

CHAPTER II

FIELD, METHODS AND EXPERIENCES

2.1 Fieldwork

In anthropological fieldwork, an investigator goes to the field and stays with the people whom she/he wants to study. She/he observes the phenomena under study and records them systematically. It is true that all events taking place in society cannot be studied at the same time. It is also true that all phenomena are not visible to sense organ. In these circumstances, an investigator takes help of other techniques of data collection such as interview, case study, schedule, questionnaire, etc. Moreover, all techniques of data collection have some advantages and disadvantages. Hence, an investigator takes help of more than one technique, when she or he goes to collect data from the field.

I did my fieldwork among the Tangkhuls of Ukhrul town in Manipur, a northeast Indian state. Selecting my own community to do research was a deliberate decision as I have the advantage of knowing and speaking the language of my subjects; I am familiar with people that may be helpful for my research etc. I had the chance to visit the field area frequently; therefore, I did not miss any important event that took place in the field that relates to my topic. This has indeed helped me to collect enormous data. Thus I was able to work better and pursue a legitimate research.

2.2 Entry into the field

For many “entering the field is always difficult and may pose particular challenges for women because of their gender” (Wolf 1996:6). However, in my case there was a difference: unlike the other ethnographers, I did not face the problems and challenges since I belong to the community I studied. Despite, I did not go alone during the pilot study. My parents were extremely supportive; my father agreed to let my mother come along, as she did not have any other important engagement at that time. My mother was certainly not a hindrance to me, in a way it was advantageous to take her with me because she knew so many people from Ukhrul and she introduced me to them. This also enabled me to find the key informants. It was through her presence that some people got interested in my work. It was my mom again who sought me a host to spend my entire fieldwork. She even requested some of the host’s neighbours to give me company whenever needed. They were all so helpful to me throughout my fieldwork.

2.3 Selection of the field area

My research on the Impact of Christianity led to a study in Ukhrul town. This town provided me with enough opportunity to study the proposed research problem due to the following reasons. First, Tangkhuls are predominantly settled in Ukhrul town of Manipur. Second, this town is the centre of Tangkhul social, religious and political activities. And third, Christianity was introduced first among the Tangkhuls of this town. Hence the proposed town is ideal for carrying out the present study.

When I decided to work among the Tangkhuls I was in dilemma as to which village/town to select and how to select one. There are more than 200 Tangkhul villages and a town in Manipur. Beteille (1975:103) rightly pointed out the “every anthropologist knows how difficult it is to find a congenial village to live in and study”. Thinking about my convenience I was so tempted to select my village, I thus pondering for a while to find some valid reasons. But later realized that my village could not be a representative of the Tangkhuls. Eventually, in the process of selecting the field, the choice fell on Ukhul town for the various reasons mentioned above.

The trip to Ukhul was a two and half hour journey from Imphal (capital of Manipur) by bus. I did my pilot study in the month of December 2007 and then came back to Shillong for a long spell in which I did library work. After preliminary survey was made, detailed fieldwork was initiated in the month of October 2008 and last till February 2009. A pilot study helped me a lot as I met some key informants and one key informant led me to another key informant. I received a mix reception in the field. While there were people who encouraged my work there were others who simply brushed my study aside. I again went back to the field in May 2009 and ended my main fieldwork in November 2009. Besides, I had short visits to the field till I got sufficient data to complete my thesis.

2.4 Choosing a host

I played no role in the selection of the host. My parents arranged for my stay at my cousin sister and brother’s house throughout my fieldwork. The two introduced me to many important people in the town. My cousin sister works with an NGO and was an

active member of the church. She insisted on my attendance at all the functions in the town and encouraged my involvement in everything she did. She would take me on all her social visits to her church friends, neighbourhood friends and colleagues. My cousin brother who studied Theology after higher secondary was involved in Christian mission and that association also proved to be important as he was a very well respected person. I learnt things by talking to him casually and by interviewing him formally. As one of my informants he provided me with the materials of church histories and introduced me to many church leaders. I am thankful to my cousins for allowing me to be a part of the numerous events and activities such as weddings, house warming, name giving ceremony, youth activities, social-work events, community functions, and other Church related activities that I would not have done otherwise. My participation in such social activities struck a strong bond between me and the community. This enabled to collect reliable information from them.

2.5 Rapport establishment

Every ethnographer strives to establish rapport—a good, friendly working relationship based on personal contact—with the hosts (Kottak 2002). Rapport establishment is one of the important aspects of fieldwork. It helps to avoid suspicion, hostility, unfamiliarity and shyness from the people under study. Once the investigator gained their confidence, the precise information can be expected from them. Advantage

Doing fieldwork in my own community has been very advantages for me as rapport establishment was not a herculean task. In fact I had to spend only a few days in establishing rapport, thus giving some extra days for my fieldwork. In my first visit to

the field, my relation with the people was established primarily through my mother and my cousins. As they were helpful, friendly, patient and encouraging sometimes I went on my own though sometimes friends I met in the field accompanied me. I was welcomed and treated with love and respect almost everywhere in the town. There was no question of suspicious as my topic is on Christianity. In fact most of them were all so willing to help me. They treated me with love and respect. I also used to have contact with some of my informants (importantly with the key informants), which strengthen me so much in analyzing the data. I also believe that since I was staying with my cousins, whose friends' circles are immense in the town, made my introduction into the town easier.

