

Chapter 21

Researcher Positionality in Qualitative Research With a Reflexive Dive With the Santals: A Dissertation Case Report

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ABSTRACT

This case report presents the experiences through a PhD thesis and highlights the researcher's positionality. The researcher's positionality and reflexivity were interconnected to accomplish an ethnographic study with the Santals of Bangladesh. Against this backdrop, a qualitative research design was utilized that involved participant observation, a type of qualitative approach for data collection from the Santals hamlet of northern Bangladesh. One component of the methodology demonstrated how the researcher is embedded with the target population and illustrates the embedded context via a lengthy involvement prior to the qualitative research to demonstrate the use of reflexivity and positionality.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the experiences of qualitative dissertation research through the author's engagement with the Santals of Bangladesh. It offers an anthropological and genealogical account of customary law and community development (Roy,

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2024a). Particularly, the chapter offers the experiences of how the participants came to be constituted over time in a community to govern itself. To understand the community's self-control or management [now self-determination], here needs to clarify the researcher's positionality to comprehend the research reflection in society. As a researcher, England, in his book, mentioned that "research is a process, not just a product" (England, 1994, p. 82).

Clarifying the researcher's positionality in the qualitative process is vital to acknowledge and locate the views, values, and beliefs about the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As an outsider, I need to comprehend Santals' community activities, community development perception, and customary law changes from my experiences. Against this backdrop, fieldwork is crucial to anthropology; some term it "a rite of passage" essential to becoming an anthropologist (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992/1997, p. 16). This statement leads here to explain the researcher's positionality for understanding the significance of research in the field; we can cite, "---- anthropologists have sought to understand the diverse part played by women and men across societies; they have also sought to consider the positionality of researchers themselves in the field." (McGee & Warms, 2013, p. 260).

This dissertation study was based on an ethnographical approach. I began my fieldwork at Birganj Upazilla of Dinajpur as an outsider in the Santals community to understand and unlock their native cultural codes like customary law in the community (Roy, 2024a). In this study, I was 'towards [outsider]' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017) depending on the participants' observation of their life settings. Malinowski directed this in this sense, saying that— [researcher] should obey the recommendations of their tribal [indigenous] code without comprehending them (1922). In my fieldwork— the research location became a primary mobility method in this study. In particular, this portion considers my reflexivity, which affected my social position through interactions with field informants and, in turn, the gathering and analysis of data. However, I stayed in a tiny guest house close to the Santals community— an ethnically and politically diverse group of people and organizations that helped to be an insider within the community. Of course, during the research, I focused on their customary law practices and development activities, holding the different views, values, beliefs, and knowledge from the mainstream community (Manohar et al., 2017). In the Santals' hamlet, I used several data collection methods, including in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and participant observations. However, the study followed the Ethnographic method to collect the data through participant observation and analysis of the data on the thematic processes (Holmes, 2020; Martin et al., 2022). Although 60 were crucial informants, I talked more than that while gossiping in the tea stall, village market, and the agri field sitting on the grass. This strategy helps me come closer to them and obtain their faith. During my frequent stay in the community, I participated in their local programs and even

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