

Exploring the 'Field' and 'Fieldwork' in
Social Science Research

Submitted as part of the internship project

By

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Anveshi for having given me this opportunity to pursue my internship. While I have learnt a lot from this one month, I have enjoyed the whole process as well thoroughly.

Srivatsan sir, thank you for being my mentor and for suggesting I work on this project. What I have learnt here will help me in my studies and also equip me as a future development practitioner and researcher.

I would like to thank the Senior fellows, the Short term fellows (2012-2013) and Mithun for their valuable time and for letting me in on their strategies and personal experiences. Had it not been for your kind cooperation, this project would not have materialized.

Arima ma'am, thank you for your support and inputs during this internship. It is this guidance of yours that helped me investigate more closely into different issues involved in research so that I could make full use of this opportunity of being able to interview such experienced researchers.

I would also like to thank the staff at Anveshi for welcoming me and it was this warmth that went a long way in me being able to learn and make the most of my time at Anveshi

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgments | 1 |
| Table of contents | 2 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| A. Field, Fieldwork and types of Fieldwork | 8 |
| 1. What constitutes the “field”? | |
| 2. Is fieldwork a methodology? | |
| 3. Is the notion of the “field” evolving? | |
| 4. Is fieldwork a method of collecting data or is it more than mere collection of information? | |
| 5. Should the researcher go prepared or unprepared for the first field visit? | |
| 6. The questionnaire | |
| 7. Case study vs survey based type of research | |
| B. Field Experience | 15 |
| 1. “The fieldworker to a great extent can take from the field only what the field will give” | |
| 2. Problems that can be anticipated prior to the commencement of the research and problems that could occur during the process of the research | |
| 3. Points to be kept in mind while interviewing respondents | |
| 4. Role switching | |
| 5. Problem with respondents exaggerating or understating their views | |

6. Issues with the mediator
7. What can the researcher do when he or she gets only “Yes” or “No” answers from respondents?
8. Being able to predict the answers of the respondents
9. What do you conduct first, one to one interviews or a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)?
10. What is to be done when few people are dominating the discussion in a Focus Group Discussion?
11. How does one decide on the sample size or when to stop conducting further interviews?
12. Recording notes
13. Field notes vs Mental notes
14. Including non-verbal communications while writing the report

C. Ethics.....27

1. The display of “hypocritical behavior” by the researcher
2. Studying the issue through the eyes of the respondent
3. Biases

Conclusion31

Bibliography.....32

Appendix.....33

APPENDIX 1.Interview Guide

Introduction

I came to Anveshi with the hope of studying a particular social issue and conducting field work on it so that I get a thorough and holistic understanding of it. But upon my arrival I was asked “what is fieldwork?” and I soon got to know that my project this summer would be to try and understand what “field” and “fieldwork” is. There were researchers in Anveshi with years of field experience and I was informed that I could interview them as part of my project. I was told that Anveshi would be my field and that I would be doing fieldwork on fieldwork. This was something that that took me completely by surprise as I always understood fieldwork as “heading out into the world and gathering data”, which I soon learnt through the course of my internship is one way of understanding the “field” but is nonetheless a narrow understanding. This only increased my curiosity in trying to understand what the field was considered in the past, in the present and if it was evolving.

Over a period of 37 days I conducted interviews and conducted literature review. I interviewed 8 respondents in total. 3 of them were Short Term Fellows (STF's) (2012-2013), one respondent worked in Anveshi and 4 senior fellows were interviewed out of which one interview was incomplete due to time constraints but was considered for the project.

The questions that were asked in the interviews were based on the problems I faced while conducting fieldwork for term papers while pursuing my Masters. I conducted a literature review on articles from various anthropology journals and the issues that were highlighted in these pieces, I asked my respondents for their opinions. Initially I developed an open ended and structured questionnaire but soon learnt to use it a guide rather than rely on it entirely. Hence there are few topics in this report that came up only during the course of the interviews.

The report will present how my earlier notions of the “field” and “fieldwork” were challenged and my present understanding of them, what any researcher could keep in mind when faced with a few issues prior to the commencement of the study and during the course of the study.

One has to keep in mind that there are no standard guidelines for conducting research or fieldwork. Both are dynamic and as Robert Everhart states, “Fieldwork is a developmental process with problems and solutions presenting themselves at different stages of the research” (Everhart, 1984). Hence what the researcher chooses to do will be based on the nature of that particular problem that presents itself and the topic of the study. Clubbed with this, is the fact that, every researcher will develop his or her own methods with every fieldwork that they conduct because each experience is an experience in itself and the researcher will learn from past experiences and develop methods that suit him or her the best. It will take time and will come naturally to the researcher. I found this difficult to understand earlier on, as I was in search for advice that I could use for my remaining two semesters in college and for my future as a development professional but I was fortunate to experience this personally for myself as with every interview that I conducted I did try to learn from the challenges that I faced and the feedback I received from the previous interview.

