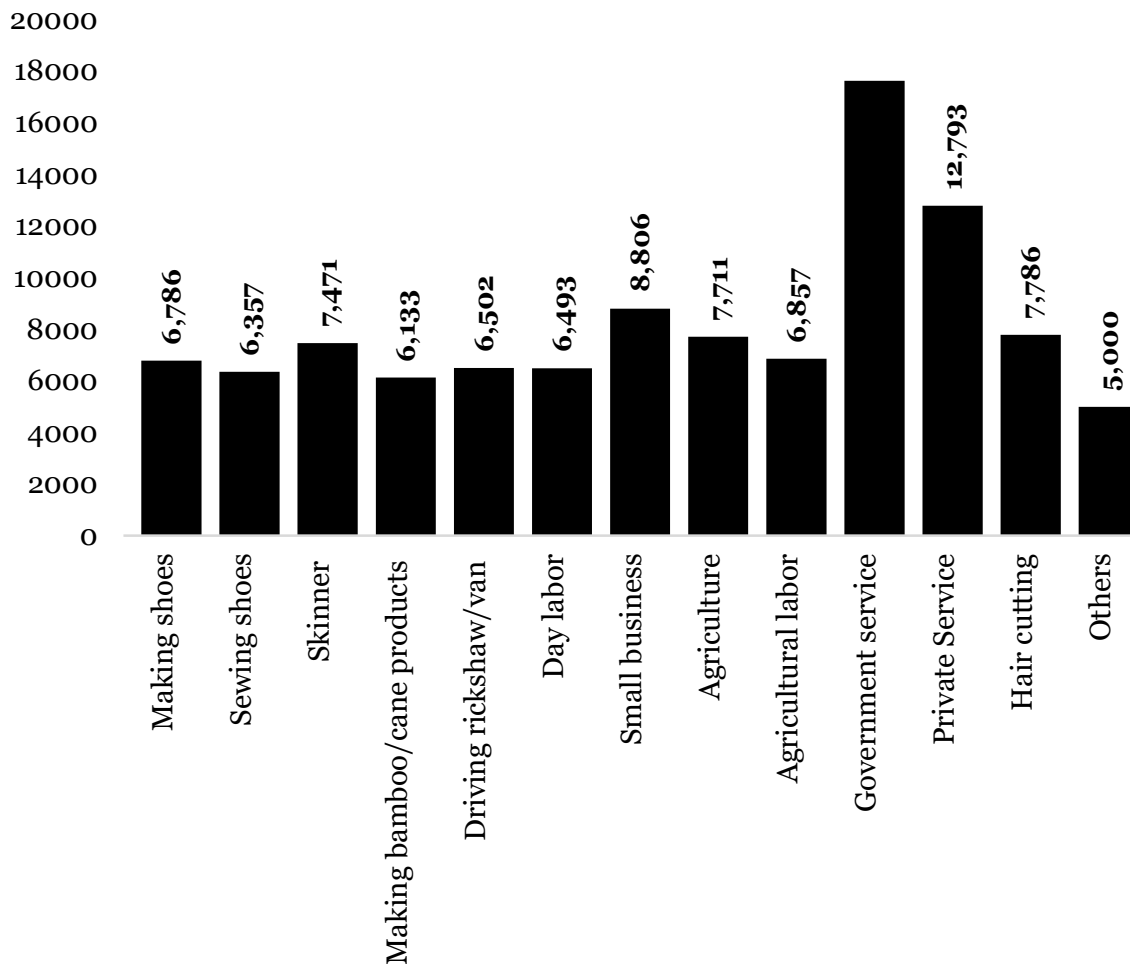
Income from making bamboo or cane products is lower than other occupations of the Rishis, which is Taka 6,133 per month. Income from small business is around Taka 8,805 per month. Rishi barbers earn Taka 7,785 on average per month. Rishi who plays musical instruments in different social events like weddings earn Taka 6,419 per month.

Income of Rishi government and private service providers are Taka 17,630 and Taka 12,793 a month respectively, which are higher than income from other occupations of the Rishis. However, a very small percentage of Rishis are working in the government (0.79%) and private (3.31%) service sector. Overall, highest monthly income is Taka 20,490 and lowest monthly income is Taka 4,301 on average.

Table 18: Average monthly income

Occupations	Taka
Making shoes	6,786
Sewing shoes	6,357
Skinner	7,471
Making bamboo/cane products	6,133
Driving rickshaw/van	6,502
Day labor	6,493
Small business	8,806
Agriculture	7,711
Agricultural labor	6,857
Government service	17,630
Private service	12,793
Playing musical instruments	6,420
Hair cutting	7,786
Others	5,000

Average monthly income (Taka)



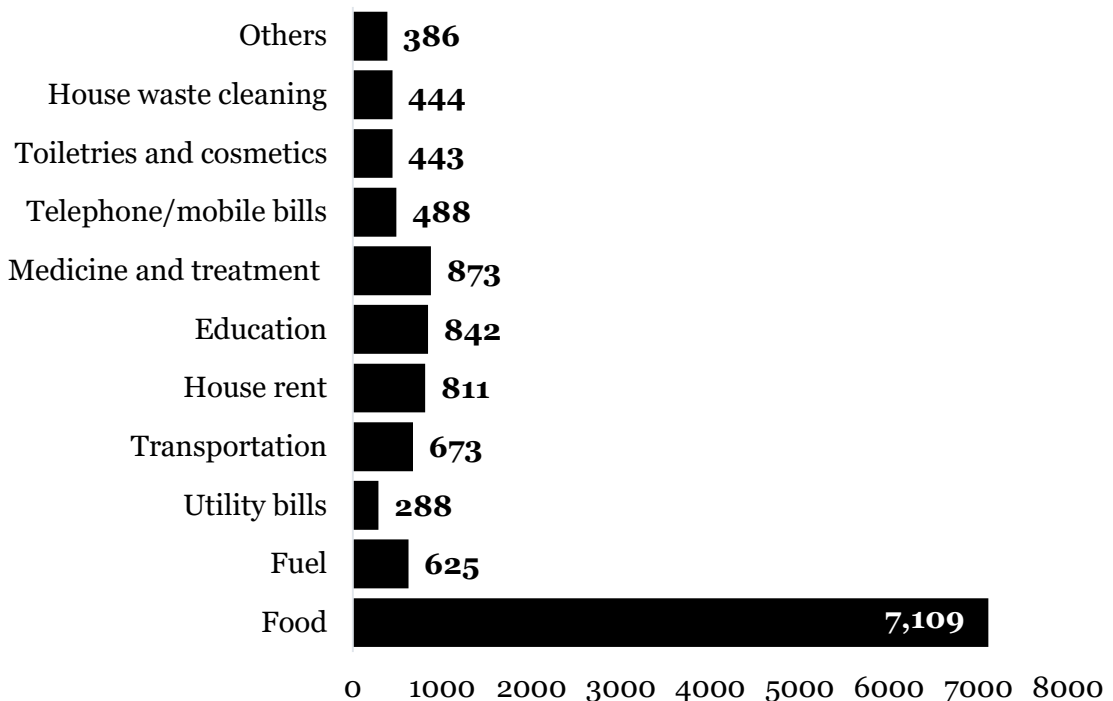
Monthly expenditure: The item on which the Rishis spend the most amount of money every month is food. On average, the Rishis have to pay Taka 7,109 monthly on food alone. On average, the Rishis have to pay Taka 811 as house rent and Taka 288 to pay utility bills every month. They spend Taka 625 per month on fuel. Educational expense is monthly Taka 841. On the other hand, monthly expenditure for medicines and treatments is Taka 872. Average monthly transportation expenditure of the Rishi community is around Taka 673. Telephone and mobile phone bills take up around Taka 488 per month. Moreover, the Rishis spend Taka 443 on toiletries and cosmetics and Taka 444 on cleaning household waste.

Table 19: Monthly expenditure

Items	Taka
Food*	7,109
Fuel*	625
Utility Bills*	288
Transportation	673
House rent	811
Education*	842
Medicine and treatment	873
Telephone/mobile Bills	488
Toiletries and cosmetics	443
House waste cleaning	444
Others*	386
Total	1,264

*Food=Rice, pulse, oil, salt, fish, meat, milk, vegetables, etc; Fuel=Wood/coal/kerosene/oil/cylinder gas, etc; Utility bill=Electricity/water/gas; Education=Tuition fee, study equipments; Other bills= Cable line, internet bill, newspaper bill, etc.

