Chapter IV

Creating Methodologies for Transgression into a Closed Community

Research design is the structure of the research which helps in giving direction to throughout the research process. It keeps the research intact and show how major parts of the research work together to attain research goals. In the forthcoming paragraphs, I will discuss the methodology I have followed for my thesis.

For the present study, Parsis of Mumbai was selected. Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra is located at 18°58′30″N 72°49′33″E / 18.9750°N 72.8258°E / 18.9750; 72.8258. It lies in west coast of India and is one of the most popular cities of the world. It constitutes of seven islands which were home to fishing communities. For several centuries, city was controlled by various kingdoms (Portugese, British etc), the effect of which is seen in the city. It consists of two distinct regions: Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburban District, which form two separate districts of Mumbai. Mumbai is entertainment and commercial center of India, and is also knows as the 'financial capital of India' generating 5% of the total GDP. Mumbai is connected with all the sources of transport, air, road, rail, and sea. Mumbai has tropical wet and dry climate, with average annual temperature of 27.2 °C and average annual precipitation is 216.7 centimeters.

With a population of 13,662,885, the city includes 67.39% of Hindus, 18.56% Muslims, 5.22% Buddhists, 3.99% Jains, 0.58% Sikhs and Parsis, Jews and atheists make up rest of the population. The linguistic/ethnic demographics of Mumbai consists of 42% Maharashtrians, 19% Gujaratis, 24% North Indians and South Indians making up the rest. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumbai). Map of Mumbai is given in Map II.
Though the numbers of Parsis is negligible as compared to total population of Mumbai, but Mumbai has highest number of Parsis in India. Parsis have made great contribution in the development of Mumbai. Without philanthropic Parsis, Mumbai would not have been what it is today. Their institutions are seen all over Mumbai, which are not only helping their community but also other communities of Mumbai.

The study covered a vast range of subjects. It was important to get the perspective of people of both the genders as well as different age groups. Therefore, there was no restriction on age or gender as far as sampling was concerned. For the study I made sure that I interview adults who were capable of independent decision making. Though, the aspect of independent decision making could not be measured, but for this study I had
considered age as one of the factors. I had interviewed people who were above 18 years of age.

The **unit of study** was an individual who influenced the structure of the community. When I presented the synopsis, after the pilot study, I thought that I would interview individuals who were accepted as Parsis by the community. Therefore, I wrote, ‘*study individuals who belong to the community*’. While conducting my field research I realized that for triangulation and rich data in context with the scope of the study, it was important to interview people who were not accepted by the community as Parsis but influenced the structure of the community. Therefore I also interviewed Parsi men and women, married to non-parsis.

**Pilot study** for the present research was conducted in the months of July and August, 2006. As an important aspect of research; it was a small scale study conducted to check feasibility of the study. It helped in getting acquainted with the research area and to cross check the research design and improvising on it. It also helped in detecting the loop holes which influenced the study and deriving appropriate solutions for the same.

The foremost aim of this pilot was to build rapport and to determine strategies which would help me in getting acquainted with the community member. In Mumbai, Parsis are considered to be a reserved community, among the community members and other communities. It is believed that they did not easily mix up with people from other communities. When I started my research and talked to people about my research most of the people born and brought up in Mumbai had almost similar reaction. They laughed at me saying – “Parsis are cynical, why do you want to do research on them?” Some of them said – “forget it; they don’t mix up with other communities?” I realized that gathering data from the community would be challenging, which fascinated me more to conduct research on Parsis. After my field work, I could say that other communities were somewhat right about Parsis, but being cynical was more of a stereotype which did not stand true for all the Parsis.
From the reactions I got from my acquaintances, I realized that rapport building and access to members of the community would be one of the most challenging and crucial aspects, considering me or my acquaintances did not know any Parsi. Initially I tried to get a Paying Guest accommodation or room on rent, in Parsi colony. For a month I went to various Parsi Colonies; this turned out to be a failure. This made my work more challenging and difficult. I was not sure how to contact people. At that time I was introduced to 'Orkut', I thought to try contacting people through it. Orkut was a social networking site where people interacted with each other without constrains of time and space. Orkut turned out to be a boon for me, it became my first point of contact with the Parsis. An application provided by orkut, named, 'communities' helped me in contacting Parsis. 'Communities' are virtual communities, which consist of groups of members who have their profiles on orkut. Every 'communities' is created by an individual who is in charge of them. They can control membership in these 'communities' i.e. for some 'communities' orkut members needed moderator’s approval to join the community. When I joined ‘Parsi’ community, my request was denied three times by 'moderator'. I wrote a mail to the moderator telling him my aim to join the community. The moderator accepted me as member of the community but replied back saying that this community is only for Parsis and non-parsis are not accepted as they impure the community. This was my first interaction when I came across the idea of 'purity'. I was surprised to learn how the idea of 'purity' is taken to the virtual community. Later on I learned that he did not want any non-sense on this community. There were cases where non-parsis joined the ‘communities’ and criticized Parsis, which is why he did not allow non-parsis to join.