As one of my respondents pointed out, what the researcher does when faced with limitations is what makes a good quality research and limitations could be infact opportunities.

This report is based on the personal experiences and views of the researchers at Anveshi gathered from years of experience in the case of the senior fellows. I gained a larger understanding of research which I believe, will guide me in my future projects and which I could

use when faced with unanticipated problems, something I feel will be much more useful than advice that I could have gotten which I intended to get in the beginning of this project.

The report is divided into three sections. The first section is more theoretical and deals with the field, fieldwork and types of fieldwork. The second is based on the field experiences of my respondents and the issues they faced when conducting their research and how they dealt with them. The third and final part of the report is based on ethics involved during the course of research.

A. Field, Fieldwork and Types of Fieldwork:

1. What constitutes the “field”?

I always thought of the “Field” as “something out there”. This is more in tune with the earlier notion of “field”, especially in the domain of anthropology. But over the course of the interviews I began to understand that it is infact the researcher who designs the field for himself or herself. Through the hypothesis of the study, the research questions, the set of people chosen by the researcher for the interviews, the researcher is infact consciously constituting or determining his or her field and yet the field on the other hand, the field is something that exists outside in the world. Each of the senior fellows had their own take on what they considered the “field” to be. My understanding of the field has two components: a geographical component (the physical presence) and a mental component (the mind of the researcher which defines the field for the study).

For example, for my study, the aim was to get an understanding of the field, fieldwork and research by interviewing the short term fellows and senior fellows at Anveshi. Hence for my study, the field was the office of Anveshi.

During one interview I learnt that the researcher becomes a part of his field. This can happen when the researcher feels for the topic or issue that is being studied or when the pre conceived notions of the researcher get challenged during the initial few visits to the field. In the case of the latter, two forces are at play. The first when the researchers pre-conceived notions of the issue being studied gets challenged it can probably change the way he or she looks at knowledge from that particular moment onwards and second, through the interactions of the researcher with his or

her respondents, the researcher could possibly change the way the respondents view that particular issue..

2. Is fieldwork a methodology?

First it is important to understand what one means by a “method” and a “methodology”. Kinash explains that ethnography is considered to be a methodology while writing field notes, interacting with the locals would be considered as methods under ethnography (Kinash). Hence “methodology” can be understood as “*a system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity¹*” and “methods” are tools employed by the researcher to collect information.

Going by the above understandings, it can safely be said that fieldwork is a method that the researcher could employ to gather information. But fieldwork will depend on what the researcher wants to investigate into. Hence fieldwork as such is not mandatory for every research study.

The disciplines of the nineteenth century such as anthropology and sociology were structured, in the sense they had specific methods to be adopted for a study. For example in anthropology, an anthropologist would conduct an ethnography and live in a community for a few years and intensively write about the locals. There were certain do’s and dont’s, such as, the researcher was expected to give an objective account of the community that he or she was studying and was restricted to stating the facts. One can call this as rigour. But new emerging branches in social sciences such as Gender studies and Minority studies for example have no specific guidelines for their research. In other words there is no basis on which the quality of research can be judged. This prompted me to clarify if research today was losing its rigour and is changing in one way. I learnt the exact reasons behind why the new emerging branches lack rigour which I shall discuss

¹ <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/methodology>

to in the third part of the report under “biases”. But every fieldwork is an experience in itself and the researcher should not make his or her research too structured and rigorous that it automatically inherits the weaknesses of the disciplines but on the other hand the researcher should not fall into the trap of “anything goes” in research, a risk associated when studying the new emerging branches.

3. Is the notion of the “field” evolving?

In the book “The Fieldworker and the Field: Problems and Challenges in Sociological Investigation” (Srinivas, Shah, & Ramaswamy, 2002), the authors mention that the concept of fieldwork is being extended from earlier studying traditional communities to presently studying organizations such as courts, factories and trade unions to name a few. I wanted to further investigate to understand if the notion of “field” is evolving. From the interviews I have learnt that yes the field is evolving and is doing so in many ways.

In one way, the old disciplines adopted statist positions, in the sense, that the information gathered through such disciplines were used by the state to promote welfare for example to promote health and education. The research conducted was mostly quantitative in nature. In such research the population is looked at as numbers by the researcher. The questions being raised in such research is “how many people are benefitting?”, “How many are not?”. But in today's age, with the rise of new branches in sociology, researchers are taking neutral positions vis-à-vis the state or critical positions are being taken. In such research the population is looked at as people and the research undertaken is qualitative in nature. The questions now will be “What are the problems that the people are faced with?” “Why are these problems presenting themselves?”.