Monthly expenditure (Taka)



Total monthly average income of a Rishi family is Taka 7,295 whereas total expenditure is Taka 14,353. Therefore, monthly expenditure of a Rishi family is nearly double than their income, if not more. In fact, monthly expenditure of the Rishi families was higher than their income in all of upazilas under the study. On average, only 38.49% of the Rishi families can bear their monthly expenditure with their income. Nearly half of the Rishi families (42.70%) have to take loans in order to buy day-to-day necessities. In Sarankhola, Bagerhat Sadar and Manirampur upazilas, most of the Rishi families (87% and above) have to take loans to bear their monthly costs.

Around 14.26% families depend on their savings to meet their monthly expenditure. A small percentage of 3.02% Rishi families even sell their assets to get by. Only 0.99% Rishi families can depend on Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) to make ends meet. Less than 1% of the Rishi families have received some sort of financial aid or remittance to meet their daily needs.

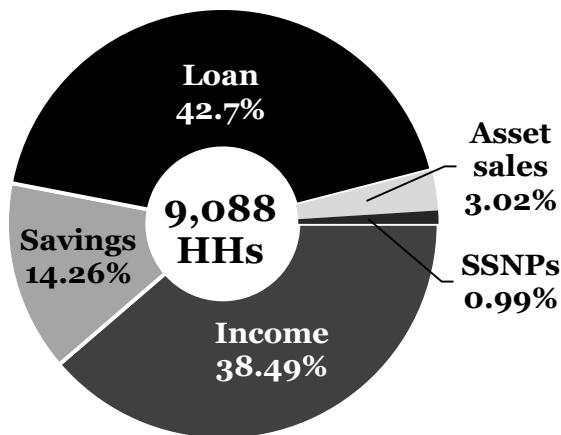
Table 20: Monthly average income & expenditure (in Taka)

Upazilas	Income	Expenditure
Kaliganj	6,085	15,805
Satkhira Sadar	6,335	15,883
Assasuni	6,290	16,270
Kalaroa	6,676	14,238
Tala	6,868	13,184
Shyamnagar	5,660	13,348
Keshabpur	8,685	13,928
Kotwali	8,330	15,269
Manirampur	8,995	14,564
Bagherpara	7,827	13,684
Abhaynagar	8,440	17,801
Jhikargacha	1,4430	16,400
Dumuria	6,440	14,470
Terokhada	5,680	11,766
Dacope	6,315	13,324
Dighalia	5,950	12,200
Paikgachha	5,807	13,532
Daulatpur	7,030	17,310
Bagerhat Sadar	8,030	9,928
Sarankhola	6,255	8,836
Total	7,295	14,353

Table 21: Meeting average monthly expenditure

Expenditure head	% of HHs
Income	38.49
Savings	14.26
Loan	42.70
Asset Sales	3.02
SSNPs	0.99
Received financial aid	0.44
Remittance	0.06
Others	0.04

Meeting average monthly expenditure



Yearly expenditure: Some items or services are paid for on a yearly basis instead of monthly including clothes and shoes, furniture, electronics, religious and social events, house repairing, etc. Major medical treatment is the biggest burden on the Rishi families which cost Taka 54,804 yearly on average. In Tala and Dumuria upazilas, Rishi families have to bear medical costs of around one to two lakh Taka in one year. Arranging social events including marriage ceremonies cost on average Taka 49,632 yearly. In Dumuria and Dighalia upazilas, organizing wedding ceremonies and other events can cost more than one lakh Taka. Other religious events cost around Taka 5,459 per year.

Construction and repairing of houses cost Taka 17,440 yearly. Yearly cost of education of their children is Taka 9,910, which include admission or session fees, private coaching fees, donations, school dress cost, etc. Clothes and shoes, furniture and electronics take up a significant portion of yearly expenditure as well. The Rishi families also have to bear legal expenditure including court fees and police charges, which can cost Taka 7,333 per year. Rishi families yearly spend Taka 4,359 on average for recreation and travelling purposes.

Table 22: Expenditure of last one year

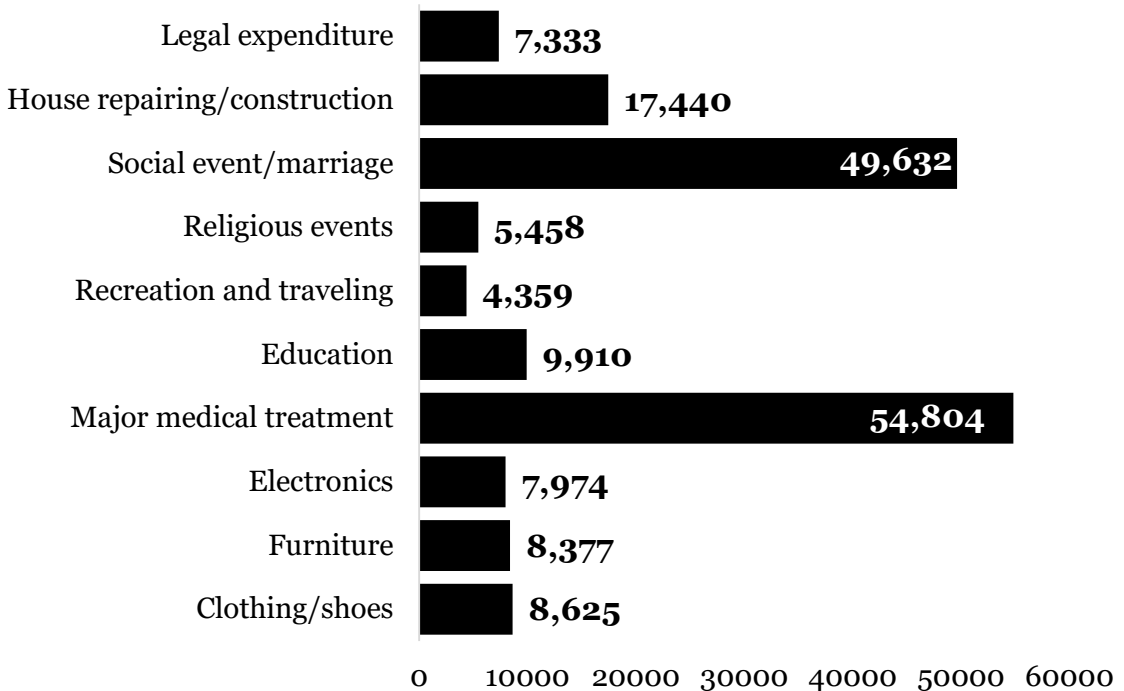
Expenditure head	Taka
Clothing/shoes	8,625
Furniture	8,377
Electronics*	7,974
Major medical treatment	54,804
Education*	9,910
Recreation and traveling	4,359
Religious events	5,458
Social event/marriage	49,632
House repairing/construction	17,440
Legal expenditure*	7,333

**Electronics=TV, refrigerator, mobile set, etc.; Education=Admission/session fee, donation, dress, private coaching etc.; Legal expenditure=court fee, police charge, etc.*



A Rishi woman making basket.
Photo: Prosad Sarker

Expenditure of last one year (Taka)



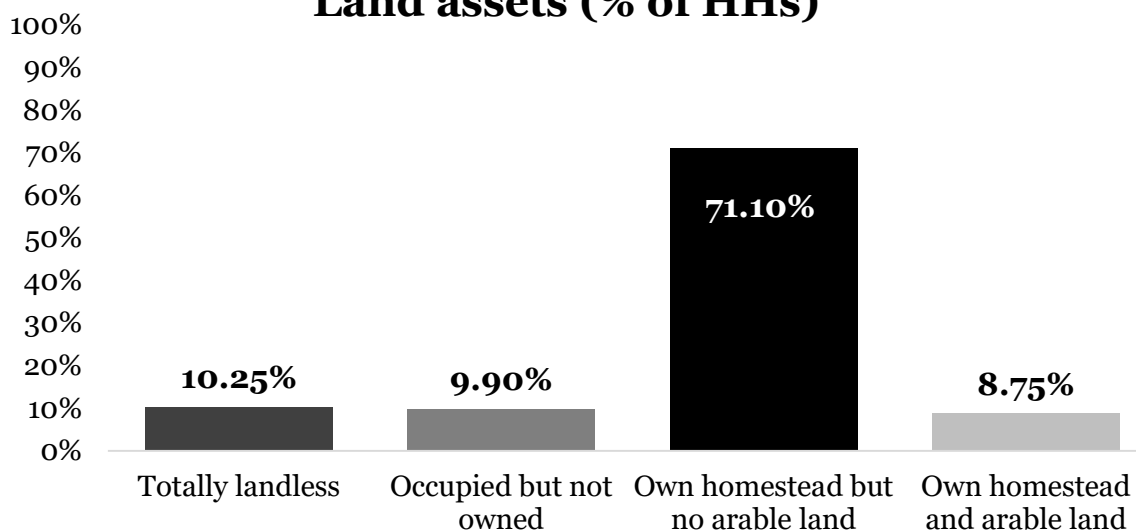
Land and Non-land Assets

Land ownership: Around 10.25% of the Rishi families are totally landless. More than half of the Rishi families (53%) are completely landless in Dacope upazila. Significant percentage of Rishi families are also landless in Dighalia, Kalaroa and Assasuni upazilas. Around 9.90% Rishis families occupy land but do not own it. In Sarankhola upazila, all the Rishis do not own their homestead land. On the other hand, 97% Rishi families do not own homestead land in Terokhada upazila. Majority of the Rishi families (71.10%) own homestead but do not own any arable land. In Shyamnagar and Kotwali upazilas, around 90-91% Rishi families do not own any arable land. On average, 8.75% of the Rishi families own both homestead and arable land.

