



RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges in Ethnographic Field work: Anthropologist Experience and encounters the Problems during Research Field work

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ABSTRACT

This research article explains that how anthropologist faced the problems during the field work and how he/she solved the problems during the field work while applying anthropological knowledge which he has been taught to ethnographer during his academia because there are two dimensions in applied anthropology one is academia anthropological knowledge and other is research field work in which ethnographer/anthropologist resolve the problems when he or she encounters the problems during the field work. As anthropologist he/she has to be careful during the field work and has to also revisit his reflexivity which always reflects on the researcher point of view. There are many major challenges which are always faced by the anthropologist during the field work and anthropologist knows about all the cultural sensitivity, feelings, and rituals, religion of the community and which helps him/her to resolve the issues during the field work. This paper further has emphasized lived experiences of the field work by the anthropologist that how he/she faced the problems and solved the during the field work, furthermore this paper explores the experience, problems which are being encountered by the ethnographer during the field work.

Keywords: Ethnography, Fieldwork Challenges, Anthropologist, Participant Observation

Introduction

The field work is utmost import in the cultural anthropology and which makes this field distinguished to other disciplines of the social sciences. Cultural anthropology almost focus on the ethnographic qualitative research while other disciplines do not focus on qualitative research. Anthropology field work is backbone and foundation of cultural anthropology on which qualitative finding are achieved by the anthropologist.

The main role of anthropologist is to participate and have observation during the field work which is also part of research methodology and ethnographer has to adopt the long term residency during the field work. Cultural anthropologist who conducts the M.sc thesis, he/she has to remain at least six month in the field work. For M.Phil. Researcher has to conduct the at least one year and PhD scholar has to conduct at least two years of qualitative research into field.

Spradly (1980) argued that ethnography is the foundation of cultural anthropology, in which anthropologist learns the real sense of field work from ethnography field work. Ethnographer is taught anthropology by the community members, so anthropologist learns about the anthropology during the field work. Author further mentioned that participant teaches real field work and essence of anthropology to the researcher.

Furthermore, Franz Boas (1970), American anthropologist, he was known as a cultural hero emphasized on the native language for the ethnographic research study. He argued that ethnographer must learn or know native language of community where he/she

goes into the community for the research work. He further said that native, and vernacular language is significant for the ethnographer to understand real data of field work.

Moreover this articles has unearthed the lived and personal experience of the researcher which is faced by him/her during the research field work and author has also mentioned different field experiences that how anthropologist faced and resolved problems during the research field work.

Literature Review

Malinowski (1922) did his filed work in the Trobrind Island in Melanesian community on the Kula ring. He remained into the field long time and had the participant observation, did ethnography in this community, He observed during the field work that religion rituals plays an important role in social and economic perspective. He also argued that participant observation is important for the filed work and further argued that native language play significant role for the ethnographer in order to understand the communities' point of view.

Boas (1970) has huge field work and ethnographic studies. He also remained a curator at Columbia University and argued that anthropologist must learn the native language for the community, he further argued that ethnographer will have the justice with community members until he knows the native language, if ethnographer does not know the local language then he /she should learn before going into the field work. He also talked about the folk wisdom of the community that local people are adept in their folk wisdom, he narrative that "once I went to village Igloo, a man sketched map of long mountains, I was taken back to see his wisdom that how accurate map has been sketched by him.

Geertz (1973) gave the concept of the "thick description" which appries about the social and cultural interpretation for the cultural settings that there is the meaning behind those interpretations as the onion has different layer after peeling it, same as every culture has many meaning and symbols while interpreting which describes different way of meaning. The ethnographic field work also interprets the meanings, modes and motivations of the community during the file work in order to know the different data and findings of the community by the ethnographer during the field work.

Furthermore it is significant for the anthropologist to learn the native language as Boas and Malinowski both have argued that learning and knowing vernacular language is important for the good ethnographer in order to understand the communities and to know the communities point of view, if any anthropologist does not know the local Language of any community then it would be difficult for him to collect the data during the field work.