The second way in which the field is evolving lies in how the people are changing from being passive to more active. In today's age the respondents want to know from the researcher what it is that he or she is going to do for them.

Another way in understanding how the field is evolving is the emergence and acceptance of the new branches in social sciences that were once considered out of the ambit of research. For example: gender studies, studies on sexuality and minority studies.

Thus from one interview I learnt that the field is changing more in the context of "What is the field" and "How do you approach the field?".

4. Is fieldwork a method of collecting data or is it more than mere collection of information?

Fieldwork I understood is not just about collecting data for the research, but at one level it is. It also depends on how the researcher feels for the topic. If the researcher feels no connection with the topic then fieldwork may mean just collecting data. But if the researcher is very interested in the topic of the study then the fieldwork also becomes a learning experience for him or her and an opportunity to increase one's knowledge on that particular issue.

It is very important for a researcher to investigate into not only what the respondents are saying but also why they say what they say. The environment plays a huge role on shaping people's perception of an issue and their opinions will be shaped by these external conditions. Hence fieldwork will give the researcher an opportunity to study the environment which influences people's opinion.

The researcher should also pay close attention to the body language and facial expressions of the respondents as this could also give the researcher hints as to whether the respondent is comfortable about speaking on that issue, if not, then it is important to understand what is making them uncomfortable.

Fieldwork should not be understood as a method that involves only interviewing respondents. If a study requires a visit to a government office, then the researcher could simply visit the office and sit and observe the kind of people who are visiting the office and their interactions with the government officials. These observations too form an important part of fieldwork.

5. Should the researcher go prepared or unprepared for the first field visit?

All research begins with a “hunch” that the researcher has. Hence he or she has a certain idea of the issue that is being intended to study. The researcher should not go into the field as a “blank slate” otherwise he or she would not know what to talk to the people about and in such a situation the fieldwork may turn out to be a mini tourism of sorts. Hence it is crucial that the researcher visits the field having read up on the works of other researchers or newspaper articles or information from any other source so that the researcher has an idea of what is going on in the field. When developing the objectives of the research, the research questions and the proposed methods and methodology for the study the field should guide the researcher.

Murray L.Wax and Rosalie L.Wax in a paper on “Fieldwork and the Research Process” (Wax & Wax, 1980) state that preparing oneself for the study by learning about the issue that is going to be investigated into before the entry into the field state is a “mark of respect” for the respondents, for the researcher considers them important enough to learn about them before a formal

introduction. They also state that it is better for the researcher to be grounded in scholarly material before entering the field than rather base oneself entirely on what the respondents say.

John Davis in “Fieldwork” (Davis, 1984), states that very few researchers go into the field unprepared. Fieldworkers usually enter their fields armed with information that they have gathered on the debates in their field and other such information that is crucial for them to know about.

Any fieldwork is an experience in itself and in research there are no general rules applicable for everyone and ones that cut across domains and disciplines, hence it is important that the decisions taken by the researcher are taken keeping in mind the changing dynamics of the field.

6. The questionnaire

How much a researcher relies on the questionnaire will depend on what the researcher wants to find. If the researcher is undertaking a survey based type of research then the researcher could rely on the questionnaire entirely. But if the researcher wants to conduct a case study type of research then it is important that the questionnaire acts as an interview guide and guides the researcher. The interviews I learnt, are better when conducted in the form of a conversation between the researcher and the respondents. When you begin to ask questions with a questionnaire in your hand there is a risk that the respondent might get uncomfortable. When the interview is conducted in the form of a conversation then the respondent is likely to be at ease and it will be easier for the researcher to ask questions.

Learning from the experiences of the short term and senior fellows, the researcher should engage in a conversation with the respondent and ask questions from the points that are being raised by the respondent. A little deviation is not a cause of concern, new aspects unheard of to the

researcher could emerge, but the researcher should be able to steer the conversation back to the topic of discussion. The researcher should go through the questionnaire to cross check and see if all the questions that were meant to be asked have been covered in the conversation.

7. Case study vs survey based type of research

For the first time I learnt about a case study type of research. I was always under the impression that larger the sample the better it is for the research. But with a small sample, the researcher could conduct the interview in detail with the respondents. In such a case it may be beneficial to pick an issue out of all the possible issues and question your respondents on it. It is a better option to write indepth on an issue than just mention several issues in a few sentences. But this again will depend on what the researcher chooses to focus on.

