CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Objectives

1. To understand the socio-economic conditions and the associated vulnerability of the Agaria community;

2. To develop an understanding of the relationship between the community and its natural resource base in the context of livelihood and conservation;

3. To comprehend the impact of the local and global changes on the community with emphasis on changing life, livelihoods and natural resources;

4. To critically examine the interventions of governmental and non-governmental sector on conservation and livelihoods of the community;

5. To understand the perception and the response of the community towards the governmental conservation programmes;

6. To suggest suitable interventions for linking conservation with livelihood of the community.

4.2. Operational Definitions

Agaria: The salt producers in Gujarat who are involved in the process of salt production using sub-soil brine as the source.

Inland Salt Production: The process of salt production using sub-soil brine as the source.

Livelihood: Activities undertaken by members of a community to meet their subsistence needs.

Conservation: The long term protection and careful management of the environment and sustainable use of the natural resources.

Traditional Knowledge: The knowledge, innovations and practices of a community which have been developed from experience gained over time and adapted to the local culture and environment.
4.3. Methodology

The research methodology of this study is the systematic approach undertaken by the researcher in conducting the study in consonance with the objectives of the study. This chapter outlines the procedure adopted while seeking answers to the research queries raised in this study. It elaborates upon the nature of the study and expounds the reasons for selecting the specific research and sampling design, for opting for the methods and tools of data collection and the subsequent manner in which the collected data from different sources has been analysed.

4.3.1. Nature of the Study

Mixed method approach has been adopted for the fulfilment of the objectives of this study. The concurrent triangulation strategy, the most commonly used model of mixed method approach according to Creswell (2009; p.447), guided the various research steps undertaken as part of this study. While the selection of the mixed method approach was necessitated by the objectives of the study, the adoption of the concurrent triangulation strategy was determined by the limitations imposed by the availability of time and resources on the researcher. In a mixed method approach, inferences are drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data which has been collected and analysed by the researcher to seek answers to the research queries (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2010). The arguments for adopting this approach have been influenced by the work of Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989). They have listed the following five reasons underlining the choice of a mixed method approach:

a. Triangulation
b. Complementarity
c. Development
d. Initiation
e. Expansion

The need to achieve ‘Triangulation’ of the qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study has been necessitated by its research objectives. This reliance on both quantitative and qualitative data in an attempt to understand the livelihood and...
conservation debate in the context of the Agarias of LRK, also highlights the ‘Complementarity’ of a mixed method approach. In this study, the qualitative data allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the various facets of the issue from the perspective of the respondents leading to the emergence of ‘categories’ and ‘sub-categories’. The quantitative data gathered by the researcher during the process of data collection, along with the transformation of the codes through ‘quantising’ (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2010; p.79) assigned numerical strength to the ‘categories’, placed the qualitative data in a wider milieu and facilitated the generalisability of the research findings (p.6). ‘Development’ in a mixed method approach according to Greene et al. (1989) referred to the collaborative effect of the applied approaches. The manner in which qualitative data shaped the formulation of the quantitative aspects of the study underlines ‘Development’ as a reason for the selection of the mixed method approach. They have further noted that ‘Initiation’ and ‘Expansion’ as reasons for adopting this approach emerged from the possibility of the findings of a study to initiate new research with a broadened scope of enquiry. The scope of the present study to illuminate newer possibilities for social work research justified the choice of the mixed method approach.

Drawing from the arguments of Nagy Hesse-Biber for adopting a mixed method approach, it can be added that the selection of this approach enabled the researcher to interview newly identified categories of Agaria respondents, which emerged during the process of data collection at various sites across Gujarat. The editorial introduction by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), highlighting the significance of mixed method approach in providing a comprehensive understanding of complicated and multidimensional social issues which are intertwined with one other also lends justification for the selection of this approach.

### 4.3.2. Research Design

A research design is the ‘logical blueprint’ of a study (Yin, 2011; p.75). According to Brewer (2000), this ‘strategic plan’ (p.57) enables a researcher to chart out the structure of the research. For this study, a descriptive research design has been adopted in order to provide a detailed description of the various facets of the livelihood and conservation
debate in the context of the Agaria community of Gujarat. In addition, the study discusses the linkage between the community and its natural resource base and the manner in which the creation of the protected area has impacted this relationship. The descriptive study design also suits the study since it seeks to examine the ongoing governmental and non-governmental efforts for facilitating the livelihood of the community and also attempts to suggest suitable intervention strategies for linking conservation with sustainable livelihoods. While formulating this descriptive research design, following the adoption of the concurrent triangulation strategy, the researcher had to consider the aspects of timing, weighting, mixing and theorising (Creswell, 2009). Based on Creswell’s explanation of this strategy, both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered at the same time.