Some groups on Yahoo like ‘Traditional Zarathushtris’ did not allow any non-parsi to join. I am extremely grateful to the moderator who let me join the community on orkut, after knowing my objective. Without his help it would have been difficult to get acquainted to Parsis. Orkut became a great help during pilot in building rapport and knowing about the community. By studying posts on this virtual community, I got an understanding of the Parsi community in real world. I got to know controversies prevalent in the community, the division between 'reformists' and 'orthodox' and their perspectives. I was familiarized with colloquial terms, like, bawa, bawi etc. These readings also influenced ‘Aims and Objectives’ for this thesis.

Moderator – person who starts the community
Through Orkut I made many Parsi friends, who were my respondents later on. Along with providing me information, they also helped me introducing to other community members.

Along with this I also joined yahoo groups, like 'Mainstream Zoroastrians', and read comments on online media Parsi Khabar. This is a note for those who doubt the veracity and clarity of ideas presented through e-mails and controlled group, like for instance, the groups mentioned above. In such cases, it has been found that the participants often had a clear identity which I have found to be linked to their ethnic backgrounds, and they interacted throughout with me based on that identity. According to Morgan (2008: para 95) such people “negotiated goals to work towards, developed meaningful acts to reach them using the facilities provided by e-mail, and authored identified who could act in those ways.” In fact, interacting through such identities in the electronic world helped to a great extent to prepare me for interaction in the real world in face to face situations with Parsis.

During this period I also contacted some priests who helped me to collect secondary data by providing books and videos from their personal collection. As it was a well-known fact that the idea of “purity” was very strong among the Parsis, as an outsider I was not allowed to attend most ceremonies. During my pilot study I managed to acquire some videos in which religious rituals are enacted. They are especially made for students who are being training to be priests and for non-parsi researchers.

I also analyzed various books, national newspapers, Parsi newspapers, Parsi magazines, and Parsi novels. After reading the articles in various media, I got familiarized with prevalent controversies within the Parsi community. This data helped me improvising on ‘Aims and Objectives’ for this study. Before the pilot, I was considering to explore ‘rites de passage’ as major part of this research. After the pilot I realized that many books were written on prescribed rites and customs by various Parsi and non-parsi scholars. Then I decided to modify my 'Aims and Objectives' and converted them to their present form.

During the Pilot, I also discovered the divide between members of the community, as 'traditionalist' and modernist'. People generally referred to them as 'Orthodox' and 'reformists'; for the present study I would use these terms. The difference between the
two groups is discussed in detail in later part of the thesis. From the secondary research I discovered that the difference in these two groups is in their perspective.

**Sampling** is a process by which the researcher selects a unit of population the researcher wishes to study, so that the sample is representative of the population under study. As Parsi community is spread all over Mumbai, it was important to select a sampling method which covered all the major Parsi colonies. As an outsider it was difficult to get access to Parsis staying in colonies because Parsis were uncomfortable talking to strangers. Parsi community was the most reputed community in Mumbai due to contributions made by their ancestors. Parsis tried to maintain that reputation in front of other communities. In past few years with their shattered reputation due to newspapers reports, they had become closed community and did not talk much to strangers. Therefore, for the present study, convenient/accidental sampling was followed by snowball sampling.

For the present study initially convenient/accidental sampling was done through a social networking site, ‘Orkut’. ‘Orkut’ helped me build rapport among members who were active on community. After seeing my interest in the community, some asked me the question - "Do you have a Parsi boyfriend?". I used to constantly reply to ‘topics’ on virtual community which made me familiar among members and also helped in increasing my friends circle. I also exchanged small talks personally with the members. Some people were apprehensive talking to me but some comfortably shared their views.