If the researcher wants to generalize or look for a common characteristic in his or her sample, then a survey based research would be the preferred. It is important to understand that there may be a common problem among the sample, but each individual's response to the problem may be different. Or it could be a possibility that the problem itself is different for the sample given each individuals condition is different. In such a case, a case study based research would be more useful for the research.

B. Field Experience:

1. “The fieldworker to a great extent can take from the field only what the field will give”

Robert Everhart states the above sentence in his paper “Dilemmas of Fieldwork in Policy Research: A critique” (Everhart, 1984) . He mentions that he is not implying that the information that a researcher can gather from the field is limited, but says that new strategies have to be employed to get more information than what is available. I wanted to understand how the researcher could learn more and get more information than just what the respondents tell him or her. From the interviews I gathered that the researcher should read up on existing literature before hitting the field so that he or she learns about the different issues or perspectives before commencing with the research. An initial visit to the field prior to the start of the research will also help the researcher. In such a visit the researcher can interact casually with the people so that he or she can learn before hand about what to expect from the field.

2. Problems that can be anticipated prior to the commencement of the research and problems that could occur during the process of the research

One hurdle that the researcher could face is not being able to communicate with the respondents in their language. One way this problem that can be dealt with is with the help of the mediator. But the researcher should understand that the mediator is not just a translator and neither an informant. But rather the mediator is a person who integrates the researcher (if he or she is an outsider) into the field. The mediator provides that element of trust to the respondents. While choosing the mediator one short term fellow stated that since she works in the field of education and all her research is on issues relating to education, she chooses a mediator who works in education as well. She says this will ensure that the mediator is interested in the topic because

her research is dependent on the interest of the mediator as the latter is the one who is going to engage with the respondents. She added that she briefs the mediator on the purpose of the study and encourages him or her as this will have a substantial effect on her research. It will also help the researcher if the mediator comes from the community that he or she is studying or going to interview.

A major problem that any researcher will anticipate is acceptance by the respondents. A few of my respondents mentioned that they are careful about the clothes that they wore during the field visits, especially to rural areas, so that their clothes are not constant reminders to the respondents that they are outsiders. The problem of class and caste is closely linked with acceptance into the community. One respondent said that the interviews are a play of power relations between the researcher and his or her respondents. For example, looking at the way the researcher is dressed or upon knowing his or her educational qualification, the respondents may mould their responses for the researcher and tell the researcher only what he or she wants to hear. This “power play” resonates in the work of Everhart who says that “the fieldworker always maintains an upper hand” because he or she is the one who sets the basis for the interview and deploys different strategies to get what is required for the research (Ibid). He adds that fieldwork is conducted with either the researcher wanting to more about an issue or wanting to evaluate or wanting to help those who are being studied. He says that fieldwork is conducted rarely with the latter purpose in mind².

² But considering that Everhart was writing in the context of anthropology, it is understandable that he says this given that anthropologists conduct ethnographies with the aim of understanding a community.

3. Points to be kept in mind while interviewing respondents:

The following are few pointers that I learnt from the personal experiences of the short term and senior fellows:

- The introduction of the researcher is very important because it is at this stage that the respondent forms an opinion about the researcher and the responses provided will be based on this introduction.
- The researcher should preferably refrain from using the word “interview” but should rather inform the respondents that he or she would like to have a “discussion” or “want to get to know your opinion”.
- The researcher should assure the respondents of their anonymity. They will be curious as to why the researcher has chosen to talk to them and will be apprehensive about what is going to be done with the information that has been collected. The respondents have the right to know.
- The researcher cannot tell the respondents that he or she knows nothing on the issue that is being studied. Pretense never works and the respondents will not fall for this lie. Rather the researcher should ask the respondent for their opinions and if necessary can give their personal views and from this a healthy conversation can follow.
- If the respondents hesitate to talk, then the researcher could cite personal experiences. This will help the respondents relate and will give them confidence to open up. It is also important to empower your respondents. Few of them will feel that their views are not important and hence it is the researchers duty to make them feel that what they have to say is important. This can only be done if the researcher thinks that the particular respondent is capable of saying something important.

- Learning how to ask questions is a skill that a researcher should and will develop over the course of time. For example, one short term fellow told me that when he asked his respondents the problems that they were facing in the university they told him that they did not have any problems. He then asked them about their previous colleges and what were the facilities that were provided there and if they got the same in the present university, the respondents then told him the number of problems that they were facing.

4. Role switching:

Robert Everhart states that the ideal situation for any researcher would be when the respondents perceive the researcher as one of them and interact with him or her in such a manner. But the different roles that the researcher brings along, prevents this from happening (Ibid). One of my respondents said that when she was interviewing her respondents, to them she was a student from the same university, a person from the same caste, a researcher and they were apprehensive of her because they had their doubts as to whether she would present the information collected to the college authorities due to the sensitive nature of the topic she was pursuing. She said that she asked questions as a researcher and as a fellow community member and after assuring her respondents of their anonymity she stated that they responded keeping these two roles of hers in mind.

