'When Stepping out of the Homes was impossible'- Recalling Fieldwork Experience During the times of pandemic

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Abstract
The value-free nature of anthropological tradition enables us to put up a lens that guides our intersubjectivity even in the trying times of the COVID-19, wherein this paper is a reflexive take on how the ethnographers set on a journey to the field, trysting with some closed yet open doors in order to study the patterns of behaviors associated towards Mass Drug Administration program against Lymphatic Filariasis in Varanasi and Chitrakoot districts of Uttar Pradesh. The diversity that explicitly played out even with a single stimulus, that was COVID- 19, is impeccably reported in this excerpt from the experience of working in the field with modified form. The rapid group ethnographic approach has been discussed in light of how imperative it became during the steady pandemic. It's premise of iterative discussions and a team signaling commonness in its approach rendered a new take on how ethnography can be carried out efficiently during the pandemic.

Key words: Ethnography, rapid ethnography, fieldwork, Covid-19, lymphatic filariasis

Introduction

It was August 2020, when the immediate call for ethnographers, who were ready to work during the lockdown amidst COVID-19 pandemic, took us straight to the field in the lands of Varanasi and Chitrakoot to carry out research running against its time. Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), a neglected non-tropical disease, but one of the prime drivers of morbidity in major states of India like Uttar Pradesh, had us calling. The government of India (GOI) had launched a Mass Drug Administration (MDA) program for elimination of LF in the months of February and March of 2020, locally known as dawa vittran for haathi paon (elephantiasis) with beaming coverage rates yet when the compliance rate came up it baffled all. What was it that stopped people from consuming the medicines that were coming at their doorsteps through accredited social health activists (ASHA) and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANM), that the people were used to seeing

every day? An immediate call was set up to understand the reasons and causes of non-compliance, timely before the commencement of the next MDA program. A study was proposed in collaboration with University of Washington, PATH and Banaras Hindu University along with the support from the government of Uttar Pradesh. The study, of which rapid ethnography was a major tenet, was designed to begin from the end of March as the MDA program was just completed, so that the main cause and reasons of non-compliance could be understood more effectively as for the people it would be easy to recall and state their perceptions towards the drugs and compliance.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and nationwide lockdown, the study was put on hold and it took off in the 1st week of August, the COVID was at its peak, states were relaxing the strict lockdown rules to get back to the routine as before. The study was composed of an ethnographic account and needed a group of ethnographers to go in the field, talk to the people and understand their attitudes and perspectives towards LF and MDA. The ethnographers who were willing to work and go out in the field were appointed. As it was a rapid group ethnography, everything was pre-planned and designated meticulously in the manual handed out to everyone, for which training was a mandatory aspect to lend everyone ample awareness about what LF was, it's manifestation and etiology, along with quicker versions of the ethnographic techniques that had to be used in the given frame of time.

A rapid group ethnography is a team-based take on data collection and analysis, where instead of a single anthropologist, a group of people set out on the field to apply ethnography on a specific problem with similar aims and desired outcomes. This team in this approach was referred to as 'community ethnographers', who had in-depth local knowledge and followed the team-based pursuit of gathering data and doing the analysis. It was an iterative approach where the biweekly analysis sessions were held in order to reflect upon the findings and get back to the field and continue with the data collection. Through its team-based strategy this approach catered to pace up the reach and boundary of the ethnographers in a limited time frame. With a bigger geographical reach, the approach facilitated with sending the teams out to work on the same problems in different localities of the selected area in order to understand the deeper nuances and manifestations of non-compliance to MDA in various diverse sections of the society. With putting in place the multiple methods like participatory mapping, transect walks, case interviews, key informant interviews, short surveys and mini-interviews, the data was itself following the pursuit of triangulation, wherein with daily set targets for the teams to be achieved weekly, enabled a larger discretion into the findings which were further enhanced during the group analysis sessions. This approach provided facilitators in the form of senior scientist, field coordinator and research assistant, who all worked simultaneously in the stipulated time period over discretion during analysis, monitoring the fieldwork and writing reports. The reports were all sent on a weekly basis, so that none of the points were missed, before the final rendition into the cumulative ethnography. With all hands on the deck, the pace of the work smoothened with all the support set in one direction. Although the approach sounds ambitious, but with clear explanations and meticulous training, along with regular group analysis of the field notes that were the expanded notes based on the individual interpretation of the ethnographer, it came out symphonically. A sufficient time to reflect upon the findings and full dedication upon the work assigned by the group, made this ethnography rapid. A clear limitation of the method came across as the initial ice breaking within the team itself, which was overcome sooner and everyone equally departed support and grit for the ethnographic completion. The limited time frame and the importance of the study had to be kept in mind all the time to swiftly act as a channel for the rapid group ethnographic approach to yield the desired outcomes. It is interesting to reveal that the study had been originally designed to follow the rapid group ethnographic approach, yet COVID-19 struck in between and this approach proved as a blessing in disguise, in the times of this steady pandemic, where all of us came to each other's support, filling spaces for each other and with the social actuality of our human nature, fulfilling this together. This ethnographic approach thus catered to the basic social nature of the human beings, where 'group' and 'we-ness' are pursuits of everyday life and rapid is what, all desire in all what they do.