As noted by Creswell, though the weight of both qualitative and quantitative approaches should be equal in this model, in practice one of the approaches may be allowed to gain precedence over the other. The precedence given to qualitative approach in this study is derived from the dominant concern to understand the subjective experiences of the Agarias and to describe the linkages between a protected area and people living near it. The paucity of published literature on the issue also supported the priority extended to the qualitative component in this study with a view to expand the understanding of the livelihood and conservation conflict in the LRK. It has to be mentioned that the qualitative approach further aided the attempt of this study to capture the meanings of the various events related to the creation of the protected area, without trying to establish a linear cause and effect relationship.

Mixing has been achieved by merging the data from both the approaches within the analytical framework of the study. Finally, in accordance with the adopted model, the researcher has provided the theoretical framework to act as an ‘orienting lens’ (Creswell, 2009; p.437) for the study. The selection of descriptive research design based on a qualitatively tilted concurrent triangulation strategy of mixed method approach is an attempt to understand the lived experience of the Agarias focussed primarily on their words and actions. Based on the discussion by Mcvilly, Stancliffe, Parmenter, and Burton-Smith (2008), the design has also endeavoured to incorporate the significance of ‘where, when, how and by whom the data was collected’ (p.163).
In accordance with the precedence attributed to the qualitative approach in the study, the descriptive research design has attempted to incorporate the characteristics of qualitative research described by Bryman (1988). The design allowed for a contextual description of the ‘events, action, norms, values, etc.’ (p.61) from the perspective of the respondents of the study. It also provided scope to the researcher to recognise and include the diversity of perspectives on the issue, among and within the various categories of respondents included in the study. Finally, this design permitted the researcher to adopt a flexible research strategy, which was deemed essential to gauge the various dimensions of the debate pertaining to livelihood and conservation.

4.3.3. Sampling Design

Universe of the Study

The universe for the present study comprised of all the members of the Agaria community in Gujarat who are involved in the production of salt from sub-soil brine, all conservationists and functionaries of non-governmental organisations who have been associated with natural resource conservation and livelihood generation or promotion in the context of the Agaria community.

Respondent Categories

Category I Respondents: This category of respondents comprised of Agarias in the age group of 25-55 years who were involved in inland salt production in the LRK during 2009-10 and 2010-11 seasons (Appendix I).

Category II Respondents: This category of respondents comprised of the following four sub-categories (Appendix I):

a. Agarias in the age group of 25-55 years who were not involved in inland salt production in LRK during the 2009 - 10 and 2010 - 11 seasons and were engaged in other livelihood activities in their villages;

b. Agarias in the age group of 25-55 years who had migrated from their villages to produce marine salt or to work in agricultural land;

c. Agaria youth in the age group of (14 - 25 years);

d. Elders of the Agaria society in the age group of (55 - 75) years.
**Category III Respondents:** This category of respondents included the conservationists, salt traders, government officials and functionaries of non-governmental organisations (Appendix II).

**Category IV Respondents:** This category of respondents comprised of members of the Chunvalia Koli community who were into professions other than inland salt production (Appendix II).

**Category V Respondents:** This category included members of different communities living in the villages bordering the LRK with the Agarias and other stakeholders involved in the debate concerning the LRK and the livelihood of the Agarias (Appendix II).

**Selection of Respondents in Different Categories**

**i. Category I Respondents:** The selection of the respondents was done in two stages:

**Stage I: Selection of Place of Stay during Fieldwork**

From among the places on the periphery of the Rann which were inhabited by the Agarias, the census town of Kharaghoda located in the Dasada Taluka of Surendranagar district in Gujarat was selected as base for fieldwork. The selection was done using purposive sampling technique of the non-probability type. Kharaghoda is also locally referred to as a village. This selection was based on the following criteria:

1. It is one of the oldest and major centres of inland salt production in India;
2. A sizeable number of Agarias live in the village;
3. Secondary information, pre-field visit interviews with experts and the pilot visit to the area showed that villages near Kharaghoda were at the centre of the livelihood and conservation debate;
4. Several NGOs working with the Agarias were present at this site.

**Stage II: Selection of Respondents**

The researcher entered the LRK to interview the Agarias through the route which passed through Kharaghoda, one of the oldest routes taken by Agarias for their annual migration inside the LRK. The selection of respondents within this category inside the LRK was also based on the purposive sampling technique. In this category, a total of seventy six respondents (62 men and 14 women) who belong to nine villages in Dasada and
Dhrangadhra talukas and the census town of Khadaghoda were interviewed over three phases of data collection. Only one Agaria was interviewed from each household which was defined according to the Census of India (2001) definition of a ‘household’ as:

“A group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevent any of them from doing so. Persons in a household may be related or unrelated or a mix of both.”