I asked the short term fellows and senior fellows if there was any difference in how respondents interacted with them when they approached the respondents as “academicians” and when they represented an organization. My respondents told me that people want to know how they will benefit from the research. They said that even as academicians their respondents cooperated with them. One short term fellow made an important point by saying that the respondents know what

they are getting into at the time of interacting with the researcher. In spite of knowing that they may not have any direct benefits they chose to cooperate or chose to refrain from doing so.

I realized that when I conducted interviews for the purpose of a study, I sub consciously switched roles. I did not just interview my respondents as a student but also asked questions as a local or citizen especially when interviewing local authorities and each of these roles asked different questions.

But through the interviews with a few senior fellows one point came out strongly, that the researcher's background should not matter because he or she is going into the field as a professional and should know exactly what information that is required for the study.

5. Problem of respondents exaggerating or understating their views:

Earlier I had mentioned that there is a likelihood that the respondents may tell the researcher what he or she would like to hear and their responses may get influenced by the background of the researcher. My next question to my respondents was, how does the researcher get to know if his or her respondents are exaggerating their views or not? One of the major take away from this internship is that, it is not the researchers job to conduct a cross evaluation of the respondents. The researcher should try and understand what the picture is based on the literature that has been reviewed and what all the respondents have said or any other sources of information that the researcher has reviewed. The account provided by the researcher should be one that the respondents are familiar with. They may not agree with the opinion of the researcher but they should be able to authenticate the events or issues related to the topic.

6. Issues with the mediator

I asked the senior fellows if they had faced a situation where in they found that the mediator was adding his or her opinion to the translations and if yes what did they do. The general advice was to be alert. One respondent told me that in one situation he had faced this problem and he continuously kept questioning the mediator on his translations and then the mediator realized that his translations were not trusted and stuck to stating the respondents views only. Another respondent told me that this problem will exist and to assume that it can be done away with is a wrong assumption.

7. What can the researcher do when he or she gets only “Yes” or “No” answers from respondents?

I find getting “yes” or “no” answers from the people whom I am interviewing a constant reoccurring problem. But I always thought it was the reluctance on the part of respondents from answering my questions. If the researcher is getting such answers and finding it problematic because he or she wants detailed responses, I learnt from my interviews that in such situations the researcher should pay close attention to how he or she is asking questions and review the questionnaire for any close ended questions that could be present. One short term fellow said that she did not realize that she framed the questions in her questionnaire in a close ended format and half way through her research she realized this and changed them into open ended questions.

Sometimes the presence of family members or others could make the respondents very conscious of what they are saying. One respondent said that during her fieldwork when was interviewing a woman of the household, she kept getting “yes” or “no” answers and then realized that it was the presence of their mother-in-law that made her do so. She kept probing and asked her “why do

you say “yes”?”, then the mother-in-law would answer that question. She then asked her respondent as to what she thinks and the respondent said that she agreed with the mother-in-law. She then went on to ask her “Why do you agree with you mother-in-law?”.

Hence the researcher should be alert and try understanding what is making the respondent answer in one word answers.

8. Being able to predict the answers of the respondents

In my previous experience on a number of interviews I have been able to predict what the respondents were going to say and found the same thing happening with my interviews with the short term fellows. I soon began to realize that though they brought up an issue that I meant to probe later on in the interview, I still went ahead and asked them the same issue even though it sounded like a repetition and was surprised to find that they said more than what they did before on that same issue. This is because the contexts in which they were talking about that issue were very different. One respondent told me even if the researcher is able to predict answers, it is important to ask the respondents anyway because even though the problem might be the same for all, each individuals response to the problem is different. One senior fellow told me that sometimes the problem itself will be different due to each individual’s unique conditions.

9. What do you conduct first, one to one interviews or a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)?

I have always conducted the one to one interviews first and kept the FGD for the last because I would make a note of the common issues faced by all of my respondents and ask them about these issues when together as a group. One short term fellow told me that she prefers to conduct one to one interviews first because since she has to go to know each one of them personally, controlling the flow of discussions in an FGD would be easier. Another respondent told me that

she prefers to conduct a FGD first because in this way she gets to interact with everyone and this breaks the ice between them when the time comes to conduct a one-to-one interview.