2.6 Methodology

I used the standard anthropological methods and techniques for my fieldwork. In the field, I relied on participant and quasi-participant observation, interview, case study, and life history methods. During my initial fieldwork, participant observation was not done in the actual sense. I simply observed the events. However, observation continued at all times and I learnt many things, which might have been difficult to find through interviews. The daily activities of people were much better observed first-hand, than reported by anyone else.

During my later fieldwork, participant observation came to mean much more. It involved attending as many social functions as possible, trying my hand at agricultural activities, joining a group of locality (*tang*) youth on their social-work day, attending Sunday services at church, youth fellowships, visiting sick relatives,

celebrating Christmas, exchanging gifts, going to an annual picnic with the church youth, and lending a hand in household chores.

2.6.1 Conducting interviews

I prepared a set of questions for interview. I also prepared guidelines regarding all the aspects on which I had to focus. On most occasions, depending on the person I was interviewing, I had to frame the questions instantaneously. I had a list of questions ready in my notebook as well as in my mind. However, most of the questions generated were based on the replies of my respondents. For every formal interview I took notes and recorded voices that on most occasions I re-read, jotting down the points that I wanted to further inquire in detail.

With every interview, I learnt certain new things. Many a time I conducted unstructured interviews without my notebook. Conversations with people while walking on the road, travelling, attending a social ceremony etc. were carried out on a few occasions. I used to casually engage people, and I felt that when they talked to me as a friend, and not a researcher, they freely discussed things. This kind of interview generated data on family, marriage, people's views and beliefs etc. There were times when I learnt about intimate details without even probing. People were more at ease when I did not pose probing questions but simply listened without jotting down anything in my notebook. Thus, it was important for me to compile those information at night or any free time. There were times when I was not able to write detailed notes that very day so I would write the main ideas in the form of points and expand the ideas later. A laptop made my work much easier.

Besides interviews, genealogies helped me in bringing out a clear picture of the family structure and marriage patterns showing marriages between different localities, lineages, denominations and also tribes. They also revealed the level of education and the occupations of people in the village. However, sometimes people did not remember so many details about their families. Many a times I followed the strategy of beginning an interview by collecting a genealogy. Asking questions about all family members, their occupations and places of residence gave me a sense of understanding that led me to further questions. I frequently got a lead for further interview through these discussions. However, there were times when I was able to collect only family data.

I also collected the life histories of some key informants, who were all senior members of the society. These were important as they gave insights into the time of the British governance, the presence of foreign Christian missionaries and the consequent changes in their lives due to the change in religion and all that came with it. One thing that greatly helped me in achieving people's trust was a humble and respectful approach I had towards them. That was the reason behind the smooth sailing of my journey while I conducted in-depth interviews with some of the elderly and knowledgeable persons.

2.6.2 Observation

An observation method is also employed to have an accurate finding. It is only possible in scientific research. According to Theodorson (1969: 370), scientific method is "building of a body of scientific knowledge through observation,

experimentation, generalization and verification". Observation is one way of collecting primary data. Observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. There are two types of observation: 1. Participant observation 2. Non-participant observation.

Participant observation is when a researcher, participate in the activities of the group being observed in the same manner as its members, with or without them being aware that they are being observed. Like laboratory experiment is for natural/physical science, participant observation is for social science. Non-participant observation, on the other hand, is when a researcher, does not get involved in the activities of the group but remain a passive observer, watching and listening to its activities and drawing conclusions from this (Kumar 2011:140-141).

The study of society and social phenomena till the middle of the nineteenth century was made mostly on the basis of speculation, logic, theological thinking and rational analysis. August Comte, a French philosopher, described these methods as inadequate and insufficient in the study of social life. In 1848, he proposed *positive method* in the field of social research. He maintained that social phenomena should be studied not through logics or theological principle or metaphysical theories but rather in society itself and in the structure of social relations. Comte considered scientific method, called *positivism*, as the most appropriate tool of social research. This new methodology rejected speculation and philosophical approach and focused on gathering empirical data. This develops into *positivistic methodology* by using similar methods as employed by natural sciences. Empirical involves observation of facts or interaction with people.

Comte's positivism (that knowledge can be derived only from sensory experience) was criticized both from within and outside the positivist domain. Within positivism, a branch called *logical positivism* was developed in early twentieth century which claimed that science is both logical and also based on observable facts and that the truth of any statement lies in its verification through sensory experience" (Ahuja 2003: 17-19).