Purposive sampling technique was deemed fit for this study as LRK is a vast expanse of land not demarcated into talukas or villages. Besides, after migrating into the Rann, Agaria households from a particular village bordering the LRK are scattered across the LRK and are not clustered in a particular area. Based on the works of Mcvilly et al. (2008) and Nagy Hesse-Biber (2010) on using purposive sampling technique in mixed method research studies, it can be further stated that this technique enabled the researcher to select Agaria respondents who provided extensive information on the issue at hand. Drawing from Bryman (2001), it has to be added that purposive sampling facilitated the capture of a wide range of perspectives on the livelihood and conservation debate, including the views of those whose opinion was different from the general sentiment expressed by the majority of the respondents.

During the first phase of data collection in April 2010, the researcher stayed in the house of an Agaria almost 30 kilometres inside the Rann from Kharaghoda and travelled in a different direction every day during the period of his data collection and interviewed twenty two respondents (19 men and 3 women) in the age group of (25 - 55) years. During August 2010, the researcher again met these respondents in their villages. Necessitated by the emergent need to explore the issue of livelihood and conservation in the area of Surendranagar adjoining the LRK, where prawn fishing is a major livelihood activity during the monsoon season, fourteen Agarias (11 men and 03 women) who stayed in three villages of Dhrangadhra taluka were also purposively selected and interviewed in their respective villages during this phase. Finally, in April 2011, forty (32 male and 8 female) members of the Agaria community were interviewed inside the Rann through the strategy similar to the one adopted during phase I (Figure 4.1). In addition, the data pertaining to salt production during the season 2010-11 was collected from respondents interviewed in the earlier two phases.
The determination of the number of respondents in this category was based on the qualitative practice of ‘reaching saturation’ in sample selection (Castro, Kellison, Boyd, and Kopak, 2010; p.343). While they have highlighted the inexactness of the criteria for saturation, Maykut & Morehouse (1994) have opined that data saturation can be viewed as a point of ‘diminishing returns’ in the process of data collection and achievement of this stage was indicative of an exhaustive study (p.58).

ii. Category II Respondents: The interaction with this set of respondents was based on the issues which emerged during the process of interaction with the first category of respondents. Understanding the viewpoint of these respondents was essential for the accomplishment of research objectives and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. The selection of the respondents within the various sub-categories was done in the following manner:
a. The Agarias who had shifted to non-salt pan activities and stayed in their villages bordering LRK (termed as non-migrants) were selected using snow ball sampling technique. The interviews of these respondents were conducted in Kharaghoda and Patri.

b. The Agarias who had given up inland salt production and had migrated from their villages adjoining the LRK to work in marine salt pans or in agricultural fields outside their villages were selected using convenience sampling technique, which according to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), is a strategy to locate key informants whom we have access to. The addresses of these Agarias were collected from the category I respondents and were interviewed in their work sites in Gandhidham, Malvan and Satapar.

c. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the youth of Agaria community. The selection of the participants for the FGDs has been discussed in the section on FGD.

d. The elders of the Agaria society were selected using convenience sampling technique. The interviews of these respondents were conducted in Kharaghoda and Patri.

iii. Category (III, IV & V) Respondents: All the respondents in these categories, except the non-Agaria villagers were selected using purposive sampling technique. FGDs were conducted with the non-Agaria villagers. The selection of the participants for the FGDs has been discussed in the section on FGD.

4.4. Sources, Methods and Tools of Data Collection

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources for this study.

A. Primary Data

Primary data was collected from the above mentioned five categories of respondents. The following methods were relied upon for the purpose of collection of data from the different categories of respondents.

i. Interview

Interview is the most prominent and favourite method of data collection in the social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Bryman, 2001). In this study both ‘semi-structured interviews’ and ‘group interviews’ were used to collect data from respondents across the different categories (Appendices I & II).
Figure 4.2: Locations of Fieldwork
By stating that semi-structured interviews are scheduled activities which comprise of open-ended questions following a general script and including a list of topics to be covered in a specific order, Bernard (2006) has argued in favour of semi-structured interviews in conditions similar to the one in the present study when the researcher had only one opportunity to interview the respondent. ‘Interview guide’ was selected as the tool for data collection for this method. Separate interview guides which comprised of written list of questions were designed for different categories of respondents. Drawing upon the discussion on semi-structured interviews by Yin (2011), the researcher altered the order of questions in the interview guide based on the course taken by the interview and probed the respondents to obtain elaborate answers to the questions. It has to be stated that the mixed method approach of the study allowed the researcher to incorporate closed ended questions in the interview guide. The closed ended questions permitted the researcher to gather quantitative data. During the tool pre-testing phase of data collection, the position of the closed ended questions in the interview guide was determined to ensure that undue control was not exercised in the interview process and the new leads which emerged during the semi-structured interview could be followed with the respondents.