One senior fellow told me that the whole research process is very dynamic. He said that if the researchers first priority is to conduct one to one interviews then that should be conducted first and not the FGD. He said that the choice between one to one interviews and an FGD would also depend on the amount of time that the respondents can dedicate because if the researcher has completed the FGD and then plans on the one to one interviews but the respondents tell him or her that they do not have the time then the researcher is faced with a problem. Hence depending on how much time the respondents can dedicate and what it is the researcher wants the most, an individual opinion or a group discussion, a choice can be made.

10. What is to be done when few people are dominating the discussion in a Focus Group Discussion?

The respondents said they came across this problem. One senior fellow told me that it is important to let the participants know that all of them are required to talk. A few interesting strategies that they mentioned were to let the ones who are eager to talk exhaust themselves because they then lose the right to talk later on and the researcher can politely ask them to give the others a chance to voice their opinions. One respondent told me that she pin points the quiet ones and brings in humor while talking to them and asks them if they are scared. She said this has worked for her in the past and in this way she managed to get the quiet participants to talk. One short term fellow told me that he asks the quiet ones what they would like to talk about and lets them do so. Later he asks those active respondents for their views on the other persons

opinion and this led to a discussion between the participants as they began to defend their opinions.

Sometimes participants will not participate and after a point of trying to get them to do so, the researcher will have to realize that nothing much can be done. One senior fellow informed me that in his experience of one particular FGD the group had informal spokespersons who were the only ones who spoke in the discussion on behalf of the group and all the participants agreed with the spokespersons views and did not add anything to what he had already said.

11. How does one decide on the sample size or when to stop conducting further interviews?

This is one issue that I have been grappling with when doing projects over the past three years. I learnt that if the researcher wants to generalize his findings over the population then with the information that has been gathered, the researcher should understand whether it is safe to generalize given the sample. If yes, then the interviews can be stopped. If not, then more interviews have to be conducted.

A general rule for a researcher is that if there are no issues that are cropping up during the interviews then the interviews can be stopped but if there are no more issues that the researcher is coming across during the interviews then it could also mean that the perspective that the researcher has adopted could be exhausted. Hence the researcher should check if there are other perspectives that can be used to look at the issue, whether it is possible to frame the questions in a different manner, whether what the answers the researcher is getting is based on what is being asked and the most important of all, is it worthwhile to do all of the above?

12. Recording notes

A majority of the respondents said that they record their interviews using a recorder and transcribe them later. One respondent said that she avoids taking down notes as this makes her lose eye contact with her respondent and she fears that the respondents might get bored. Another respondent said that he only takes down notes while interviewing his respondents. He just notes down the major words and then later after the interview recollects and writes them into full sentences. I was advised by one of the senior fellows to record and take notes while the interview is going on. The notes will remind me of the important points that were said by the respondent and while transcribing the recordings, I transcribe only those points that correspond to my notes. This will help in making the transcriptions quicker. Another respondent said that she distinguishes between material and immaterial facts while transcribing.

This is the first time at Anveshi that I have recorded an interview because normally I prefer to write my notes down. In total I had 3 recordings. All the recordings were over 45 minutes long. When I first transcribed my first recording it took me two days to transcribe because I was noting down every single word. But when I came to the last one it took me over an hour because by then I could distinguish between material and immaterial information. One senior fellow told me that with every research experience one will develop methods and strategies that suit himself or herself the best and will learn from every past experience. And with my experience with transcribing the recordings I could not agree more.

It is important to mention that the researcher should glance through the notes during the interview when the respondent goes out to attend to a few matters or as soon as the interview is

over or even frequently so that the researcher can clarify any doubt with the respondent. Hence it is important for the fieldworker to stay alert (Wax & Wax, 1980).

13. Field notes vs Mental notes

Anthony Cohen in “Post fieldwork – fieldwork” (Cohen, 1992), discusses about the notes that a researcher takes and the memories he or she takes along from the fieldwork experience. His literature review consists of authors who make the argument that mental notes or “head notes” are more important than field notes and that field notes are just a trigger for the mental notes because when the researcher writes about the study he or she will recall memories of the incidents and write their accounts based on those memories. Cohen mentions the work of John Davis who states that mental notes can be relied on more by the researcher because field notes could have probably been scribbled down and written when the researcher was in a hurry.

I asked my respondents what they rely on more, mental notes or field notes. There was this one commonality in their answers in the sense that they learnt from their experiences. They remember the problems and challenges that they faced in a previous fieldwork experience and make attempts to avoid the recurrence of those problems. One respondent told me that if he was going to recount a previous field experience that happened a few years ago he would rely more on his field notes than memory.

14. Including non-verbal communications while writing the report:

Research that is quantitative in nature, which involves the use of statistical models or numbers or graphs to convey their findings may rely more on these representations than prose and may be even forgiven for this (Wax & Wax, 1980). But on the other hand for qualitative research concentrating on the writing part of the report is extremely important because it is the medium

through which the researcher has to convey the findings of the research (Ibid). One senior fellow told me that when he writes the report, he writes his interactions with his respondents as detailed as he can write them because then the readers will be able to understand the context in which the questions are being asked and answers are being provided for the same.

