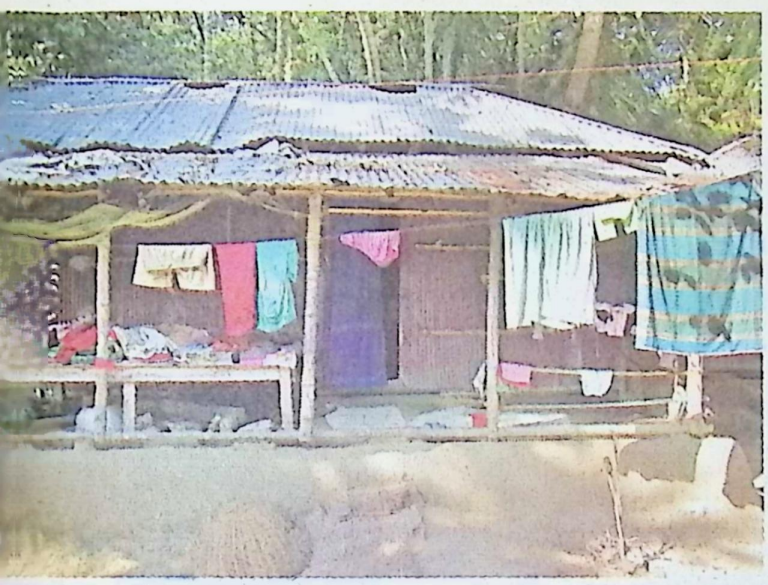
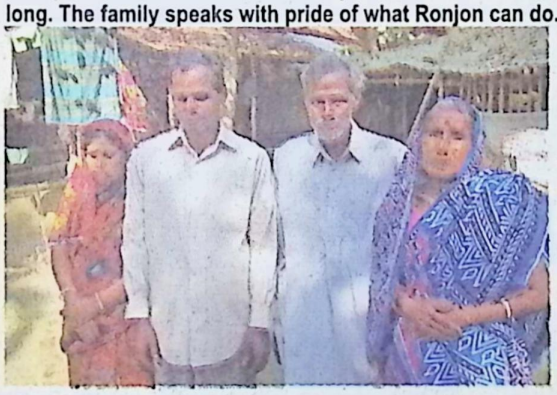


Acceptance seems to have taken up residence in the Biswas household long. The family speaks with pride of what Ronjon can do.



Ronjon Biswas with wife Shopno Biswas and his parents at their home in Rundia village, Narail.

Besides, there were two other sons and four daughters to think about.

As a child there were some in the village who did not wish to mix with Ronjon, but Rundia being as it is, the villagers began to accept him. "Sometimes people made problems," says Ronjon, "but mostly people loved me." I suppose villages are often like that.

It was when he was already twenty-five that Ronjon's life really changed – and we can thank one Amal Bose who had recently purchased a salo machine, a water pump for irrigation. Seeing Ronjon sitting in the yard without much enterprise to his day, Bose decided to take Ronjon as his helper. They went from field to field giving irrigation services to village farmers, and Ronjon had soon enough learnt how to start the machine.

From there his confidence grew. "He finds his way to the field himself," says his father, "He can negotiate the between-field aisles and it has never happened that he accidentally irrigated the wrong field." More remarkably, Ronjon learnt how to fix the machine – by sound.

I'm imagining I have Ronjon's abilities – that I would actually know a carrying shaft from a wheeze pipe. It might be something if I could remove the magnet cover, attach a ring to a piston or point to the cam pinion when asked. At the very least it would be a step forward if I could identify the head – the one on the machine as opposed to the human body. But like most of you I'd guess – with apologies to any mechanics reading this – these are not abilities which I have.

How does he do it? Is it only with sound? He must feel, smell and taste the white smoke rising that might indicate a broken piston or valve, so another mechanic told me. There'd be heat if the radiator was without water and the machine won't start at all if the nozzle goes or the liner is finished. In between all that should be the various sounds – an odd metallic clank and subtle degrees of the motor's chug-chug-chug to indicate ailments.

I could not say with any degree of certainty how he can take an engine completely apart and put it all together again. And I imagine the other villagers of Rundia don't know either. But they bring their malfunctioning irrigation pumps to Ronjon at the first sign of trouble and there can be little doubt it's a talking point, a source of pride not solely for his family but for the whole village – what their Ronjon can do.

"The day I learnt to fully repair a machine," says Ronjon, "was really memorable for me."

The irrigation pump repair season runs during the boro paddy season, from December to February. It's when Ronjon can make Tk 2,000 per month, while at his busiest with machine repairs. He receives a further Tk 300 per month in disability pension. It's not enough to cover family expenses Ronjon estimates at around Tk 5,000 per month – and outside of peak irrigation season his income still falls to around zero.

"My dream is to open a salo repair shop," says Ronjon.

It was nine years ago that he got married. "He can cut straw," says Shopno. "He can operate a mobile and return a missed call. He can climb a coconut palm and take a coconut." As if words were not enough his family encourage him and Ronjon starts up the palm tree.

When any villager attempts this feat it's impossible not to hold one's breath until they are safely down again – those palm trees are tall. But sure enough, a few minutes later and without incident, the taste of refreshing green coconut water has arrived to greet Rundia's afternoon.

PHOTOS: ANDREW EAGLE