While the semi-structured interviews were conducted with one respondent at a time, interview with some set of respondents were done simultaneously in a group. Fontana and Frey (1998) have termed this process of systematic questioning of several individuals as a ‘group interview’ (p.53). Yin (2011) has suggested that small groups similar to the ones interviewed by the researcher should be treated as ‘adjuncts of interviewing individuals’ (p.140). According to Bernard (2006), a group interview is necessary in the situation when other people join in an on-going interview with a respondent and ‘insert themselves in the conversation’ (p.250).

During his fieldwork when the researcher encountered a situation similar to the one discussed by Bernard, he included all the persons who had joined in and who also met the criteria of being a respondent for the interview and conducted a group interview by making necessary changes in the interview guide. In addition to the situation described above, on one occasion a group interview had to be conducted since the respondents
refused to be interviewed individually. It has to be added that most interviews with Agarias were recorded in a tape recorder with prior permission of the respondents.

**ii. Observation**

Adler and Adler (1998) have commented that observation has served as the ‘bedrock source’ (p.79) of knowledge to those keen on studying and interpreting the actions and reactions of people around them. They have further noted that the ‘systematic and purposive nature’ of observations made by researchers in social science distinguishes it from observations in routine life (p.80) and in combination with other methods of data collection they yield substantial amount of information. Based on the classification given by Gold (1958) and subsequently cited by (Brewer, 2000; Yin, 2011) it can be stated that during his fieldwork for the present study the researcher took the role of a ‘Participant as Observer’ (p.220). As noted by Gold, in this role there is a mutual awareness between the researcher and respondents about the existence of a ‘field relationship’ (p.220). During his fieldwork, the researcher never disguised his purpose of visit and stay with the Agarias. He also clearly stated the objectives of his study to all the persons he interacted with while collecting data. Brewer (2000) has commented that this role undertaken by the researcher involved ‘overt research’ which is distinguished from the ‘covert research’ involved in complete participation (p.84).

As indicated by Brewer, the role of the researcher in Agaria society underwent changes with the duration of his stay in the field and with each visit made by him to Kharaghoda. The keenness expressed by the researcher to get involved in the daily activities of Agarias ensured that they allowed him to work alongside them in the Rann and become a part of their activities during their stay in the village. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to make detailed observations on their lives and livelihood. ‘Observation guides’ were designed for meticulously noting observations on the lives and livelihood of Agarias during the following periods and occasions:

a. Period of salt production inside the LRK;

b. Celebration of festivals including the most important festival of *Janmastami* (festival of the Birth of Lord Krishna) during their stay in the village;

c. Performance of ceremonies and rituals inside LRK and in the village;
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d. Period of preparation to migrate into LRK and back to villages from the LRK;
e. Meetings of Agarias on the issue of livelihood and conservation;
f. Interactions of Agarias with government officials.

The observations on the communication pattern of the respondents among each other during the group interviews, on those who joined in the interview on their own, on those who were invited to join the interview and on those who were excluded by the group provided further insights on the Agaria community. The observations were noted daily in a field diary and these notings can be termed as the field notes.

iii. Focused Group Discussion

The term ‘focus group’ was coined by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall in 1956 to refer to a situation in which the members of a group were asked specific questions centred on a topic (Fontana and Frey, 1998). During the period of data collection for this multi-method study, the researcher conducted nine FGDs with four set of respondents (Appendices I & II). All the FGDs for this study were conducted with a single group of participants meeting on a single occasion. While the FGDs with Agaria youths in the age group of 14-25 years who were engaged in the production of inland salt were conducted inside the Rann, the FGDs with other set of respondents were conducted in their respective villages. FGD guidelines were designed to guide these discussions.