Table 23: Land assets (% of HHs)

Upazilas	Land status			
	Totally landless	Occupied but not owned	Own homestead but no arable land	Own homestead and arable land
Kaliganj	1.5	12	80	6.5
Satkhira Sadar	2.5	6.5	83.75	7.25
Assasuni	16.49	-	79.46	4.05
Kalaroa	21.78	-	75.47	2.75
Tala	15.16	1.5	64	19.34
Shyamnagar	9	-	91	-
Keshabpur	2.2	.1	85.7	12
Kotwali	3	-	90	7
Manirampur	1.5	.5	83.75	14.25
Bagherpara	3.33	-	83.67	13
Abhaynagar	5.71	-	61.8	32.49
Jhikargacha	2	-	81	17
Dumuria	1.67	13.67	71.33	13.33
Terokhada	3	97	-	-
Dacope	53	19	26.67	1.33
Dighalia	39	29	32	-
Paikgachha	2.67	37.67	54.67	5
Daulatpur	9	29	62	-
Bagerhat Sadar	-	12.5	87.5	-
Sarankhola	-	100	-	-
Total	10.25	9.90	71.10	8.75

Land assets (% of HHs)



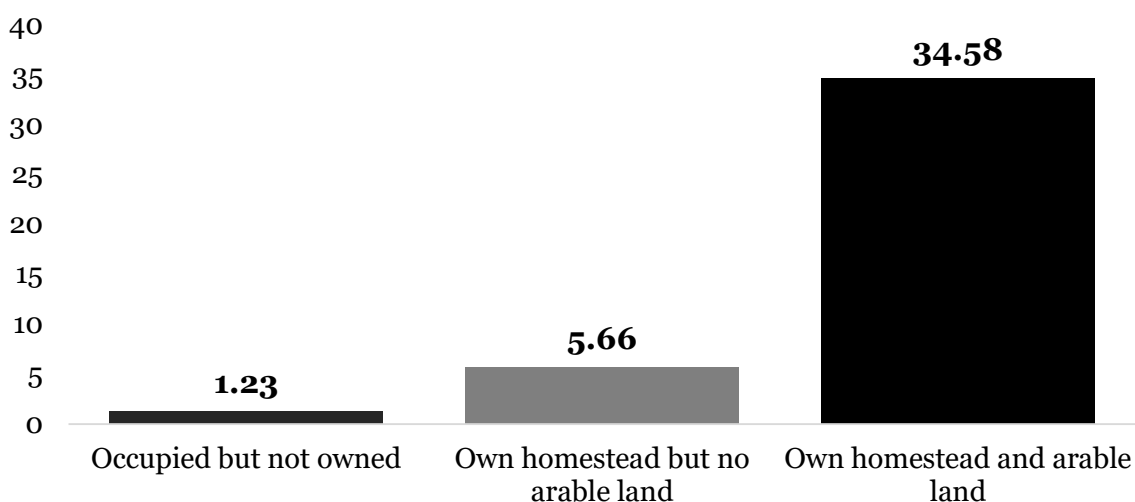
Average land size of those who own occupy land but do own their homestead is 1.23 decimal on average. On the other hand, Rishi families who own homestead but no arable land is 5.66 decimal. The land size of Rishi families who own both homestead and arable land is 34.58 decimal on average.

Table 24: Average land size (in decimal)

Upazilas	Land status		
	Occupied but not owned	Owns homestead but no arable land	Owns homestead and arable land
Kaliganj	7.5	8	25
Satkhira Sadar	1	5	22.5
Assasuni	-	5.5	23.75
Kalaroa	-	5.67	16.67
Tala	.75	4.5	58.75
Shyamnagar	-	5	-
Keshabpur	.3	8.1	37.5
Kotwali	-	3	30
Manirampur	2	8.25	35
Bagherpara	-	5	45
Abhaynagar	-	5	30
Jhikargacha	-	8	50
Dumuria	2.33	3	63.33

Terokhada	2	-	-
Dacope	1	8.33	33.33
Dighalia	2	2	-
Paikgachha	4.67	3	86
Daulatpur	2	2	-
Bagerhat Sadar	2	3	-
Sarankhola	2	-	-
Total	1.23	5.66	34.58

Average land size (in decimal)



Ownership of non-land assets: A significant portion of the Rishi families own livestock. On average, 70.69% of the Rishi families own poultry or birds and around 40% of them own cows. On the other hand, 34.38% of them own buffalo and 43.20% Rishi families own goat.

Around 11% of the Rishi families have small business and a small portion of the Rishi families have their own shop (2.80%). On the other hand, 9.7% Rishi families own fishing net.

On average, 86.33% of the Rishi families own a mobile phone and 56.12% families own a television. Among other electronics, they own refrigerator (3.45%), radio (35%) and computer or laptop (14.86%). Majority of the Rishi families own a mobile and in some upazilas all of the families own mobile phones.

Boats are the most common mode of transportation owned by the Rishis (34.48%). On average, 28.26% Rishi families own bicycles and 16.84% families own a rickshaw or van. Around 2.44% own motorcycles.

On average, 27.25% of the Rishi families own shoe polishing equipment as one of the traditional occupations of the Rishi community is sewing or polishing shoes.

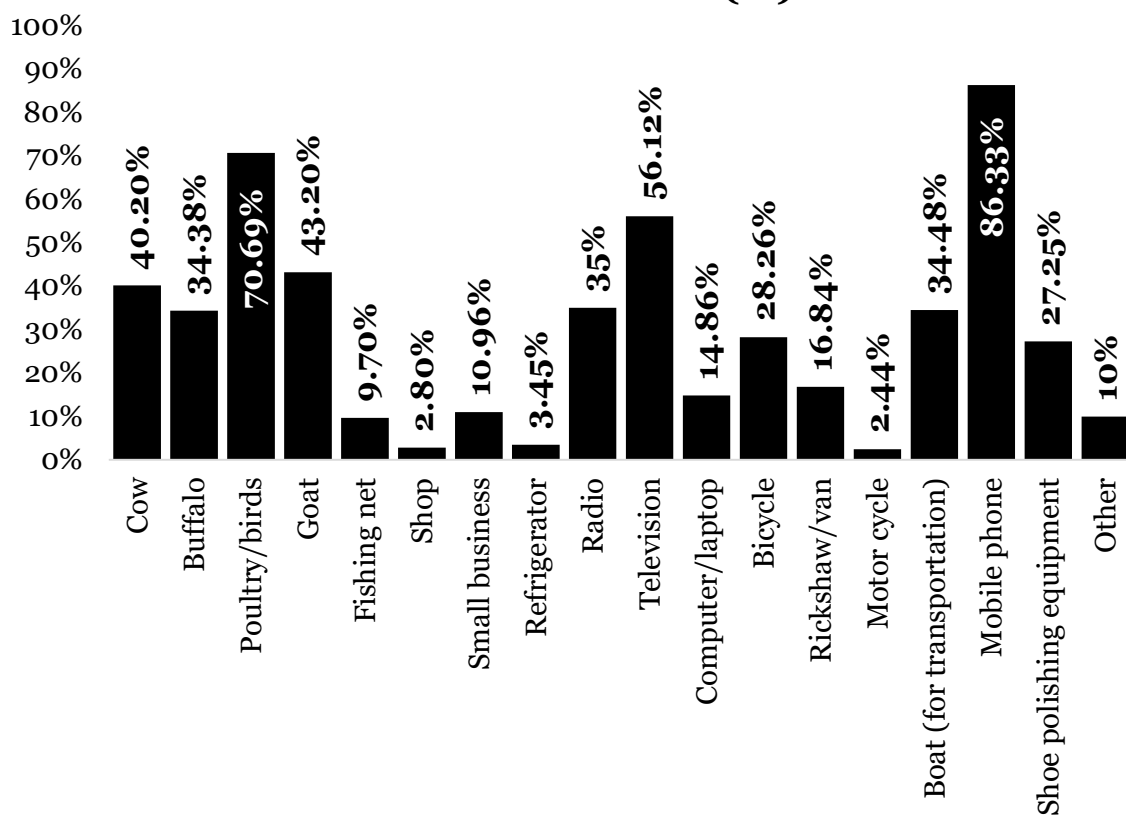
Table 25: Non-land assets

Non-land assets	% of HHs
Cow	40.20
Buffalo	34.38
Poultry/Birds	70.69
Goat	43.20
Fishing net	9.70
Shop	2.80
Small business	10.96
Refrigerator	3.45
Radio	35.00
Television	56.12
Computer/Laptop	14.86
Bicycle	28.26
Rickshaw/van	16.84
Motor cycle	2.44
Boat (for transportation)	34.48
Mobile phone	86.33
Shoe polishing equipment	27.25
Other	10.00