This was followed by snowball sampling; once the existing subjects were comfortable with me, I personally met them. They further helped me to recruit other subjects from their acquaintances. These subjects were generally not located in one specific area; ‘Orkut’ gave me the opportunity to contact participants who were living in various pockets of Mumbai, within and outside Parsi colonies. My friends from Mumbai also helped me introducing me to their Parsi friends. These introductions helped me getting participants and were used for snow-ball sampling for getting more participants.

During the Field work, I realized that a common Parsi individual doesn't know much about religion. They could talk about their everyday rituals and practice but the
reason/meaning behind those rituals and practices were lost. Therefore, to understand the community holistically, it was important to interview people from different professions. E.g. A common Parsi could not tell the difference between a “Dhansar” and “Dhansak”. I explored the difference while interviewing a chef. She explained me the difference when we were discussing auspicious and inauspicious food for ceremonies. I then decided to interview people from different professions who would be important for the study like - chef's, priests, marriage counselors and trustees of Parsi Panchayat.

I have also contacted people from yellow pages, which came as a supplement of a Parsi magazine, ‘Parsiana’. I generally got decent response from people most of the times. After asking many questions some Parsis preferred to talk but some politely refused to meet.

In total, I conducted 76 interviews for this study, in which 45 were males and 31 females. These interviews consisted of both small and long interviews.

During my synopsis submission I was asked how am I going to identify an individual as a Parsi. The concern was, fake identity, someone might fake to be a Parsi. I was asked to include criteria to identify a person as Parsi. The criteria are as follows:

- Their names
- Knowledge of religious practices like kusti, navjot, nahan, jashan, etc.

Though the above criterion was important but with snowball sampling, which was done by introduction of person through a Parsi member. During the research I did not come across any person who would fake to be a Parsi. Out here it is important to understand that during an interview, I was not giving any compensation to the participants. Though I paid the restaurant bills most of the times, but that was not compensation. People met me because they wanted to share their thoughts on religion. Many times my introduction was through a relative or friend, so I never had any doubts regarding their identity. My rapport with the participants on orkut helped me convince them to participate in the study. If we consider a scenario in a Metropolitan city like Mumbai, where people do not have time for their families or themselves - Why will anyone take out time to fake as a Parsi and that too without any monetary benefit? Moreover, we need to understand that
Anthropological research is based on rapport establishment. In that scenario, there is no chance that anyone would fake as a Parsi or direct one to a non-parsi individual. Identifying an individual as a community member doesn't come into question in this situation. In case this concern came from previous studies, then it is of major concern. It is important to identify the problem and device a research methodology to combat that problem.

Credible data is the most important part of social research and collecting credible data is a challenging task. There were many issues and complexities associated with any one particular method of data collection. Therefore, various methods were devised to acquire credible data for this research. The very first step in collecting data is access, whether it was written records, videos, or interviews. Without access, obtaining credible data becomes impossible.

This research started with collection of secondary data through books, papers, websites, and news. Content analysis of secondary data was done which led the foundation of this research, by aiding in framing of 'Aims and Objectives'. The next step was the collection of primary data which was the soul of this research. Considering the study was done in Mumbai, where Parsis were spread across the city, various anthropological methods of data collection were used. These methods were also modified to some extent to get credible data.

My field work was divided into two phases. The first phase was the 'exploration phase' and the second one, 'validation phase'. Each method was stated hereunder with its importance in research.

The first step would be collecting genealogies. Genealogy as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary was "a line of descent traced continuously from an ancestor". Genealogy was very important in establishing rapport with the participant. It was a quick method of data collection which would help in figuring out the unsaid facts about the family which helped in gathering data during the interview and later helped in analysis.
While taking the genealogy, many Parsis were uncomfortable talking about their family members and refused to talk about it. Some of them asked me not to disclose the information. To keep their identity confidential, I am not including genealogies in this thesis but have used them for data analysis.

**Interview** could be defined as “a method of data collection that involves researchers asking respondents basically open ended questions” (O’Leary, 2004: 162). Interviews could range from fixed to free, like structured, semi-structured, unstructured, formal, informal, face-to-face, and group. The present study I opted for informal, unstructured, and face-to-face interviews because an informal interview helped in establishing rapport, gain trust, and created an environment which was conducive to open and honest communication. Face-to-face and unstructured methods helped me to pursue interviews in conversational style so that questions were answered in order natural to flow of conversation and the interviewee would be at an ease to express his or her thoughts without any preconceptions caused through a performa-based approach or by giving choices.