As suggested by Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, and Robson (2001), to achieve the desired ‘depth of information’, emphasis was laid upon deciding the composition of the groups for conducting the FGDs (p.35). Keeping in view the importance of selection of participants in a FGD, the researcher conducted FGDs with groups comprising of youths invited to participate in the FGD, rather than with any pre-existing group of Agaria youths. On similar lines, the researcher invited members from different non-Agaria communities living in the villages of Kharaghoda and Patdi to participate in the FGDs conducted in their respective villages. In Zinzuwada village, the researcher had to conduct FGDs with members of the Rajput and Dalit communities separately as the researcher was advised not to bring persons from two communities on a single platform due to the prevailing tension them.
As a facilitator of these FGDs, the researcher had to prevent the discussion from slithering into a group interview in almost all the FGDs. As pointed out by Bloor et al. (2001) unfamiliarity of participants with FGDs coupled with their expectation that they should be asked questions and that the answers should be directed at the facilitator were the reasons which could turn a FGD into a group interview. ‘Focusing exercises’ (Bloor et al., 2001; p.43) were undertaken by the researcher to reorient the attention of the group to the discussion. Based on the experiences of conducting group interviews and FGDs during the period of fieldwork, it can be stated that the role of the researcher, the nature of participation of respondents in the group and the scope for the researcher to take up new leads differentiates a group interview from a FGD. It has to be added that the FGDs proceeding were recorded in a tape recorder with prior permission of the participants.

B. Secondary Data

The secondary data for the research was collected from the following documents:

1. Census of India (2001);
2. Gujarat State Statistical Abstract (2009);
3. Surendranagar District Gazetteer (1977);
4. National and Vernacular Newspaper Reports;
5. Annual Reports of the Salt Department, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India;
6. Reports of various Centres and Institutes;
7. Reports published by NGOs;
8. Documents of various Government Departments;
9. Official correspondence of the Agariya Heet Rakshak Manch (AHRM) with the Conservation Officials and Survey Settlement Officials in Gujarat;
10. Pamphlets and Brochures on the Sanctuary and Agarias;
11. Personal Diaries maintained by Agarias;
12. Documents and Photographs retrieved from personal collection of respondents.
4.5. Data Analysis

The rapid generation of a large amount of data is an important characteristic of a qualitative study (Bryman, 2001). The present study with its qualitative leanings also yielded substantial amount of primary data collected using the interview, observation and FGD guides. The initial analysis of this data began during the process of data collection itself. Based on the emphasis laid by Bogdan and Biklen (1982; as cited in Bryman & Burgees, 1994) on analysis of data during fieldwork, this initial stage involved listening to the recorded field interviews and review of field notes. During this stage, the researcher attempted to ascertain whether the research objectives were being addressed, highlight the new areas which have emerged from the interviews, determine the need to incorporate new questions to explore these issues and seek respondents who could provide information on these issues.

The next stage of data analysis took place after the completion of fieldwork. This stage of data analysis comprised of the first three phases of the five-phased procedure of data analysis described by (Yin, 2011; p.177) (Figure 4.3).

The five phases of the procedure are:

1. Compiling Phase;
2. Disassembling Phase;
3. Reassembling Phase;
4. Interpreting Phase;
5. Concluding Phase.

In line with his proposition that analysis follows a non-linear process, the researcher moved between the two phases of this cycle as indicated by the two way arrows.

The first step in the compilation phase involved the preparation of interview and FGD transcripts. The transcripts were prepared using the MS Office Word 2010 software. This was followed by labelling of the transcripts according to the respondent category and their arrangement in folders to create a database. During this phase, the field notes were also compiled according to periods or occasions in the life of the Agarias using the MS Office Word 2010 software to create a separate database.
Figure 4.3: Phases of Data Analysis

The compiled databases of the interview and FGD transcripts and the field notes were broken down into smaller fragments during the disassembling phase. This phase of data analysis has been associated by Yin with the assignment of codes to the data fragments. Miles and Huberman (1995) have stated that codes are ‘tags or labels’ for conferring ‘units of meaning’ to information collected during a study (p.56). According to Auerbach and Silvestein (2003), coding enables a researcher to organise a text of the transcript to ascertain ‘patterns within that organisational structure’ (p.31). The procedure of assignment of codes to the data gathered during fieldwork can be termed as ‘open coding’ (Strauss, 1987; p.28) and it comprised of the following sub-steps:

a. Defragmenting the research objectives into the constituent research questions;
b. Listening to the recorded interviews several times;
c. Repeated reading of the interview and FGD transcripts and the field notes;
d. Developing an initial system of primary codes (C_P) based on the research questions;
e. Assignment of the primary codes (C_P) to the relevant sections of the transcripts and the field notes;
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The next phase (reassembling phase) was initiated by merging the sections of the interview and FGD transcripts and the field notes based on the assigned primary codes. The merged transcripts were read again with the objective of identifying the underlying themes. Drawing from the work of Auerbach and Silvestein (2003), a common group of ‘repeating ideas’ was considered as a theme (p.38). After repeating the reading exercise several times, secondary codes (C_S) were assigned to the transcript based on the emergent theme. An explanation memo was attached after the codes to aid future understanding. The parts of the transcript with the same secondary code were merged and read again to categorise the subthemes within the theme and a tertiary code (C_T) was attached. Finally the same tertiary coded parts were combined and a memo was attached to each combined part representing the sub-theme to highlight its linkages with other themes and aid its interpretation.