Table 26: Usage of mobile phones

Upazilas	% of HHs
Kaliganj	98.5
Satkhira Sadar	100
Assasuni	90.90
Kalaroa	68.19
Tala	89
Shyamnagar	86.36
Keshabpur	86.44
Kotwali	100
Manirampur	100
Bagherpara	85
Abhaynagar	81
Jhikargacha	100
Dumuria	84.33
Terokhada	93
Dacope	79.5
Dighalia	32
Paikgachha	88.67
Daulatpur	59
Bagerhat Sadar	100
Sarankhola	50
Total	86.33

Non-land assets (%)



Access to Services

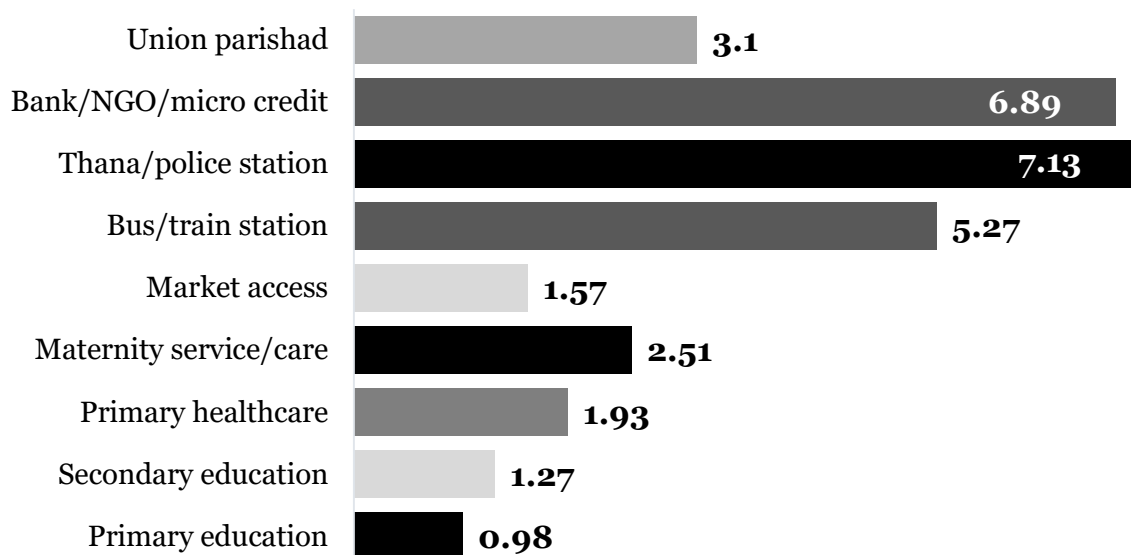
Distance to nearest facilities: Distance to different facilities from the Rishi households were taken into account to determine the accessibility of specific services. It was found that the facility nearest to the Rishi paras were primary school and the furthest were police stations. On average, primary schools are 0.98 kilometers away from the Rishi paras and in the case of secondary schools, the average distance is 1.27 kilometers. On average, the distance between police stations and Rishis paras is around 7.13 kilometers. In Paikgacha and Dacope, police stations are 16.67 km and 11.67 km away from the Rishi villages on average.

Bus or train stations are far away from the Rishi villages as well, which is usually 5.27 kilometers on average. In the same two upazilas mentioned above, bus and train stations are 11.67 km and 16.67 km away respectively. On the other hand, banks or NGOs are on average 6.89 kilometers away. Average distance to the primary and maternity healthcare services is 1.93 km and 2.51 km from the Rishi villages. Markets are on average 1.57 kilometers away from the Rishi villages. Distance between Rishi villages and union parishad is usually 3.10 kilometers.

Table 27: Distance of the nearest facilities (km)

Facility	Average distance
Primary education	0.98
Secondary education	1.27
Primary healthcare	1.93
Maternity service/care	2.51
Market access	1.57
Bus/train station	5.27
Thana/police station	7.13
Bank/NGO/micro credit	6.89
Union parishad	3.10

Distance to nearest facilities (km)

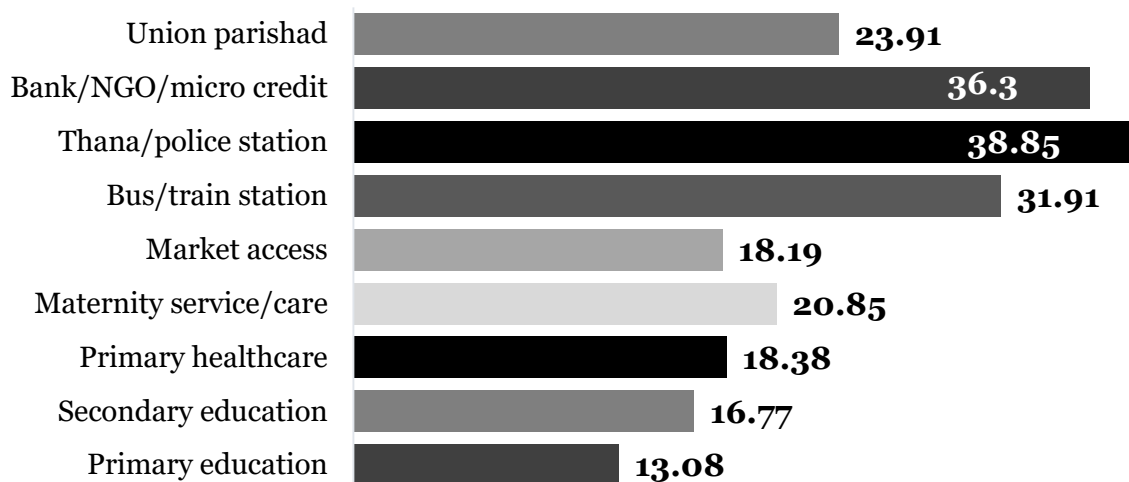


As mentioned before, among all the facilities primary schools are closest to the Rishi villages. It takes Rishi students 13.08 minutes on average to reach primary schools. Secondary schools, primary healthcare and maternity healthcare services are on average 16 to 21 minutes away from the Rishi villages. On the other hand, bus and train stations take 31.91 minutes to reach whereas banks or NGOs are 36.30 minutes away on average. In comparison, markets are union parishad are closer to the Rishi villages, which are 18.19 and 36.30 minutes away respectively.