The interview process demanded a high level of engagements with participant. In an interview, the researcher is reliant on the interviewee to provide honest and open answers. People want to be liked, want to maintain a sense of dignity, at the same time they want to protect some level of privacy. If respondents felt tested, judged, ashamed or offended, or differential or awestruck, gathering credible data is far from assured. The interviews mostly happened in English language. Parsis who were introduced through friend met me at their home; Parsis who were introduced through other means met me at public place, mostly coffee shop. Old people were more comfortable to call me at home as compared to younger generation. Younger males were not comfortable to introduce me to their families because I am a non-parsi, and they might have to answer unexpected questions from their parents.

As I was interviewing different people across the city, I met most of the participants once. Most interviews went on for 1-1.5 hours and sometimes more than that, depending on the information the participant provided. For comfort of the participant, sometimes I
also met participant more than once because the interview would last more than 1.5 hours and it was not possible to gather data at one time. Even in cases of conflict, I met the participant twice – first before the conflict and secondly after it. Example, I met one of the priests excommunicated before and after excommunication.

In the case when the researchers met the participant only once, rapport establishment became one of the most crucial parts. It became important to gather credible data and other contacts from the participants. Establishing rapport was important, especially at the beginning of the interview to make the participants comfortable and get credible data. It should also continue throughout the interview, till the interview ends. At any point of time participant should not feel biased, judged or offended. It was very important for me to brief the participants about the aim of the research. I always started with my introduction and the purpose of the interview. At times when I felt the participant was not too assured, they thought that I am a journalist. In such cases I showed them the letter from Panjab University which stated that I was a research scholar. This helped me gain trust. I also mentioned that there might be some issues which they might think would offend me and not tell me. I told them that I am a student of Anthropology, which means that we were not offended by their views. They could tell me whatever they feel. I also gave examples, like, "some Parsis do not talk why I can't enter fire temple because I am impure. You can tell me things like these. I understand and respect your religion and the idea of purity". This made the participants more comfortable and they talked to me without hesitation of mine being from other religion. I also told them that during the discussion, "I will ask different some stupid questions asking details about common things because I am a non-parsi. These questions might annoy you but please be patient".

To make the participant comfortable I told them that in case they did not want to answer anything they could tell me and I would not discuss that issue with them. During the interview, most of the participants were comfortable talking about their view points; some told me that they didn’t want to talk about certain issue. I never probed on those areas with the participants. Some participants refused to talk about their extended family and some said that they didn’t know much about it. So I stopped asking people about her families.
I also told participants that whatever was being discussed in this session won’t be used anywhere other than research. Their names and identities won’t be used anywhere. I maintained this throughout my field work and documentation. During field work, I was often asked what someone else, especially acquaintance, said. I politely refused to disclose identity. This also helped in building trust among those people and they talked openly to me. Even during documentation, I have changed the names. I have not disclosed the identity of any individual, throughout the research.
As I was also recoding the sessions, it was important to make participants feel comfortable. I told them the purpose of recording the session. It was for my reference because I won't be able to write all the things we talked about and after going back home, I would forget most of it. I assured them that their identity and these tapes wouldn’t be used for any purpose other than the analysis of my research work. Some participants felt uncomfortable with the recorder and told me not to use it. Some of them told me to switch off the recorder while discussing some controversial issues. I always made sure that the participant was comfortable while talking to me, so I switched off the recorder whenever they wanted me to. At the end of every interview I also switched off the recorder and engaged participants in small conversations. During these conversations some participants talked about issues they didn’t talk about when the recorder was switched on.

I followed a funnel structure during interview. I asked factual and generic question at the start of the interview. Later on towards the end, when I realized that participant was getting more and more comfortable talking to me I talked about the controversial issues. This technique had two benefits. First, when the participants talk about facts for almost half an hour, they start trusting the researcher. Talking about controversial issues at the end of the interview did not annoy the participant and they gave candid answers as opposed to politically correct answers. Secondly, if the researcher started with controversial issues at the start of interview, it might offend the participant. The participant might not talk about other issues comfortably. Asking sensitive topics at the start of the interview might affect quality of other important factual data as well. However, for using this method researcher made sure that the participant trusted the researcher. One way of testing trust of participant on the researcher could be done by asking some conflicting/controversial questions to the participants which were not highly controversial. E.g. "Why non-parsis cannot enter the fire temple?" If the participant answered the questions comfortably, researchers should continue asking other questions.

When I talked about these controversial issues, I realized that some participants were hesitant talking about themselves. So I framed the questions in a manner in which they had to talk about what other was doing. It was obvious that they were more comfortable talking about others than themselves. So I started questioning with reference to other
people. E.g. "What kind of restrictions have you seen around you when non-parsis women become part of family?"