Material and Methodology

An ethnographic method has been used for collecting the data. Participant observation was the main research methods during the field work and observation was also being conducted during the research. For the qualitative data, in-depth interviews were taken from the communities. Researcher has its also own observation during the field work. Research faced many problems which he encounter during the field work and also shared his personal field experience, he has also highlighted his field work experience which he faced during the practical and academia research.

Results and Discussions

Aga Khan University Project

There is Pediatrician department at Aga Khan University Karachi which conducts many international projects of the outreach downtrodden area on the child & mother health in different areas of rural Sindh. The pediatrician department hires the many Anthropologists as Cultural Consultant and Social Scientist who prepare the Social and Cultural Health Models, Research Instruments, Behavior Change and Communication (BCC) models. They give the training to the Social Mobilizers, Doctors, Lady Health Workers (LHWs) and prepare the videos.

Hala Perinatal and Newborn Care project was being implemented by the department of pediatrics, Aga Khan University, Karachi, in collaboration with department of health Government of Sindh. The objective of the project was to improve the health of mothers and their newborn babies through community based interventions. One of the interventions was empowering women to improve their health and their newborn babies by themselves by providing them with targeted health education methodology named Women Support Group Methodology.

I was also hired as an Anthropologist in Aga Khan University team for the Hala Perinatal and New born Care Project in 2007. Apart from other staff this project had twenty female mobilizer who were trained by the anthropologist to disseminate the message in the community about mother and child health. There was video session for women since women, especially pregnant ones, were our primary target group, they were given health education sessions through various videos. These videos were culturally suitable and acceptable and sustain the norms and values of the target community. The language of the videos was local and easily understandable to the community so that the key messages of the project were well conveyed.

Besides pregnant women, their mothers-in-law and adult unmarried girls were also invited to watch the videos so that they too become aware of the health issues. Mothers-in-law were especially invited in order to sensitize them about pregnancy issues and care for the pregnant women. As it has been observed that women's issues are usually handled by the old women or mothers-in-law, the latter are told to take much care of their daughters-in-law and lessen their burden of work and provide the adequate diet to them during their pregnancy.

During the first visit to the village, the mobilizers asked the community to give them time for arranging video sessions. Our team reached the same community on the given time and showed them videos. Video sessions were the most interactive form of conveying the message. While video session is in progress, the mobilizer pauses the video at the key issues and verbally tells the people in detail what was being shown or discussed in the video. At the end of the video session begins the question-answer session in which people asked some questions and the mobilizers provided the answers.

If the village is big enough and not all the women can watch the video, the mobilizers arranged the video session in the next Mohalla of the same village, on the next day. Then after every month the team of mobilizers revisits the same village for follow up. If they feel that community needs another session they again ask them for time and day to arrange the video session.

LHW/female mobilizer would help organize these sessions. To organize such sessions you need to encourage pregnant women, their mothers in law and adolescent girls of your area to get together at health house or some appropriate venue where women of your area can come easily. The preferred place should be health house or household of member of community health committee. You must encourage women from all parts of the village/town.

Hala project had developed an educational video based on the potential barriers and harmful and positive care practices identified by a formative research conducted by the department of paediatrics & Child health. In this video we have used local characters using local terminology in the local Sindhi language. The messages were self-explanatory and you just have to be there in case there is a question from the participants. You must encourage participants to discuss the issues themselves and come up the ways of adopting the positive practices and quit negative and harmful practices being practices by themselves or in their neighborhood. The participant must be also encouraged to share the learning not only with male members of their households but also to women who have not attended the sessions. The session was interactive i.e. participants ask questions and discuss among themselves and share their experiences.