Table 28: Average time to reach (minute)

Facility	Average time
Primary education	13.08
Secondary education	16.77
Primary healthcare	18.38
Maternity service/care	20.85
Market access	18.19
Bus/train station	31.91
Thana/police station	38.85
Bank/NGO/micro credit	36.30
Union parishad	23.91

Average time to reach nearest facilities (minute)

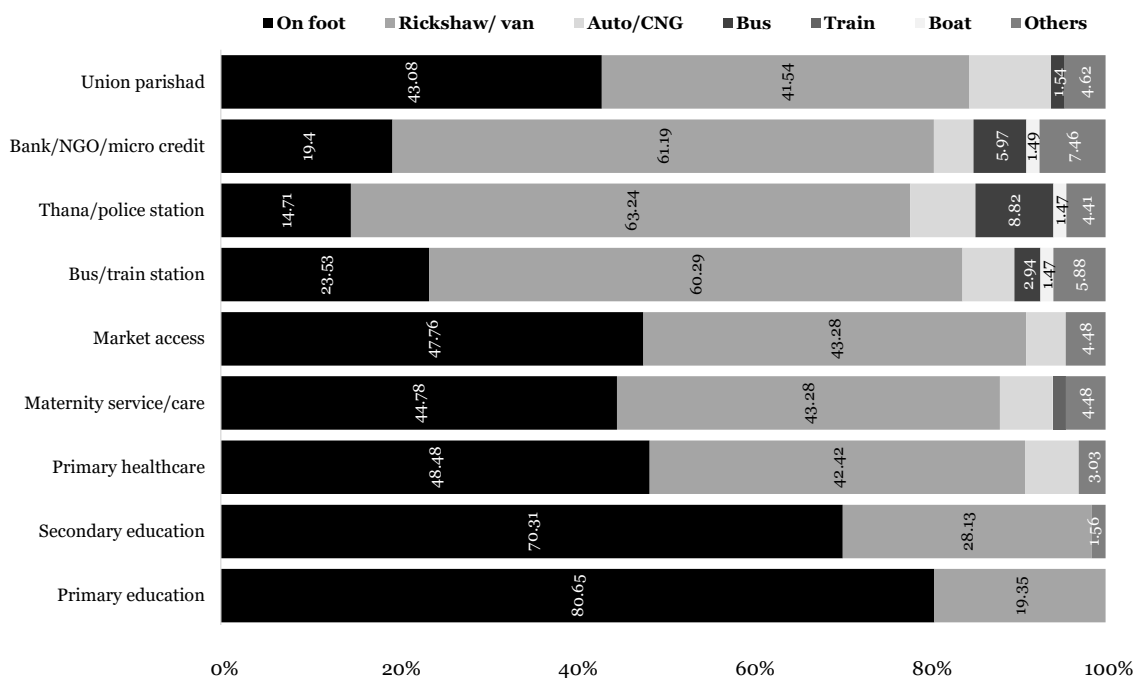


The Rishis mainly travel by rickshaw/van or they walk to reach different facilities and institutions. On average, 45.12% of the Rishi community commute by rickshaw or van whereas 43.10% of the community walk to access the different services and facilities mentioned before. Only 4.88% of the community travel by auto/CNG. On average, 2.19% of the community take bus to reach police stations, bank/NGO offices, union parishad and bus/train stations, which are situated far away from their villages. A small percentage of the community (1.49%) commute by train to reach maternity services. On the other hand, 0.51% of the community travel by boat to reach bus/train station, police station and union parishad office.

Table 29: Mode of communication to access service

Name of service	Mode of communication						
	On foot	Rickshaw/ van	Auto/ CNG	Bus	Train	Boat	Others
Primary education	80.65	19.35	-	-	-	-	-
Secondary education	70.31	28.13	-	-	-	-	1.56
Primary healthcare	48.48	42.42	6.06	-	-	-	3.03
Maternity service/care	44.78	43.28	5.97	-	1.49	-	4.48
Market access	47.76	43.28	4.48	-	-	-	4.48
Bus/train station	23.53	60.29	5.88	2.94	-	1.47	5.88
Thana/police station	14.71	63.24	7.35	8.82	-	1.47	4.41
Bank/NGO/micro credit	19.40	61.19	4.48	5.97	-	1.49	7.46
Union parishad	43.08	41.54	9.23	1.54	-	-	4.62
Total	43.10	45.12	4.88	2.19	0.17	0.51	4.04

Mode of communication to access services



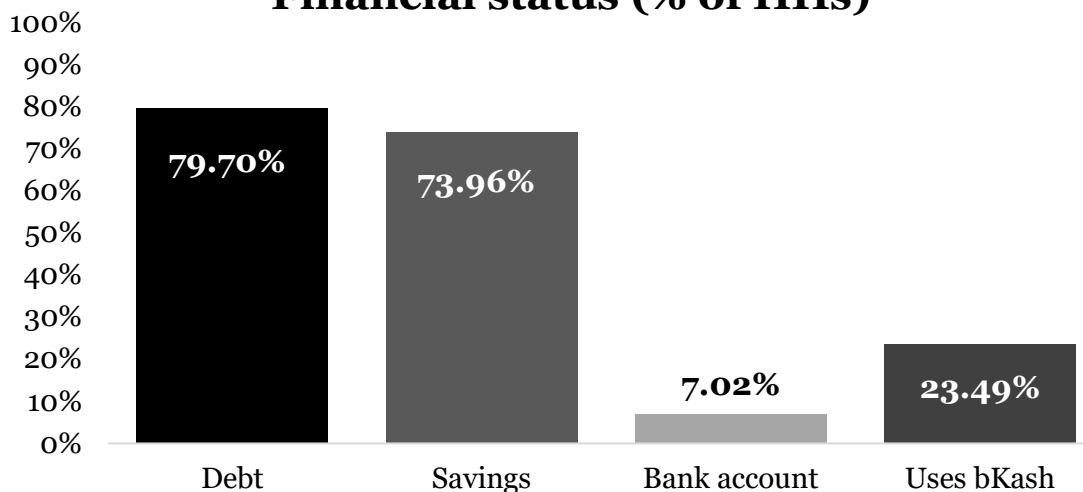
Economic Condition

As mentioned before, monthly average expenditure of a Rishi family is nearly double than their income. Majority of the Rishi families are either in debt or depend on their savings or both. On average, nearly 80% of the Rishi families are in debt and 74% of the families have savings. However, the average savings of a Rishi family is little in amount. All of the Rishi families in Sarankhola and Terokhada upazilas are in debt. Around 7% of the Rishi families have bank accounts and 23.49% of the families use mobile banking, mainly bKash. In Bagerhat Sadar and Sarankhola upazilas, no Rishi family has a bank account.

Table 30: Financial status

Types	% of HHs
Debt	79.70
Savings	73.96
Bank account	7.02
Uses bKash (mobile banking)	23.49

Financial status (% of HHs)

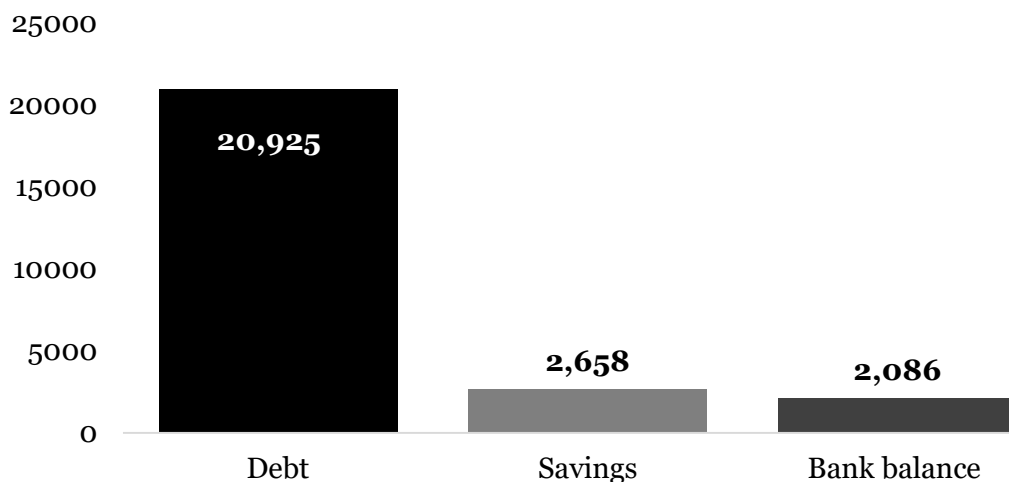


Even though nearly 74% of the Rishi families have savings, the average savings is only Taka 2,658. On the other hand, the average debt that a Rishi family has to pay back is Taka 20,925, which is significantly higher than their monthly income or savings. Those who have bank accounts also have little money in their accounts. On average, their bank balance is Taka 2,086.