The researchers of the disciplines adhered to stating the facts and refrained from including their emotions in the report. But, Anne Monchamp in her piece on “Encountering Emotions in the Field: An X marks the spot” (Monchamp, 2007) dwells into incorporating emotions into the final report. She highlights this from the perspective of a researcher and that of the reader. First, for the researcher it is important to make note of his or her emotions because it is with these emotions that he or she is interpreting an occurrence. She also says that it is important to write down emotions of the fieldworker in the report because the reader will be able to understand between who the discussions are happening, why and for what purpose and under what circumstances they are happening.

C. Ethics

1. The display of “hypocritical behavior” by the researcher:

M.N.Srinivas in his book, “The Remembered Village” (Srinivas, The Remembered Village, 1980) asked if the fieldworker displays hypocritical behavior by saying things that the focus group would like to hear and behaving in a way that is pleasing to them so that the fieldworker could ensure that he or she is on good terms with them as this will ensure a steady flow of information that is necessary for the study. He asks if the fieldworker is an actor (Ibid, pg 25). I asked the senior fellows for their opinion on this display of “hypocritical behavior” and one of my respondents said that this hypocritical behavior arises when the researcher distrusts his or her respondents. I then enquired how one carries out an interview when the researcher is of a completely different opinion than the respondent. I found the answer to this question in one of my interviews with a senior fellow who conducted an interview with a person whom she completely disagreed with. She said that she keeps her personal views aside and concentrates on what her respondents views are since her study focuses on the latter’s views and not hers. She said she was conducting an interview and not preparing for a battle. She says that it is important for the researcher to have some clarity on the study and its purpose. In her book she said that she wrote down the respondent’s views and her views.

2. Studying the issue through the eyes of the respondent:

M.N Srinivas says that the account he gives of the village is what he has seen through the eyes of three people (Ibid, pg 53). I asked the senior fellows what the risk was for a researcher when he or she looks at the issue through the eyes of the respondents. The overall response that I got was

there was no harm and all accounts should be corroborated by official documents, the experiences of the people and other such sources.

3. Biases

I had few concerns about the quality of a research study when the researcher was investigating into an issue that he or she feels strongly about. For example, a woman researching on women's issues, a Dalit researching on Dalit's issues and a Muslim conducting a study on the problems of Muslims's. I was of the opinion that such accounts would be biased as there is the risk of the researcher getting emotionally involved in the research.

I learnt that the new emerging branches in social science such as gender studies and minority studies are an attack on the 19th century disciplines. These branches accuse the disciplines of hiding under the cloak of neutrality when in fact their research was thoroughly biased. The disciplines did not help dealing with issues that they were studying for the purpose of being neutral. The new branches on the other hand state upfront the biases involved in their work as they want a response to their work and not an assessment of their work. The disciplines were more preoccupied with stating facts while the new branches are keen on understanding "why do people say what they say?". Feminism, Dalit studies and Minority studies are studies of oppression and discrimination and hence it is difficult for the researcher to remain objective.

Monchamp states that fieldwork is a unique combination of field and the fieldworker because fieldwork by itself is a dialogical process wherein the fieldworker will engage in conversations with respondents, thus making it a two way flow of information rather than a one way flow in the case of surveys (Monchamp, 2007). In this process of sharing information he or she will form bonds with the respondents. This two way sharing of information occurs because, by sharing

personal experiences the respondents open up more and also the fieldworker does not merely want to report what he or she has seen , but wants to dig deeper. And in this process of digging deeper emotions are brought in and friends are made.

It is difficult for a researcher to stay neutral on an issue that he or she is passionate about. Almost all the respondents told me that they have tried hard to minimize the biases but their studies were not free from biases. One senior fellow told me that he does not pay too much attention to the biases and concentrates firmly on doing his job because he says once a researcher begins to worry about the possible biases, then he or she begins to question every decision that is made. He added that the researcher should focus on “what is the truth?”. He said that physical science is more concerned about “objectivity” while social sciences was more concerned about “reality”.

One respondent told me that if there is a battle going on between two groups then the researcher should not automatically label one group as the “oppressed” and the other as the “oppressor” because an ongoing battle does not mean there is an already decided victor. The researcher should rather focus on the facts and issues behind the battle and start looking at the issue from its history onwards rather than from the position of the so called “victor or victim”. By falling for the latter approach there is a risk that the researcher might go over board with sympathy.