The steps of this coding exercise have been demonstrated using a part from the transcript number 22.Cat I/3A (Table 4.1). In the first phase of analysis the part was assigned the primary code (ISP) as it pertained to the ‘Inland Salt Production’. In the next phase all the parts with the primary code (ISP) were merged in a single document and the secondary code (FT) was assigned as the part described the theme ‘Future Trend’ in inland salt production. In the last stage the tertiary code (APR-RF) ‘Apprehension-Reason For’ was ascribed in accordance with the sub-theme. Finally a memo was added to describe the linkage of this part to the sections with codes:

a. ISP/FT/APR-AP (Inland Salt Production/Future Trends/Apprehension-Action Plan)
b. AS/CT/MIG-RF (Agaria Society/Changing Trends/Migration-Reason For)
c. PR/CT/DSA-RF (Perception of Rann/Changing Trends/Disassociation-Reason For)

Table 4.1: Data Analysis: Coding

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<td>Reassembling</td>
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... in ten years the cost of drawing brine for the salt pans will rise so much that no Agaria will be able to go to the Rann for salt making...
The last step of data analysis comprised of the final two phases of the procedure (interpretation and conclusion). While the completion of coding of the data was essential to enable its interpretation, however as shown in Figure 4.2 interpretation had started during the phase of compilation of data. During the phase of interpretation the thematically coded data was elucidated in view of the objectives of the study. In this phase the themes were organised into ideas and links between the various themes were identified and explained in accordance with the framework of the study. It has to be stated that during this process new themes emerged and the researcher had to repeat the coding procedure at times.

In view of the adoption of mixed method strategy, a count of some of the themes was also done to substantiate the qualitative data. In addition, the data obtained from the closed ended questions was entered in MS Excel 2010 and processed to yield frequencies. The data obtained through the different methods were linked with the information obtained from secondary sources to give it the shape of a narrative in which the subjective experience Agarias were weaved into the theoretical framework of this study.

4.6. Being Here and There: Fieldwork and Ethical Considerations

A television documentary on wild asses of LRK shown in the national channel when the researcher was in college was his first exposure to the distinctive lives of the salt producers of LRK. The tale of Agarias and the images of wild asses in the vast expanse of barren land left an indelible impression in the young mind of the researcher. It was during his winter placement as part of the MA course in social work in Manav Kalyan Trust (MKT), Khedbrahma, Gujarat during December 2007 that he got the opportunity to know about the lives of Agarias of LRK in detail. Their lives fascinated the researcher and after coming back to Delhi, he started exploring ways in which he could associate his decision to pursue a higher degree in social science research with the Agarias of LRK. The award of the UGC research fellowship in May 2009 ensured that monetary concerns would not come in his way of working on a hitherto unexplored area in social work research. Hours after the results of the fellowship were declared, he called Mr. Lallubhai Desai of MKT and expressed his desire to work on a topic related
to the lives of Agarias of LRK for his doctoral work. Mr. Desai, put him in touch with several persons in government departments, research institutes and voluntary organisations who are associated with the community to enable him to decide on the topic. Almost everyone with whom the researcher interacted over telephone directed him to Mr. Sukhdevbhai Patel of Ganatar.

Mr. Patel, welcomed the idea and suggested that the researcher should visit the area before he finalised his decision. Following his advice, the researcher reached Patdi in June 2009 to ascertain the feasibility of doing his research in this region. Several persons advised the researcher against this ‘adventurism’ for his doctoral work, in view of the new regulations of the University and the reduced timeframe for submission of thesis. He was warned that his decision to conduct fieldwork in an entirely unfamiliar geographic terrain on an issue which has not been explored in social work research was an unwarranted risk. He was told that he might not be able to complete his work in the stipulated time. Motivated by Dr. Neera Agnimitra, who later became his research supervisor, with the welcoming gesture of Agarias during his visit to Khadaghoda in June and the assurance of support given by Mr. Patel, the researcher submitted the proposal to the University to work on the issue of livelihood and conservation in the context of Agarias of LRK. The proposed area of fieldwork was the villages bordering the LRK.