Along with funnel shaped structure I also followed some basic fundamentals of an interview. I never asked leading questions or two questions at a time. Along with these techniques, the technique which I used to gather credible data was 'probing'. Probing meant, asking detailed questions and with Parsis probing played a crucial role. Firstly, it was especially helpful in my situation because I was not allowed to witness many Parsi rituals and ceremonies. Therefore, talking to people in depth about these ceremonies by asking the most basic and simple questions, helped me gather data. Probing was also based on reviewing photographs and videos of the ceremonies that were taken by participants and asked questions based on those photographs and videos. Secondly, Parsis were familiar with western and Indian cultural context. When they explain an event, they tend to explain it in context of the researcher. For example, when I started talking about jashan, most said – 'it is like your havan'. I did not stop there but asked questions in detail. The same jashan is explained as 'Thanksgiving' by Luhrmann in her book 'The good Parsi' (Luhrmann: 1996: 37). Thirdly, it was very crucial that the participants and researcher had same understanding of subject in question. Therefore, probing was a very powerful tool in such situations. It helped in avoiding any kind of assumptions or interpretations and also helped in understanding the topic.

As a researcher it was important that after an interview, the participant felt good at the end of the interview. I always tried to maintain this by my body language. I tried to keep my gestures which made me look interested in whatever the participant was talking about. There were times when the participants told me things to which I totally disagreed with, but I always maintained an amiable body language and never argued with participant. If the participant asked my views on certain method, I told them what I really felt but apologized first that they do not match with their views.

During every interview I carried research guide which had a list of 'Focus areas'. Focus areas were the topics I wanted to talk about during the interview. For this research I had to cover vast range of subject matters. I didn’t explore each and every topic in detail from every individual. Depending on the profession and political view, questions were framed
e.g. priests did not know much about the ceremonies like panchmasyu, agharni etc. I talked to them about the religious philosophy, prayers, etc. While interviewing young mothers I concentrated more on rituals during pregnancy and child birth. From people who mentioned death had happened in the family, I talked more on death ceremonies. Not many people knew about Kshnoom, I talked about kshnoom from the people who knew about it. Some topics, like, daily prayers, Agyari visit, prayer routine, identity, conversion, inter-community marriages, cremation etc were talked about with every participant.

In the 'exploration phase', I was in exploration mode. It was a learning experience and I explored the daily practices and practices around 'rites de passage' in detail. In that phase I created a teacher-pupil relationship with my participants. At the beginning of the interview I told them that I being an outsider I could not witness the rituals and ceremonies and requested them to tell me everything in detail. Participants were very helpful telling me all the facts in minutest of details. I often asked, 'what', 'when' 'where' 'why' and 'how' questions from the participants. Some of the questions did sound stupid to them but they understood my problem and helped me greatly in understanding the ceremonies and rituals. After each interview I came back and typed the interviews. Learning’s from previous interview were taken to the next interview. After a few times, I also started giving them scenarios and exploring how things would change in different situations. E.g. "If navjote is not done on fixed day, what happens?"

I learned that participants were not too open criticizing the community. In direct questions like, "What do you think is not very good aspects of the community?", I always got the response - "nothing, my community is very good". Then I started to ask them the question, "What are the three things you would like to change in the community". With this question many participants openly talked about the problems in the community and the way they would like to see change. This question was asked towards the end of the interview. This often led to dissatisfaction with the community practices, controversies regarding cremation, inter-religious marriages etc. This also led to another level of discussion with the participants. This Phase ended with first cut of documentation.
After the documentation I intended to conduct validation phase, in which I wanted to validate my research findings. Exploration phase gave me enough data on ‘rites de passage’ but less on current issues. In the validation phase I concentrated on the current controversial issues. Unlike exploration phase, where I created a teacher-pupil discussion, in this phase, it was more like peer-peer discussion. I told the participants that this was validation phase and I wanted to understand their perspective. I didn’t wait for the participants to tell me the controversial issues, but asked them directly what they thought about it. I engaged them in discussion but made sure that I don’t offend the participants.

During the exploration phase I realized that more or less participants told me the things which were supposed to happen, not the way they actually happened. In validation phase I started framing the question in different format, to combat this issue. Whenever I thought this thing was happening, I used to ask, “But considering the practical situation, how are you able to manage?” After this question, many people told me the actual situation. E.g. The times they skipped prayers, kusti, etc. Similarly, some people talked about how others practiced religion, then I asked - "What about you, how do you do it?” After this question they talked about their experience.