Another respondent told me that journalists feel sympathy for their focus group and write accounts in a manner that would favour them. Researchers on the other hand are more concerned on what is the truth and prefer to state how things really are. He said that it is common for inexperienced fieldworkers to get carried away by feeling sorry for the respondents.

The researcher should be frank about the biases and limitations of the study. For example if a particular site was chosen keeping in mind time, geographical and financial constraints. As

students we are constantly being told that good quality research will mention clearly the limitations of the study.

I asked one of my respondents whether the accounts of a Dalit researcher and a non-Dalit researcher on discrimination faced by Dalits would vary to a high degree. She told me that the background of the researcher is not important. If both the researchers are armed with proper knowledge then the two of them will not have accounts that vary to a larger degree.

It is important to understand that, what one considers a bias another person may not. The researcher will take a position based on what he or she intends to do with the data collected.

Conclusion:

From my experience at Anveshi, I realized that my views of the “field” and “fieldwork” were similar to that of the 19th century disciplines and I had understood them in a narrow sense. But now my understanding has broadened. My respondents have explained to me the larger picture behind almost each and every issue that I raised during the interviews this has helped me more than words can say because from now on when faced with an issue instead of judging based on what is happening at that moment I have learnt it is important to understand the overall framework in which the issue is being played out and then take decisions.

I have learnt that it is important not only to investigate into what the people are saying, but why they say what they say. I also managed to develop a few methods that suit me the best based on the interviews that I have conducted here.

I have also learnt that it is important for the researcher to be clear about the purpose of the study and what needs to be investigated into and what does not. This will go a long way in saving the researchers time as it will eliminate the immaterial facts and information, which can help make the final report more focused.

I have to admit that it will be a task for me to apply what I have learnt at Anveshi in the field in the coming months or years. I have been told clearly that it will take time but I could see it happening for myself in small ways during the past few weeks. I look forward to learning new things and improving the way I conduct research from now on.

I am forever grateful to my respondents for having given me the opportunity to learn from them and their experiences.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview Guide

Field and the different types of fieldwork:

1. How would you describe the “field”?
2. Is the concept of “field” changing, broadening or evolving?
3. Popular notions of “fieldwork” understand it as “a method of collecting data”. Would you agree with this, or do you think fieldwork goes beyond this understanding
4. Some researchers go into the field prepared and knowing what aspect of the study to investigate into, while others prefer not to go in with pre-determined objectives. What do you prefer and why?
5. Have you conducted fieldwork on a short and long time period? What were the methodologies employed for the two? On what basis were they chosen? How were they different in these two cases? What were the specific challenges in each of the two?
6. Apart from the time period is there any other difference between the two types of studies (e.g Methodology)?
7. Have you conducted secondary research? What are the challenges in conducting such research?
8. Case study vs Survey type research methodology. What would you prefer and why?

Field experience:

1. “The fieldworker to a great extent can take from the field only what the field will give”. How you ever encountered this problem? How have you dealt with this issue?

2. Were there problems that you anticipated prior to the commencement of your field work?
How did you go about working around them?
3. What were the problems and limitations that you encountered while doing your field work?
4. Role switching – coming from an NGO and as a researcher. Who do your respondents perceive you to be? Have you interacted with people as a person from an NGO and as a researcher? Was there any difference in the way people interacted with you?
5. How do you decide on the sample size?
6. How do you encourage people to participate in your fieldwork?
7. How do you interview respondents who answer questions with a “yes” or a “no” answer
8. What do you do when you begin to predict the answers given by your respondents?
9. Would you conduct a one to one interview first or a FGD?
10. How do you tackle the problem of a few people talking and dominating the discussion in a FGD?
11. How do you record your field notes? (Write them down, record..etc)
12. How do you transcribe the data you have collected?
13. Field notes vs Mental notes³. What do you rely on the most and why?
14. When writing your reports do you include non-verbal communications?

³ Field experiences and incidents

Ethics:

9. M.N Srinivas in his book “The Remembered Village”, says that the fieldworker displays “hypocritical behavior” because he or she perpetually has to be on their best behavior and say things that please the locals in order to be on good terms with them which ensures information for the fieldworker. What is your opinion on this?
10. What are the risks associated when the researcher sees the issue that he or she is studying through the eyes of their respondents?
11. Researching a topic when the researcher has the same background. For example, a Dalit conducting research on Dalit issues. Do you consider this to be a bias? If so, how can it be minimized?
12. How to do you keep biases outside the ambit of your research?
13. How to do you explain to your respondents that your findings are for purely academic purposes and not intended to benefit them directly?
14. How do you know if respondents are exaggerating or understating their views? How do you validate and cross verify the information?
14. What do you do to show your appreciation to your participants?