Several authors have pointed out the attachment of newer meanings to the words, ‘field’ and ‘fieldwork’ in research. While (Sluka and Robben, 2007; p.2) have highlighted the broadening of the ‘the field’ to include ‘everywhere there are human beings, and every imaginable human group’, Hannerz (2006) has pointed out that in recent times field is conceived of as ‘here and there, in many sites, trans- or multi-, something or other’ than ‘a rather fixed entity’ (p.24). Deliberating upon the changing understanding of ‘fieldwork’ in his essay on the depiction of ‘self’ in ethnographic writing, Shore (1999) has written,

“The traditional idea that fieldwork can be neatly divorced or ‘bracketed off’ from ‘normal’ time and space is itself a highly dubious and problematic notion” (p.26).

In view of the altering views on fieldwork, he has aptly conceptualised ‘the field’ as a ‘fluid, loosely connected set of relations, sites, events, actors, agents and experiences’
Fieldwork conducted for this doctoral work also cannot be restricted to the activity of collecting data from different categories of respondents or to the time periods when the researcher stayed with the Agarias. Before his initial period of stay with Agarias in April 2010, the researcher visited Ahmedabad and Khadaghoda between October 2009 and February 2010 to attend a seminar and a workshop on the issue of salt workers of Gujarat, conduct review of literature, collect secondary data and gain acquaintance with the stakeholders associated with the park and people debate in LRK. During the seminar, Mr. Patel also introduced the researcher to Agaria representatives and informed them that he will stay with them in the Rann. These initial meetings were very important to gain confidence of the community in view of the prevailing situation of mistrust in the area. Agaria leaders accepted the researcher as a friend and it also provided him an opportunity to understand their perspective of the debate. During this period, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the history of inland salt production and Agarias of LRK. It was also the period when the researcher familiarised himself with Gujarati alphabets and learnt basic Gujarati.

In April 2010, the researcher reached Khadaghoda to initiate the process of data collection. Staying in the office of Ganatar in Patdi, the researcher conducted his pilot interviews inside the Rann. The need to interview respondents inside the Rann made it essential for the researcher to stay with a family inside the Rann. Keeping in view the vast expanse of the Rann and the distance between two Agaria shelters inside the Rann, he had to hire a motorcycle and seek favour from a local person to guide him inside the Rann. Though almost every respondent spoke and understood Hindi, the researcher sought the assistance of his motorcycle rider during his interactions with some elders who only spoke the local dialect. The voice recorder was a major attraction for the respondents and many of them were keen to hear their voices played through the device after the interview.

The perception of the researcher by Agarias altered at different stages of the fieldwork and it influenced his interactions with the respondents. Linlay (2002) has rightly noted that research is a ‘joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship’ (p.212). As his entry into the field was facilitated by an NGO and he was seen with government officials in Ahmedabad during his initial interactions with their community
leaders, Agarias thought that the researcher had come from some organisation in Delhi desirous of collecting information on salt workers. This belief was not altered by the explanation provided by him at the outset of every interview in the Rann. The frequent enumeration exercises conducted for preparing beneficiary lists for implementing government and NGO welfare schemes in the area also gave them the impression that the researcher from Delhi was related to one such scheme. They also assumed that the presence of a man from Delhi is definitely related to another such scheme. Very soon news spread inside the Rann that a list was being prepared to be sent to Delhi and prompted several Agarias to come to the researcher and request him to include their names ‘the list’.

The local guide of the researcher advised him that he should just pacify Agarias who had come to include their names in ‘the list’ by saying that he had included their names; this would save time and not disappoint the Agarias as well. When the researcher tried to explain the need to follow ethical considerations during fieldwork, the guide patiently listened at first and then retorted, ‘...do as you like, just do not blame me if you fail to complete your work in time...’. The researcher was completely dependent on his local guide and his motorcycle inside the Rann. He had to take several detours from his route upon the request of his guide to meet the Agarias, whom he had promised to introduce to the person from Delhi. Some of these friends of the guide and a few respondents also repaired the motorcycle, which frequently developed technical problems or got punctured on the roads leading to the Rann. Every time the vehicle would break down, the guide would repeat the line, ‘an Agaria child learns to ride and repair a motorcycle before walking’ to dispel any doubts in the minds of the researcher that they would get stuck inside the Rann.