Observation would help in gathering credible data. Observation can be defined as, “a systematic method of data collection that relies on a researcher’s ability to gather data through his or her senses” (O’Leary, 2004: 170). The major obstacle in the quest for credible data through observation was the way in which biases, interests, experiences, and expectations pictured what was being observed. Non-participant, overt, and unstructured methods of observation were used because as an outsider it is impossible to do participant observation of Parsi community. Though observation was very important tool but in this research it did not play a major role. I was allowed to observe some ceremonies from far off, e.g. I observed marriage and navjote from a distance because as a non-pars I could not go on the stage to observe them. Though observation of food, language usage, clothes, type of houses etc were also important as they made part of this thesis. I also attended public gatherings like religious classes, seminars and public rallies, which helped in gathering observational data.
Participants often forget details about the ritual they are asked to explain. To solve this problem, I observed ceremonies (marriage, navjote, nahan, jashan, tilli, ashu mishu) and made a mental note of these ceremonies. I documented these notes and used them for probing during the interview.

The case study method involves an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event, i.e., a case. They provided a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. Case studies were collected on the practices of everyday life and were documented. For case studies, I had changed the names of participants to maintain identity. Despite of this there might be people in the community who have similar names as the names I had changed; any resemblance to such person is purely coincidence.

Visual Anthropology was also used as of the method of data collection. Being a non-parsi I was not allowed to view the rituals and ceremonies of the Parsis. As a result I was unable to do any checks on the data from primary sources. However, it was possible to get some videos and photographs of such rituals and ceremonies being conducted. Further, it was also possible to ask people details relating to these rituals. Through such methods an indirect route was selected to collect primary data. This also would raise the importance of new sources of interactive media (like CDs and the Internet) through which data collection may be facilitated.

From the conversations I enjoyed, to the problem I faced, field was a fascinating experience. In this section I will talk about my learning’s and problems encountered.

Research was a great learning experience; right from rapport establishment to field work to documentation, I came across challenging circumstances and found out solutions for the same.

The foremost aspect of the interview was rapport establishment. It was one of the most challenging tasks. Being a closed community and their shattered reputation in media,
Parsis were apprehensive talking to strangers, which made my task difficult. Wherever I went, people thought that I am a journalist and were apprehensive talking to me, especially when it came to sensitive issues like conversions, inter-religious marriage etc. Finding a solution through Internet, using orkut, was the biggest learning as this method solved two purposes. Firstly, establishing rapport, my continuous interaction made Parsis made me familiar among them. Secondly, it also helped in convenient and further snowball sampling. I also got familiarized with colloquial terminology and controversies prevalent in the community. Attending public gatherings like religious classes, seminars, public rallies etc helped in rapport establishment. It helped me in two ways, firstly community members got familiar with me, and a few agreed to be part of my study. Secondly, I gathered primary and secondary data in form of notes from lectures, pamphlets, and discussion during lectures.

Field etiquette also played an important role in rapport establishment. During the pilot study I realized that Parsis welcomed me more when I wore western clothes. I maintained this dressing code throughout the interviews. I always dressed in western attire whenever I went for interviews, but always wore Indian attire while attending ceremonies of navjote and marriage.

Another big learning from the field work was honing my interview skills. It was very evident that I would not be allowed to observe rites and ceremonies, which made interviews my primary source of data collection. Therefore it was very crucial to get credible data through interviews. After coming back from each interview, I analyzed my interview and figured out different ways I could gather maximum information. Throughout the research I experimented with interview methods and carried the methods which worked best. The small modifications during interview, which I have already mentioned, made a huge difference in data gathering. I could analyze the difference in my first and following interviews.

As a good anthropologist, I tried learning Gujarati. I did learn the basics; I could understand the language to some extent but could not speak it. In my encounters with Parsis, I realized that most of them were comfortable talking in English. No interview
happened in Gujarati; therefore I gave up learning the language. The only place where my language understanding skills came to use, were the Parsi social gatherings, where I could understand what people were talking about.