The goal of the support group was to provide a setting where women in similar situations can share their experiences. This sharing served to minimize feelings of isolation; offers a place to vent thoughts and feelings without being criticized or advised; may suggest alternative courses of action and may provide the beginning to a new social support system for the participants and come up with strategies to improve the health of pregnant women and newborns. The LHW/CHW/mobilizer-facilitated support groups are run quarterly in same community. On the whole women support group aims at mobilizing women at the community level will help to disseminate the messages, educate them about what type of preparations they need to make, how they can make them, who to contact to help prepare for the delivery, etc. Where available, LHWs will be the facilitators for these women support groups. In case of their non-availability, CHW will be trained to discharge this responsibility. The Community Mobilization used to work closely with the LHWs and CHWs to facilitate the women groups and empower women to make healthier choices for themselves and their newborns.

Major Issues Encountered During the Field Work Project

Our teams used to conduct regularly the female video sessions in which there were visual images of the breast feeding of mothers and messages regarding the breast feeding that how and in which position new born mothers have to adopt method to feed the breast to her first day of new born baby and in which position she has to put the nipples of her breast into the mouth of baby as new born baby can suck the nipple in easy way in order to get the mother's first milk which is very necessary for the immune system of child, protects from any disease, diarrhea etc.

One day Agha Khan University projects teams moved to village named Older Lal where majority of the inhabitants were religious. When Project's teams started to show the videos. They attacked on the teams and burnt the two field vehicles of the project. The large numbers of people were gathered. They argued that Agha Khani are transforming their religion to us and spreading the naked and sexual messages (*Fahashee paigham*) to our women as they could be motivated for sexual and bad activities which is against of our religion. They further said that they will not tolerate and allow any Agha Khani to work in our village. The Project teams tried to make them explain that we are likes of you Muslim and do not belong to Agha Khani community and work for your mother and child health.

The villagers said that we know well all of you and these kinds of organizations which hire the best mind and educated peoples. NGOs give you too much pay (rupees) for this task as you can make us agree for Agha Khani agenda. What so ever you will try to mobilize us, we will not accept your Agha Khani agenda. The Project team came back to office, made a report to head office Karachi.

All the anthropologists were called including me who were the part of Agha Khan university project team. They (anthropologist) gathered to sort out the major issues that how these religious communities member should be satisfied for the current projects. The

strategy was made that first of all *Mulha* of the village should be sensitized and their behavior should be changed regarding the ongoing project and these all key messages regarding the mother and child health should be disseminated by the *mulvies* on *juma khotab* (prayer) regarding the all orientation of the project then head of the village should be taken into the confidence and then head of religious men should be taken into confidence. All anthropologists team made consensus on this strategy in the meeting.

We came to know that villager also belong to Mulana Fazal Rehman group, this was informed to head office then Agha Khan University official directly approached to Maulana Fazal Rahman then he made them explain to villagers via cell phone that Aga Khan University has been working for your health of mother and child care and there is no any kind of harm or wrong message against the religion. I personally assure you, allow the Aga Khan University team to work in your village. After the message of Mulana Fazal Rehman then teams were allowed to work in the same village. After the message of Mulana the villagers apologized from the Aga Khan University teams and promised for the compensation of loss. The Aga Khan University Projects of Hala perinatal and new born care became successful with the passage of time and with the cooperation of the same villagers.

Research Field Work during the M.Sc Project

When I was student of M.Sc anthropology in 2003 at Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. I conducted my dissertation titled "An ethnographic study of the Cattle Decoration: Continuity & Change, A case study of Muhammad Khan Wassan Village District Umerkot". As a researcher I faced major issues during my research. As a researcher my caste became major problem for me and I was also confused myself what to do now?. I belong to Syed caste which is to be thought very prestigious and most respected caste in Sindh because of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him).

It was my first day of field visit at village in order to build rapport with the community. There was Chunwaro (*hut of Thar*) where all were sitting on the ground floor. I also sat with them. When I introduced myself that I am Syed then all stood up and kneel downed and once again met me and brought the cot (*Charpae*) stretched the neat and clean new quilt (*rely*) and new pillow (*Wehano*) for me and asked to sit on the cot. They further said that your caste is higher and prestigious than us you belong to the family of Hazarat Muhammad (peace be upon him) how can we let you sit with ourselves.