Table 31: Average amount of debt, savings and bank account

Types	Taka
Debt	20,925
Savings	2,658
Bank balance	2,086

Average debt, savings and bank balance (Taka)



Access to Social Safety Net Programmes

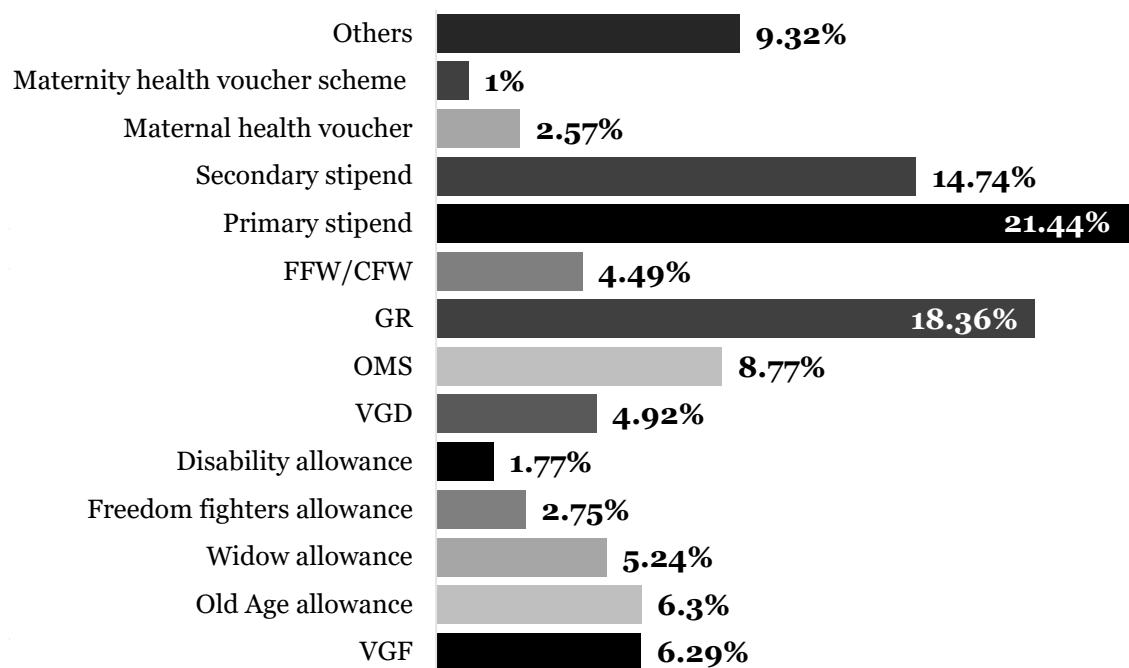
A significant percentage of the Rishi families receive primary and secondary stipends. On average, students of 21.44% Rishi families receive primary stipend and 14.74% families receive secondary stipend. In Satkhira Sadar, 57% and 47% of the Rishi families receive primary stipends and secondary stipends respectively. On average, 18.36% of the Rishi families receive Gratuitous Relief (GR) and 8.77% receive Open Market Sales (OMS). GR provides emergency assistance to people affected by disasters and other crisis situations in form of kind (food grains, tin/corrugated iron sheets, blankets, winter clothing etc.) or cash. On the other hand, 6.30% of the Rishi families receive Old Age Allowance and almost same percentage of families are included in the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) program.

On average, 4.49% Rishi families receive Food for Work (FFW) or Cash for Work (CFW) and 4.92% Rishi families are under Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program. Only 1.77% families receive disability allowance. On average, 2.75% Rishi families receive freedom fighters allowance. Only 2% Rishi families in Paikgacha upazila are under maternity health voucher scheme.

Table 32: Access to social safety net programmes (SSNPs)

SSNPs	% of HHs
VGF	6.29
Old age allowance	6.30
Widow allowance	5.24
Freedom fighters allowance	2.75
Disability allowance	1.77
VGD	4.92
OMS	8.77
GR	18.36
FFW/CFW	4.49
Primary stipend	21.44
Secondary stipend	14.74
Maternal health voucher	2.57
Maternity health voucher Scheme	1.00
Others	9.32

Access to social safety net programmes (% of HHs)



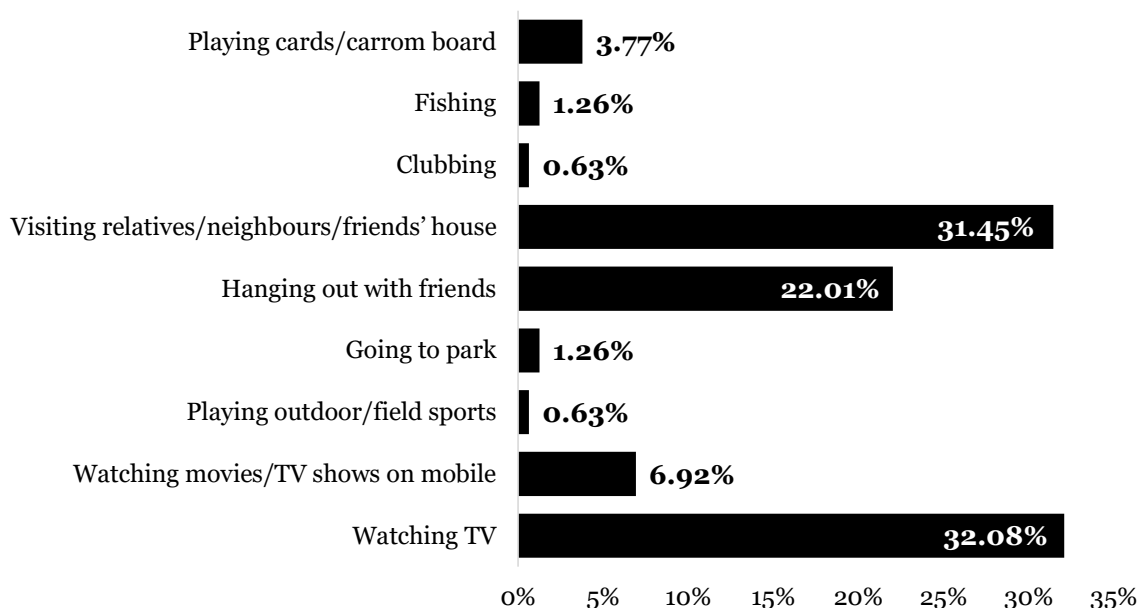
Recreation

The common recreational activities of the Rishi families were found to be watching TV, visiting relative, neighbor or friend's house or hanging out with friends. Around 32% of the Rishi families watch TV. On the other hand, 53.46% of the Rishi families visit their relative, neighbor or friend's house or hang out with their families. Only playing outdoor games is common in only 0.63% of the Rishi families and same percentage of families go to the local club to spend their leisure time. Around 1.26% of the families do recreational fishing as well.

Table 33: Recreation

Types of recreation	% of HHs
Watching TV	32.08
Watching movies/TV shows on mobile	6.92
Playing outdoor/field sports	0.63
Going to park	1.26
Hanging out with friends	22.01
Visiting relatives/neighbours/friends' house	31.45
Clubbing	0.63
Fishing	1.26
Playing cards/carrom board	3.77
Total	100

Types of recreation (% of HHs)



Social Capital, Changes and Aspirations

Rishi culture

Majority of the Rishis under the study responded that they are widely known as Rishis but sometimes they are also referred as Das or Muchi. Around 70% of the community clusters are known as Rishi. On the other hand, other people refer to them as Das and Muchi in 17% and 13% of the clusters respectively. Some people also call them 'Christians'. It should be noted that 9.98% of the Rishi community under the study were found to be Christians. However, majority of the community (89.50%) are followers of Hinduism. Less than one percentage are Buddhist and no one from the community are Muslim.

The two main *pujas* celebrated by the majority Rishis who are Hindus are *Kali Puja* and *Durga Puja*. They also celebrate a religious function titled *namjoggo*. Some of the other less-known Hindu religious ceremonies celebrated by the Rishis are *Gachtomar Puja*, *Chorok Puja*, *Bhashan Puja*, *Bashanti Puja*, *Dhormodel/Del Puja*, *Kartik Puja*, *Bashan Puja*, *Pahela Boishakh*, *Shonir Puja*, *Poush Sankantri*, *Shouro Puja*, *Harichand Thakur Puja*, *Mansa Puja*, *Christmas*, *Saraswati Puja*, *Sitala Puja*, *Janmastami*, *Lakshmi Puja*, and *Neel Puja*. The Rishis have several *gotro* or clans in their community including *kashyop*, *mohessho*, *boro bhaage*, *choto bhaage* and *thaakurer gotro*.

According to the Rishis under the study, making handicraft, bamboo or cane products and playing musical instruments are their most common special skills. Some of the other special skills of the community are castrating domestic animals, sewing shoes and cutting hair.

Majority of the Rishis speak Bangla. However, 21.74% of the community clusters also speak their traditional language, which is known as *thar* language. *Thar* or *thare* is a corruption of Bangla, in which Bangla words and sounds are used with a different meaning and often combined with a 'sign language' (Zene 2002:18).

'A Religious Solution' Christian and Muslim Rishis in Bangladesh

Conversion to other religions has been presented as a solution to untouchability on different occasions throughout history. However, it did not improve the status of low caste Hindus in Bangladesh, which is also true for low caste Muslims in the country. Caste mentality has also penetrated the Muslim society in Bangladesh, which led to a few Muslim low caste communities such as Behara (palanquin bearers) and Dai (oil pressers). The Behara and

Dai are former untouchables who converted to Islam yet treated as lower castes by other members of their Muslim community in Bangladesh.