I am a Punjabi Hindu, who never came in contact with any Parsis in my life. It was important for me to get flavor of Parsi life, beyond field work. Over the duration of field work, I got flavor of Parsi life by watching movies and reading novels on Parsis by Parsi authors. The novels I read were – *Tales from Firozsha Bang* (Mistry; 1987), *A Fine Balance* (Mistry; 1996), *Such a Long Journey* (Mistry; 1991), *Family Matters* (Mistry; 2002) and *Pervez* (Pestonji; 2003). Movies I watched were – *Being Cyrus*, *Khatta Meetha*, *Little Zizou*. These novels and movies gave me flavor of Parsi life and also helped me in getting familiar with colloquial terms, e.g. I came across the term *loban* in *Family Matters*, and the very first novel I read before starting field work. Along with these movies, I watched some videos on Google, like, *Bedpan*, *Dadar Ormaj*, *Maney Jaldi Bolaavo*, *Non-Parsi* and *Parsi Wada, Tarapore - Present Day* (Google Videos; 2006: (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e)). These videos were made on Parsis by Parsi director. All these things, novels, movies, and videos helped me get flavor of Parsi way of life.

Like any other researcher, along with the leanings, I also faced many challenges and issues during the field work. As an Anthropologist, it was my responsibility to overcome those issues and get credible data. The foremost challenge was to get participants. In a place like Mumbai, where people didn’t have much of personal time, it was difficult to find people who would give me time for an interview. Therefore, I used various ways to find participants. It became more of a challenge as the study was time bound, and I had to cover many aspects in this limited time frame.

The second most crucial issue I faced was with snowball sampling. When participants understood that I wanted to talk about religion, they often directed me to a priest. Later I started explaining them that it was about day-to-day religion in which I need perspective of common Parsi, and not only from priests.
Being single and staying alone in Mumbai I also faced issue of flirtation from men. Some of them tried to be over friendly. There was always a moral war which I fought, to gather data I need to be friends with Parsis, but where do I draw the line? To solve this issue I carried the identity of 'committed' with me. Though it did solve the issue to some extent but not always, in those cases I did not interact with those individuals.

Parsi food habits were different from my food habits. Whenever I went for some Parsi party/function, there was ample non-vegetarian food, so I had to request the host to prepare some vegetarian food. Moreover, Parsis alcoholic drinks are part of most parties, which I was offered most of the times. As I was there to observe people and on work it was not a good idea. I generally ended up taking some wine and made sure I never finished my glass till the drinking session got over, so that no one asks me for refill.

All the Parsi parties I attended happened at night and in south Mumbai which is almost 1 hour travel by train from my house. This created minor security issues. As I always wore western clothes, so coming back at night I faced eve teasing issues. I avoided it by taking private transport and getting down at train stations which were expected to be crowded at night.

**Research ethics** are very important as an Anthropologist. It is responsibility of an Anthropologist to respect the culture they intend to study. I respected all the restrictions I was expected to observe as a non-parsi. For example, when in the field, I respected the 'purity' concerns of the participants. During one of the interviews with a priest, I found out that if they shake hands with anyone, they have to do their kasti again, especially if the person is of opposite gender. After this information, I refrained myself from handshakes, especially with priests.

Women are considered spiritually impure during their menstrual cycle. Many Parsis do not come in contact with women during this period. I paid due respect to that aspect of culture, I did not conduct any interviews during my menstrual cycle. Whenever required, I canceled interviews when I was on my menstrual cycle. This also helped me in rapport establishment.
I never wore black color clothes when I learned that black is considered inauspicious. During the interviews, sometimes people used to ask me responses from known person. I always smiled and told them that due to research ethics, I can't disclose that information. This also helped in gaining trust of participants.

As it is a small community, most people know each other. Some Parsis were highly critical about their identity; they did not want to disclose their identity. To maintain their identity, I have used pseudo-names throughout the documentation of this research.

Interesting thing during research which happened was my identity which was mocked on by my friends. All my friends started calling me 'Parsi'. People wished me on 'Navroz'. If there was any news on Parsis of Mumbai I got to know the news from my friends even before opening my newspapers. People often asked me questions regarding Parsis, especially on cremation issues because I knew more than some of my Parsi friends. My Parsi friends often directed people to me for religious queries they had. Strangely on my way to interviews sometimes Parsis and non-parsis mistook me for a Parsi.

In the above paragraphs I have talked about my field experience. After collecting field data, documentation and analysis were equally challenging aspects. Initial documentation started with writing introduction and history of Parsis. Writing introduction was still easier because I talked about different theories. Writing 'Zoroastrianism and History of Parsis' was extremely challenging. Being one of the oldest religions, written text on Zoroastrianism was enormous. Documenting each and every aspect of religion was not possible and not required considering the scope of this study. Therefore, I have concisely documented the aspects which were relevant for this study. The aim of this documentation was to make the reader understand basic tenets of Zoroastrianism and history of Parsis. This would be foundation of religion and community and would help the reader easily comprehend 'Ethnography'.