I emphasized them a lot that I can sit on the ground floor with you and we all are equal I am among you, like you so why have you brought a separate especial cot for me. They got angry with me and said to me that we can not be sinner. If you sit with us it will be great sin for us, we will be asked at the Day of Judgment that why we did not respect the (*Ahl baite*) Syed. We will be punished if we do not respect you. Especial Glass and Jag was also brought for me, again I asked them please give me water in same glass in which you drink the water but they refused.

They also asked me that why have you shaved your mustache this does not suit you being a Syed (*Ahal baite*) you should not do, to shave the moustaches is the work of Hindu, majority of Hindu shave the moustache. They further asked me that your caste is higher than from all other caste and it is our duty to respect you. We think as a worship to serve you and at the day of judgment you will help us and our sins will be forgiven due to (*Ahal baite*) Syed. I was listening them carefully and remained silence.

Their community member were poor. I wanted to come back Umerkot where I had stay but they forced at me that we will not allow you without the lunch. They said that this is our hospitality and we do not allow our guests without the serving of the meal. If we will not serve you then mishap would fall on us, when we will serve you then all the major problems will be solved. You are our prestigious guest and Allah has brought you here. I was

feeling shy and was taken back to see all things which were happening. I became very much upset that how can I refuse them for lunch then they served me with chicken, butter, lasi.

Due to my caste I faced many problems. I could not talk to them informally where ever I go. Many peoples used to gather there. I was not able to mingle with them. I could not have informal discussions with them. I became very much vexed about the data and my filed work that how can internalize with them and how can be informal with them.

I relied upon the good techniques of Rapport building which helped me a lot. I adopted the residency in the same village. With the passage of time I started to collect the data from them. I seemed to them as a part of their village member. After the passing good time with them I participated in their every daily activity such as marriage ceremony, death ceremony and on other events.

I mingled with them and collected a lot data. I remained three months with them, had good time with them, and learned a lot form the community members. When I was leaving the village after completing my field work whole peoples of the village were gathered, tears were in their eyes, one of them informant said everyone has to depart from this world in this way as you are leaving us. We will miss you a lot but please do visit to us after your completion of degree and getting job. We will look forward to see you again. Now you have become our family member and village fellow. We cannot forget you.

Important of Native Language

I want to mention here an interesting event which happened to me during my field work that there was boy who used to live near my community. The boy who was well versed in local *Marwari* and *Sindhi* language. The few of them my community member also speake *Marwari* language in Thar. I asked a boy that you know *Marwari* language very well, please give me further information about these people who speaks this language. I have heard that there are many proverbs in *Marwari* language, first of all get me write down in local *Marwari* language and then get me translated into *Sindhi* language as I can translate into English.

The boy started to tell me proverbs in *Marwari* native language. Boy said that he has told me all the proverbs in local language. I was happy that I wrote down all proverbs in native language and now only will write their translation into English. When another native came. I told him that the boy has told me all the local proverbs which are in *Malwari* language and I have written. The native asked me that read me out these proverbs which have been told by the boy. When I told the *Marwari* proverb which were in *Marwari* language.

Other informants started to laugh at me. I asked him that what is the reason, why you are laughing at me. I am telling you those *Marware* proverbs which were told by the boy. The other informants said that the boy has made you fool and got you write down Abuses in local *Marwarei* language in spite of the proverbs. I was taken back, really it could be so. I became very much careful for the native language and also started to learn the *Marwari* language. I also learnt a lot which helped me during my field work.

Lens of Literature Review

Literature review is back bone to conduct the good research because literature review makes clear research topic and it gives right direction for the research, helps a lot to clear the main concepts of the problem of the research. Literature review minimizes the subjectivity and leads researcher to the objectivity. When student can not find any relevant literature review for their concerned topic. They consume a lot of time behind the literature review due to the shortage of relevant books and journals.