Behara were a Muslim Rishi community in Chuknagar-Tala area who converted to Islam to improve their low caste status. However, even after the conversion, they could not inter-dine or inter-marry with other Muslims and often were not permitted to enter the mosques (Zene 2002:68). On the other hand, the Bede community are also followers of Islam yet considered as second class Muslims by the greater Muslim society in Bangladesh.

A small portion of the Rishi community in Bangladesh have converted to Christianity. The Catholic Church of Bangladesh includes three types of people: The oldest converts from Dhaka and Chattogram, people from the ethnic minority communities and Christian converts from untouchable or low caste Hindu communities. The Rishi community is a significant part of the third category. The Jesuit missionaries first made contact with the Rishis in Satkhira in 1915. In Khulna, the oldest Christian parish was established in Shimulia in Jashore district. Other parishes in Khulna were established in Satkhira and Borodol. It should be noted that the highest concentration of Rishis can be found in Khulna.

Initially, the Rishis were not very welcoming towards the missionaries. However, at that time some famous professional criminals from the community in Borodol area were looting boats coming from Calcutta. On top of that, Rishis were officially classified as “criminal tribes” in a census organized by the English in 1921. In 1935, some of them were sent to prison, which created scopes for the influential Muslim groups in Borodol to evict the Rishi villages. The Rishis went to the Jesuit missionaries seeking help and protection and agreed to convert to Christianity. Immediately their problems were solved as all authority and power belonged to the white men before the Partition of India.

The missionaries in Khulna also provided education and basic skills needed for different trades and professions to the converts, which eventually set them apart from the rest of the Rishi community in a positive way. Even today, Christian Rishis from Satkhira and Borol have higher level of education and social status than their Hindu counterparts. However, the parishes also had strict demands from the new converts restricting marriage, celebrations of Hindu festivals and other social and religious activities with the Hindus from nearby Rishi villages. Eventually, they separated themselves from the Hindu Rishis and claimed to be superior to them because of their new identity.

However, their expectation that the ‘Muchi’ label will be replaced by a prestigious one ‘Christian’ did not come to fruition. Instead the term ‘Christian’ became synonymous with the word ‘Muchi’ in Satkhira and Borodol. The converted Rishis were often mocked for changing their identity for economic and other benefits as no other community in the area

had shown interest in Christianity.

On the other hand, there were some attempts by the missionaries in the 70s to convert 40 million Harijan (an occupational Hindu community also considered as ‘untouchables’) in North India, which were not eventually accepted by the greater society. One argument against the attempts relied on the observation by Mahatma Gandhi that Harijans would willingly change name and uniform but they would not become devoted followers of the Christ. Many argued that if the Church wants to take up the issue of human rights of the Harijans then affiliation with political groups that manipulate the Harijans would benefit the community more instead of religious conversion.

Overall, socio-economic factors prevail over religious ones in terms of the issue of untouchability and occupational slavery. Low status occupational groups and low caste communities like Rishis required social integration rather than religious solutions. Otherwise, untouchable converts simply became yet another low caste.

Excerpts from Luigi Paggi (1990) and Cosimo Zene (2002).

Community Capacities and Political Participation

The Rishis have identified their different capacities as a community under the study. According to 41.33% of the community, the Rishis are experts in work related to constructing or renovating temples including painting the buildings of religious institutions and filling up temples fields. In 17.33% of the community clusters, the Rishis established a village organization or an organization of their own in addition to becoming a member in local clubs. However, a small percentage of the community has registered their organizations. On the other hand, 10.67% of the community clusters are involved in repairing streets, building dams or *ghat* (a series of steps leading down to a body of water). They also identified their unity and celebrating religious programs as a community capacity. A small percentage of them has also made some arrangements to either attain *khas* land, built a cremation ground and set up deep tube wells.

The Rishis have used their capacities to carry out different activities for the development of their community and villages. For example, 65.33% of the community clusters has contributed in collecting donations to build or renovate temples and even set up public deep tube wells. Around 16% of the community clusters have invested in different income-generating activities by saving up collectively and increasing their savings. Some of them have also volunteered for development of their village or to build a dam. They have also become united to increase the security of their community, demand their rights, perform

religious activities, demand *khas* land for their temples and cremation ground and bring water supply machine from upazila (10.67%).

They have also motivated their young generation to do social development work and Rishi women became more active to demand their rights. Involvement of more people in business has ensured some economic success. In some cases, they even unified to file complaints to the local governments. However, the percentage of Rishis involved in these activities is still very small (less than 5%).

More than half of the community clusters (55.22%) have Rishi voters and 13.43% of the clusters have Rishi members who they competed in local government elections. Some of them have competed for the school management committees (7.46%). Some of them are member of the market committee and also politically active. Some of the Rishis are members of citizen forum/organization, Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Unity Council, temple committee, health committee and school committee.

They cast vote in local and national level elections in 61.19% of the community clusters. Some of them were selected as executive members of the committees in 14.93% of the community clusters. A few Rishis women are directly participating in politics by becoming union-level presidents of Bangladesh Awami League. A few of the Rishis are in a position to give input in important political decisions. Some of them even led protests for retrieving *khas* land.

Recent Changes in the Community

For this study, several dimensions were considered in order to identify the recent changes that occurred in the Rishi community including occupation, education, migration, social status, communication and title change. The occupations of the Rishis have become more diversified than before in 71.7% of the community. In majority of the community (92.5%) education rate has increased. Half of the community stated that some of them have migrated to India and some migrated to Dhaka or other cities of the country from 30% of the community.

Around 74.5% of the community stated that their social status has improved because of better communication. It is because communication has increased between different communities, which led to the willingness to be more cordial to other communities. In 89.69% of the Rishi community clusters, road development has improved their communication. Another major change is changing their titles or last names. All of the community clusters stated that they have changed their surnames to Das, Gain, Sarker, Mondol or Biswas.

Majority of the changes in the Rishi community occurred in 2000 (15%), 2008 (13%) and 2010 (20%). Overall, 36.33% of the community stated that social respect for Rishis has increased as other people now socialize with them and do not call them names or refer to them

as ‘Rishis’ in a disrespectful manner. However, the respondents of two community clusters stated that they are asked whether they are Muchi Das or higher caste Das.

The respondents also identified the reasons behind positive changes, which are increased social respect, increased education rate, increased income, improved roads and communication, decreased commute time, scope to reveal Rishi identity, awareness of other people, etc. In two of the community clusters, the Rishis identified access to restaurants as a reason behind positive change, which they did not have before.

Table 34: Nature of changes (% of community)

Dimensions	Nature of change	Type of change >20% Major change <20% Minor change
Occupation	No change	Minor (18.9%)
	Diversification of occupation	Major (71.7%)
	Awareness increased	Minor (1.9%)
	Participation in agriculture	Minor (3.8%)
	New river transportation Became day laborer	Minor (1.9%) Minor (1.9%)
Education	Awareness increased	Minor (1.9%)
	Participation in social work	Minor (3.8%)
	Education rate increased	Major (92.5%)
	Became day laborer	Minor (1.9%)
Migration	Migrated to India	Major (50%)
	Migrated to Dhaka or other cities	Major (30%)
	Income increased	Major (20%)
Social Status	No change	Minor (4.3%)
	Participation in social work	Minor (10.7%)
	Communication increased	Major (74.5%)
	Discrimination decreased	Minor (10.7%)
Communication	Participation in agriculture	Minor (1.9%)
	Road development	Major (82.7%)
	New river transportation	Minor (7.7%)
	Communication worsened	Minor (5.8%)
	Van/Korimon/Nosimon	Minor (1.9%)
Title change	Title changed to Das/Gain/Sarker/ Mondol/Biswas	Major (100%)

Problem Analysis

Drinking water and sanitation problems: A major problem for the Rishi community is access to drinking water. In the study, 21.66% of the community clusters identified lack of drinking water as their main problem. Around 62% of them face this problem because they have no access to deep tube wells. Other main reasons behind this problem are arsenic in water from tube wells, salinity, negligence of local government and poverty. On the other hand, the main reasons behind the sanitation-related problems of the community are mainly lack of awareness and saline water.

Bad roads and floods: The community face problems while commuting because the roads in their areas are muddy or get drowned during rainy seasons. Another reason behind this problem is establishment of unplanned dams and dams without proper water drainage system. Negligence of the local government and mainstream society make the problem worse for them. Around 12% of the Rishi clusters stated that they face problems in commuting due to bad roads in their vicinity. On the other hand, building unplanned dams and establishment of dams without proper drainage system are the reasons behind Rishi *paras* getting flooded during monsoon.