The researcher stayed inside the Rann with an Agaria family who had migrated from Khadaghoda village. The selection of this household was also determined by the relationship of his local guide with the person, as he also had to stay in that shelter. One family had to be rejected as it belonged to the relative of his estranged wife. The day of the researcher inside the Rann would begin at dawn. He would take a bicycle and go to a spot at some distance from the shelter to relieve himself in the open. After completing the morning acts of ablution, he would assist the member of the Agaria household in
raking the formed crystals in the salt pan and leave early to interview a respondent to avoid the scorching daytime heat. It was routine for the researcher to spend his day with the respondent and his family inside the Rann. After the detailed interview, he would plan his visits to the Bets and other spots inside the Rann. Evenings inside the Rann would be passed with Agaria youth and men discussing the various aspects of their lives while they played cards after toiling in the salt pans. Life inside the Rann is an unending struggle for survival. In this condition of extreme hardship, where every amenity of basic living is scarce, Agarias see any visitor to their Rann as a ray of hope, someone who might help them.

The life of the Agarias during their stay in their village is completely different from the one inside the Rann. The researcher stayed with them in Khadaghoda during the monsoon season of 2010. While lack of water makes their lives miserable inside the Rann, the overflowing streams cuts off most Agaria villages from the towns during monsoon. During this phase, the researcher went to Dhrangadhara taluka and interviewed Agarias in their villages near the Rann. He also interacted with the prawn fishers, whose lives are equally bad if not worse from that of the Agarias of LRK. The conservationists and respondents from other categories associated with the park and people debate were interviewed during this phase. His participation in the social and religious ceremonies of the community gave him the opportunity to gain important insights into the area of study.

The increased familiarity of the researcher with Agarias ensured that respondents were willing to speak on matters related to their lives and livelihoods more frankly. His presence in the village was not welcomed by all; during one group discussion in the village, bystanders showered choicest of abuses at the researcher and accused him of being an agent of Hindustan Salt Limited (HSL) in Khadaghoda. The basis of this accusation was the researcher’s visit to the HSL office for conducting interviews with the officials. Such abuses were rooted in the lingering discontent among Agarias regarding the decision of HSL to retrench its employees under the voluntary retirement scheme (VRS). The researcher also suffered from an acute rise in his blood pressure due to high exposure to salt during this phase. Following medical advice, he had to go back to Ahmedabad and restrict his field activities to the interviews of government officials,
NGO professionals and academicians in universities and research institutes working on this issue. The researcher completed his data collection in during his stay in Khadaghoda in March 2011. During this period he also visited Gandhidham to interview Agarias who had migrated to produce sea salt. He made his final visit to the villages in October 2011 to complete the gaps which had emerged after the preliminary analysis of data.

While on one hand, living with the Agarias unravelled various aspects of the debate, it also enabled the researcher to probe into his own prejudices and beliefs. Like millions of other environment-friendly urban middle class residents, the researcher was also influenced by the words in his school and college textbooks pronouncing ‘protected areas’ as the saviours of biodiversity threatened by human action. The close association with Agarias during his stay with them and the continuing correspondence afterwards, transformed his views on several issues pertaining to the park and people debate. The researcher was cautious to maintain his critical outlook and not get overwhelmed or swayed by the gestures and plight of the Agarias.

Utmost care was taken not to create any expectations in the minds of the respondents. In view of the prevailing mistrust between stakeholders, care was also taken not to fuel any feelings of animosity amongst the groups. He maintained confidentiality of the information obtained and was vigilant against revealing the information collected from one group of the respondents to the others. The wish of the respondents who did not want their interviews to be recorded and their names published was also respected. The words of the bystanders, ‘...go away with your hollow promises...', deeply impacted the researcher and raised several issues regarding research with communities, even though his local guide and the participants of the discussion asked him to ignore the comment as it was made by an alcoholic. Bronfenbrenner had said,

“The only safe way to avoid violating the principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether” (Bronfenbrenner, 1952 as cited in Fine 1993; p.367).

The researcher has taken care to respect the traditions and customs of the community and not to hurt the feelings of any respondent. He is convinced that his work is a step in the direction of reducing the miseries in the lives of Agarias and other communities caught in the park and people conflict.
Plate IIa: Fieldwork in Pictures - I

Inundated Rann during Monsoon Season

Approach Road to Khadhoda during Monsoon

Discussion with Agaria Men in Khadhoda

Discussion with Agaria Women in Khadhoda

Chapter 4
Plate IIb: Fieldwork in Pictures - II

- Agarias working in the Salt Pan
- Researcher working in the Salt Pan
- Temporary Shelter of an Agaria inside LRK
- Agarias digging a new well inside LRK
Plate IIc: Fieldwork in Pictures - III

Signboards inside the Sanctuary

Wild Asses in LRK

Wild Asses Raiding Agricultural Field

Prawn Fishing inside LRK during Monsoon

Chapter 4
On way to meet the Agarias inside LRK

Packaging of Salt in a Storage Site

Water for Travellers inside LRK

The Journey Begins where the Road Ends

Plate IIId: Fieldwork in Pictures - III