I also felt a lot of troubles before going to the field for the literature review. I had lot struggle a lot to find out the literature for my concerned topic. Sometimes I used to be fed up that may I change my topic because I am not capable to find concerned literature review of my topic. When I go to Central library to search online access the books were available on line data but when I got to shelf to find out the book then always books were missing. I also called the staff of the library that this online access number but book is not available in the shelf, twice staff accompanied with me but he was also unable to find the book.

Staff man of the library said to me that book is available in the library but we do not know where it is being kept, sorry for the inconvenience of the book. When I went to find out online articles in the international journals in which central library has access with the support of higher education commission (HEC). The staff of the library said that you can not use your own computer here in library port. USB port is not allowed, if you find any kind of article then you can email to yourself after down loading. When I access to the online journals they demanded for the payment rupees.

Every international journal is not allowed to get free access of the article. The university has access to few social sciences journals as compared to natural science journals. I felt lot of difficulty to find the literature review for my concerned topic . I started to contact with my seniors they told me to go and search in others general library. I went to few general libraries and got few concerned literature review about my topic.

Identity Of The Researcher During Filed Work

When I visited for my field work at the locale for the Rapport building. I met with the many community members of the village, had long gossip and chit chat with them about the general matters apart from my field work. I came across many questions and their problems. There were many problems which were not resolved since long time. They discussed the matter of politics especially about the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). I had to listen them carefully because as anthropologist i had to give attention to their matters apart from my research topic. I was taken back to listen their matters. Villagers said that we give vote to local MNA and MPA but have not seen them for many years at village. They came to village at the time of voting and then nobody comes us to talk about the problems.

We do not have health facility since long time at village. We take patient Taulka hospital, there is no any kind of good facility. The doctors who are employed there asked to us that come to our private hospital, because there is good treatment and everything is available. There is not any equipment and medicine are available at govt: hospital. Come to our private hospital where everything is available.

Many mothers and infant children are died due to not having the basic facilities. We do not have basic primary school. How do our kids can get the education? There is no electricity facility at our village. There is shortage of water how can we cultivate our land without water. The land lord also stops our water. First of all they cultivate their land then in the last they give us water for the land when no any water remains in the canal for our land. The community members of the village further said that our kids are not getting education and we do not want that our kids became uneducated like us. We want to educate them.

The community members had a lot of expectations in me that I have come to their village, will solve their problems and they were also expecting from me that he belongs to any international NGOs who will give us bag of flour (*ata*), oil for cooking or any cash money.

I made them clear that I have come for the purpose of research. I am not from any NGO and have not come to solve your problems but I will document about your culture and

other activities. They said to me that why have you come there. We do not need you. You will not give us benefit. You have come for your own interest. You write about us then we will get rupees. They further asked me that you are telling a lie that you have come here for your study research. You have come for the earning rupees for NGOs.

I made them clear that I do not belong to any NGO. I am a student, have come for the purpose of study research. There was a lot of expectation of the community from me and it puzzled me a lot during my field work. I spoke all truth to the community. By the passage of time they realized that I am saying correctly that I have come for the purpose of research. It took me a time to convince them about my research and build a trust among the community. However, I succeeded to build trust among them. This was indeed a great challenge for me to restore their trust.

Conclusion

This research paper explores the field work experience of the ethnographer which he faced during the field work and the researcher has also shared his own personal M.Sc. MPhil and PhD experiences which were encountered during field work. The researcher has also shared his project experiences which he worked with international organizations such as Aga Khan University Karachi, Sindh. Outreach projects of the university were based on the community field work where the researcher has also worked in Aga Khan as an Anthropologist in the different projects for the community component for the mother and child health projects of the university. In-depth and lived experience is shared which unearthed the living experience for the anthropologist that how he countered the problems during the field and while facing the problems how he has solved those problems. Ethnography plays a significant role for the field work and collecting the first-hand information for the data during the field work. Ethnographic field work is also the foundation for the cultural anthropology in terms of the field work and for qualitative research.

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