Observation enabled me to understand the problem better. To a large extent it also steered me towards collecting reliable information. In order to use this method as a method of data collection, a good rapport was developed with the respondents or key informants. This kept me away from any kind of untoward suspicion. Instead they encouraged and provided me with all the information they have. I tallied the information I collected from interview schedule, case study and literature available with the data collected through observation method whenever possible. There are again certain cases where I need not ask from the interviewee but can collect only by observing. Thus reduces the number of questions asked to the respondents and therefore saves the time of respondents' as well as mine which in turn helped me to get more willing respondents.

2.6.3 Case study

Further the present study was based on primary data collected from three generations of Christian converts. Inter-generational comparison was made to understand the vertical impact of Christianity. Case studies of native leaders viz. T. Luikham, M.K Shimray, R.S Ruichumhao, Ngashanphung Luikham, Kanrei Shaiza, Chinaochin

Shingnaisui and Vashumnao Phanitphang were taken. Key informants were (L) Ngalashingai (100), C.T Shangam (94), Thinengla Vashum Thomas (Mrs. A. Thomas) (88), S. Jangkui (88), Stephan Angkang (85), Dharma Raleng (84), Kanmila Raleng (83), E. Kahaosan (75), Ramkathing Ramsan (83), Benjamin Kashung (82), Ruichumshai Rumthao (80), and Ramkhayei Kashung (70). Young (1960: 247) describes case study, as “a comprehensive study of a social unit be that unit a person, a group, a social institution, a district or a community”. According to Calhoun (2002:59), case study is “a research method that engages in the close, detailed examination of a single example or phenomenon.” “The method of exploring and analyzing the life of a social unit/entity be it a role-incumbent (person), a family, an institution or a community, is customarily known as case study method. The aim of case study method is to locate or identify the factors that account for the behavior patterns of a given unit, and its relationship with the environment. The case data are always gathered with a view to tracing the history of the social factors and forces operative and involved in its surrounding milieu” (Walkinson 2001:257).

Plate 2.1 Some of the key informants' pictures



Plate 2.1.1 Mrs. Thinengla



Plate 2.1.2 Mrs. (L) Ngalashingai



Plate 2.1.3 Mr. Benjamin Kashung (right) & Mr. Ramkhayei Kashung (left)

2.6.4 Field diary

Study of diary has become a very important branch of Anthropology. Diary is not only essential to know the society/people under study but also to know about the anthropologist. Various things are jotted down in a field diary, such as; the various problems that one encountered in the field. How to overcome those problems? The kind of new knowledge that is generated in one's mind, what one observed, met, whom to meet and the experiences. Date and hours should be written down. This helps to see the kind of development taking place. Diary keeps memory alive throughout the life. Thus maintenance of field diary became very necessary and helpful.

2.6.5 Use of mechanical aids

Some mechanical devices like camera and voice recorders are of immense help in fieldwork. A digital voice recorder became an important device for recording case studies and other information. It enabled me to play and replay whenever needed and further it gave a minute detail. Sometimes, language alone cannot give the complete picture of phenomena or a situation. Photographs prove to be a tremendous help by presenting particular situation in frozen form. Relevant photographs were taken wherever necessary, as it is not humanly possible to visualize each and every detail in the field. Photographs were taken which could give a better insight of things studied and discussed.

2.7 Studying my own community

Studying my own community has its advantages and disadvantages. Malinowski, the father of fieldworker emphasized that a researcher should collect data through the medium of native language and researcher should learn their language before undertaking long intensive fieldwork among them. According to him, the goal of all fieldwork is to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of this world or to get inside the native skin. A failure to understand the informants' language may create myriad problems. Thus it is very important to familiarize oneself with the language of the target group. Being from the same community I did not have problem. I did not have to go over the agony of trying to grasp the actual meaning translated by the interpreter. As I belong to the same community there was no question of suspicious and I gained entry to the town without any difficulty. However drawbacks are present and I had to struggle with it. The worst hindrance that occurred during my fieldwork was that I was so tempted to take for granted many things present in the community's study and as a result I almost missed out on some vital information. When I started collecting data on Christianity, I almost took their beliefs for granted since I shared the same religious beliefs. Another big hindrance was biasness. But I used to bring myself to the right track by reminding myself that I was doing a scientific research and I went on questioning in detail and found things I had no knowledge of about my own religion.

2.8 Analysis and verification of data

In the process of collecting data, I also came across a variety of materials, some making sense while other mundane. Many a times I was confused with my gathered information. It became a hard task to gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of some data. So, in order to verify its accuracy and validity, conjugation of techniques were utilized. Behaviour was observed repeatedly at different durations in similar situation. Data were rechecked by inquiring informants and observing the consistency and individual variation. Occasionally, the same informant was asked to relate at a later data with the information given before to check the consistency of the data.