Landlessness: As mentioned before, 10.25% of the Rishi families are completely landless and around 10% occupies land but does not own it. Around 71.10% of the families own homestead but has no arable land. They identified their identity and traditional occupations, poverty and no ownership of property as the main reasons behind this problem.

No temple or church: Majority of the community stated that they cannot build temples or churches because they do not have the money to construct their respective religious prayer houses. The other reasons behind this problem are negligence of the local government and the society ignoring their problems.

Unemployment or seasonal unemployment: Around 18.5% of the Rishi clusters under the study identified unemployment as a major problem for their community. Majority of the Rishi community are unemployed or seasonally unemployed because of lack of better job opportunities. They face unemployment for lack of better job opportunities and not getting a job even after having the qualifications. The other reasons behind their unemployment are poverty and their identity. Unemployment has been mentioned as the reason behind other problems in 19.1% of the community clusters.

Poverty: Unemployment and poverty are a never-ending vicious cycle for the Rishi community. The respondents identified lack of better and new job opportunities for the Rishis as the reason behind their poverty. Negligence of the society also contributes to

their poor economic condition. Poverty has been mentioned as the reason behind other problems in 15.3% of the community clusters.

No cremation ground: Rishis stated that they do not have separate cremation grounds because of they do not own any land other than their homestead. The other main reason behind this problem is negligence of the society regarding this issue.

Untouchability: The Rishis are labelled as the ‘untouchables’ in many districts of the country. People do not let them enter the common temple or use the big ponds. In some schools, the teachers make the Rishi children sit at the back of the class. Incidents have been reported where the teachers even call them names and humiliated the little children because of their identity. In some areas of Khulna, Rishis are not allowed to enter tea stalls or restaurants because otherwise local customers will leave. They cannot sit with others to eat and they are served food in separate plates and glasses in restaurants and social programs. In some restaurants, their glasses and tea cups are marked so that drinks are not served in those glasses to other customers by mistake.

The main reasons behind the untouchability of the Rishis is their lower caste or *muchi* label, their identity and occupation and negligence of majority people. The Rishis fall even below the lowest caste in traditional Hinduism. Their traditional occupation of making and sewing shoes and skinning animals are considered impure and dirty. They are socially excluded because of their identity and traditional occupations. The respondents mentioned untouchability as a major problem in 14 Rishi clusters under the study.

Child marriage: The respondents stated that child marriage is a major problem in 5 of the community clusters under the study and they stated that the major reason behind it is lack of awareness. The other reasons behind this problem are lack of employment and negligence of the society.

Lack of security: The main reasons behind lack of security of the Rishi community are lack of better employment opportunities, negligence of the society, lower caste or *muchi* status, their identity and traditional occupations and harassment of Rishi women by local influential people.

Loans: As mentioned before, nearly half of the Rishi families (42.70%) have to take loans in order to meet their daily needs. They stated that the only reason behind Rishis being dependent on loans is poverty.

Cobbler identity: Around 7.42% of the Rishi families still earn a living by sewing or polishing shoes and only 1.06% of the communities still make shoes, which were once their traditional occupations. The reason behind why they are still cobblers is because

their families had earned a living as cobblers as well.

Low education rate: Nearly half of the Rishi community (46.89%) have letters knowledge only and 11.80% of the community are completely illiterate. The respondents stated that the only reason behind low education rate is lack of awareness.

Habitation problems: Around 60% of the Rishi community clusters who faces housing problems stated that the reason is because they are poor and 20% stated that they face habitation-related problems due to harassment of the female members of the family. River erosion is another cause behind this problem.

Poor drainage system: Community clusters that face this problem stated that the reasons behind poor drainage system are lack of deep tube wells, bad roads, dams and garbage management in the Rishi villages.

Lack of government support: The respondents stated that negligence by the authorities is the reason behind lack of government support for the community.

Social discrimination: The identity of the Rishis and their traditional occupations are the main reasons behind social discrimination against them. They are discriminated against because of their lower caste or *muchi* status.

Access to ponds: No access to ponds and negligence by the society are main reasons behind the pond-related problems of the Rishis.

Possible solutions to the problems: The Rishi respondents suggested different solutions for the identified problems under the study. The main solutions suggested by the Rishis were strong initiatives by the local government and government departments of public health and engineering, initiatives to generate employment opportunities, change in social outlook, awareness programs, accountability of local government representatives, set up deep tube wells and implementation of existing laws.

Around 12.8% of the community clusters stated that the social outlook about the Rishis who are cobblers need to change and the upper caste Hindus need to change their perspectives. Majority of them (64.3%) stated that a change in social outlook will remove the 'untouchable' label of the Rishis. However, in order to bring that change the local governments also have to take some initiatives like carrying out awareness programs and ensure the laws which penalize social discrimination are implemented. However, the local government representatives need to be accountable to ensure they are carrying out their responsibilities properly.

The respondents stated that government and non-government initiative for employment of the Rishi at both local and national level is the only solution to the debt

crisis of the community. This initiative will also contribute to decrease unemployment and poverty of the community. If employed, they can also solve some of their other problems related to habitation, sanitation, cremation ground and security.

Awareness programs initiated by the local governments can eradicate child marriage and increase the rate of education in the Rishi community. Local government representatives need to be held accountable in order to improve the government support for the Rishi community. This can also contribute to solve other problems of the community including improving the roads, establishing separate temples, churches and cremation ground for the Rishis and protect their areas during flood.

Needs and Aspirations

Job opportunities: The main need of the Rishi community was found to be access to job opportunities. Half of the Rishi community in Tala, Abhaynagar, and Dighalia upazila need a solution for unemployment. On average, 27.67% of the community stated that access to job opportunities is their main demand, which can solve many of their other problems. They also stated that trainings need to be provided to Rishi women who make handicrafts.

Setting up deep tube wells: The second major need identified by the community was access to deep tube wells. Around 14.47% of the community under the study stated that deep tube wells need to be set up.

Land ownership: Around 11.32% of the community stated that the Rishis want access to land as majority of them do not arable land or land on which they can build temples, churches or cremation ground.

Women's handicraft skills: The women of the Rishi community stated that need training opportunities to develop their handicraft making skills. Around 28.69% of the Rishi families are either involved in making bamboo or cane products or making other kinds of handicrafts, which is one of their traditional occupations.

Building roads: Rishis in Kaliganj, Satkhira Sadar, Kalaroa, Tala, Shyamnagar, Dumuria and Paikgachha upazilas stated that the roads they use need to be repaired. On average, 7.55% of the community presented the demand for better roads.

Renovating temples and cremation grounds: Rishis of Satkhira Sadar, Assasuni, Keshabpur and Abhaynagar upazilas stated demanded initiatives to repair their temples. On the other hand, Rishis in Satkhira Sadar, Assasuni, Manirampur and Jhikargacha upazilas demanded space for cremation grounds.

Eradicating untouchability: Rishis from Keshabpur, Manirampur, Bagherpara, Jhikargacha, and Bagerhat Sadar upazilas demanded that untouchability should be eradicated and relevant laws should be implemented to decrease discrimination against them.

Other demands of the Rishis are access to education stipends, opportunity to participate in Special Area for Development (SAD) project, access to agricultural loans and loans without interests, fair election, receiving training, opportunity to form traditional musical bands, access to higher studies, separate allocation for Rishis in the national budget, setting up industries, building better drainage system, access to grants, ensure law and order, fixing water clogs and access to sanitary toilets.

Around 20.8% of the community stated that they need different trainings to develop their skills for better employment opportunities and 13.84% stated that effective public and private initiatives are necessary to meet their needs. Around 9.5% of the communities suggested that there needs to be quotas for the Rishis in employment and education. Establishing guchho gram, positive attention of locally elected members, access to khas land, anti-discrimination laws, scholarships for Dalits, agricultural loans, loans for entrepreneurs, opportunities to practice their culture, protection from law enforcers and awareness of parents are needed to fulfill their aspirations among others.

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Rishis of Khulna

The Rishis are among the largest ‘untouchable’ or ‘Dalit’ communities in the Hindu world. They are lower caste Hindus who were traditionally skimmers, leather workers and musicians. They are also known as Muchi, Chamar or Charmakar, which are considered derogatory terms for the community. Their traditional occupations of making and sewing shoes and skinning animals are considered impure and dirty. Even in this modern era, they are socially excluded because of their name and traditional way of living. In Bangladesh, the Rishis live in almost every district of Bangladesh with their highest concentration in Khulna division. The Rishis are still treated as ‘untouchables’ in some districts of the country.

This monograph presents findings of a study of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) on demographic and socio-economic conditions of the community, which is a valuable addition to the academic and public discourse on social exclusion of the Rishi in Bangladesh.



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