Documenting 'Review of Literature' was again an easy task. I had reviewed papers and books, relevant for the study. Though work was done on other social aspects of Parsis but
I had not documented those because they were not relevant for this study, e.g. I have not talked about Parsi theater, charity, etc. I had also added articles from magazines and newspapers in the review. It was important because I was discussing contemporary issues in 'Aims and Objectives'. Therefore, it was important to understand perspectives of contemporary writings on Parsis.

Next is the soul of the study, i.e. 'Ethnography'. For this chapter and proceeding chapters, I will say that analysis and documentation went hand in hand. Both documentation and analysis went through number of iterations at various levels. First form of data documentation and analysis were the transcripts of interviews taken. Analysis at this level was conducted at budding stage. While documenting every recording, I analyzed every recording and transcript to find out loop holes. This helped me introspecting and improving on interview skills. Moreover, I also analyzed which aspects were to be discussed in detail, where was the data missing, etc. These learning’s were carried to the next interview.

The second level of analysis was done after collecting data from the field. The transcripts of interviews were analyzed using cluster analysis method. As mentioned earlier, I had a list of ‘Focus areas’ during the interviews. Data relevant to those ‘Focus areas’ went under them, e.g. everything related to navjote, was placed under the header ‘navjote’. This data was later subdivided and groups were created of similar data, which were given appropriate header. Data which did not come under any predefined header was scanned several times. Groups of similar data were created and appropriate headers were given to them. Though other methods of analysis, like Discourse analysis, Content Analysis, Narrative Analysis etc could be used, this may result in different analysis. But for the present study I have used cluster analysis because this was one of the most appropriate methods. Cluster analysis is a method where similar set of data is grouped into clusters or sub-sets, so that the cluster makes sense.

As Parsis are highly educated communities, most of them have their own perspective on various controversial topics. The data documentation and analysis is based on the interviews conducted.
After analyzing the interview transcripts, documentation was done. While documentation I faced challenges at various level. For me the most crucial aspect was that I wanted to document the data as understood by community members and me as a researcher. That is the reason I have used simple English language so that every reader understands the content in similar manner with minimum differentiation in individual interpretations of the text. Moreover, I had only documented data gathered from various data gathering methods, without putting in my thoughts because I wanted to avoid any interpretation and assumption at this level. Moreover, there were number of repetitions happening at various places and were important for comprehension of reader. I had tried to avoid those repetitions as much as possible but some of them were unavoidable because they were appropriate for that context.

As an Anthropologist, it was my duty to document findings in appropriate manner. I think it was my responsibility to document the findings in such manner, so that it does not hamper image of the community. Some of the points sounded very negative, e.g. "Parsis think others are impure therefore cannot enter Fire Temple". This is where probing helped; I backed up such statements with data I got from probing; to make the reader understand reason behind such behavior.

The third level of analysis happened, when I wrote the chapter 'Analysis'. This was once again iterative and progressive process. This was the most seductive phase in the study as it changed my thought process. I had based this analysis on data I gathered from the field, without comparing the data with other studies. I have used the theory "Social Construction of Reality" because while documenting 'Ethnography' I understood from the data that this theory was most appropriate. Probably if we analyze this data from perspective of any other theory, we might end up in different conclusion.

As mentioned in the 'Sampling' section, I modified the 'Aims and Objectives' because lot of research was done on 'Rites de passage'. Therefore during documentation I had written the process followed while Parsis conduct 'Rites de passage', without going into details of meanings of events, other than the events important for 'Aims and Objectives. For example, I had given details of marriage and death ceremonies because they were crucial part of analysis. Moreover, I had discussed other aspects of practiced religion in detail,
which was different from prescribed religion because they were the most powerful tools in analyzing religion from perspective of this theory. The changes which happened in everyday life influenced the community, which I have discussed in proceeding chapters. Therefore, it was not wrong to say that for the present study, the idea of 'Everyday life' had come very distinctively in case of Parsis and most appropriate to use.

At last, I will talk about the present chapter, which was also written with lot of effort and contemplation. As the field work and documentation took a period of almost three years, I did not want to miss important aspects of this study. Moreover, the research was in Metropolitan, where researcher faces different challenges, therefore documenting methods of data collection in comprehensive manner was extremely crucial.