Methodology

This investigation is based upon the analysis of the group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted after the completion of data collection from both the districts in order to evaluate their fieldwork experience during the pandemic. The group discussions were conducted among the six fieldworkers, field coordinator, research assistant and the senior scientist. The discussions were moderated by the senior scientist and transcribed by the research assistant. The fieldworkers and the field coordinator were asked to add their personal reflections, stories, case studies and detailed explanations of their experience of undertaking rapid ethnographic study during the times of COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked a range of questions of open-ended nature where each of the fieldworker discussed their reflexive accounts in great depths. Each of the fieldworker was allotted around two hours' time each. The broader research questions of the group discussions focused upon the following themes:

- Training for Rapid Group ethnography
- Experience of 'Fieldwork' during the pandemic
- Challenges encountered on the field
- Modifications in the fieldwork due to COVID-19
- People's reaction to their fieldwork during the pandemic

The data from the interviews and discussion was analyzed using the narrative analysis based on the themes in order to examine how the context of the COVID-19 influenced the meaning-making of fieldwork and ethnography among the fieldworkers through negotiations carried within their existing self-concepts and the incoming ones (Saint Arnault & Sinko, 2021). The deductive coding was carried out, based on the above-mentioned themes.

The Awakening of Fear of Covid-19: The Training

As per the proposed design of the study, three groups of two ethnographers each, for a period of six weeks had to study different localities of Varanasi and Chitrakoot. Each team was originally designed to comprise of a male and a female ethnographer but this could not be made possible due to the pandemic. So, incurring a greater limitation, each team had to suffice with having both males as ethnographers. Right from the beginning of the training session, a fear could be sensed in every individual, as people from different states had gathered in a number of nine, which was of course a group at the time. It was hard to find a place for training since the universities were closed and any gathering was restricted by the government norms. So, taking this into account, the place and a team was formed. Sitting for approximately, over eight hours in a room, tackling the understandings of ethnographic techniques in form of participatory mapping, transect walks etc with the mask on, at all times was challenging.

It is a perpetual challenge to perceive the performability and internalisation of a pandemic in different individuals, and so was, what we faced. Everyone had their own ideas and ways to resort to the new norms of the COVID-19 hygiene. Some of the ethnographers were not so concerned and took off their masks stating their own different reasons like,

'If anyone has the COVID then, a mask won't do anything and they will get infected with or without mask' and 'we have to meet daily and have to work together, it won't be possible to work like this'.

Since the ethnographers were students of Banaras Hindu University residing in the hostel, they also stated, *'we are living together at our hostels so it won't matter much if we put masks on or off'*. A mixture of attitudes was observed, some were lenient and were not so much affected by the pandemic, while some were of mixed thoughts, trying to be amply safe with taking masks off, only when they felt was required but maintaining the distance, occasionally applying sanitizers when needed. While a few were paranoid and were constantly washing hands, rubbing sanitisers, and not taking the masks off, even for a second and

trying their best, to be as distant as possible. As the training came to end, everyone was very versed with the study methods and how to cope up with the COVID situation. Every ethnographer was asked to always wear the masks and keep two feet distance while talking with the participants and also taught to maintain proper hand hygiene. In addition, the ethnographers were also provided with extra face masks, sanitizers to offer them to the participants while conversing with them.

Upon recall, a track of how things unfolded, it is crucial to point out that, all the ethnographers except the two 'outsiders' from Varanasi, who by that time were not internalized into the way the COVID-19 was perceived collectively in Varanasi, as a normal pursuit. It clearly brought out that the cultural ways to combat and assess pandemic situations vary and so did our ways to react.

A TEAM, YET INDIVIDUALS: WAYS TO COMBAT PANDEMIC ON THE FIELD

Distance tends to invariably influence the promise of ethnography, that rests upon its maintenance of this unsaid clause of being proximal to the people. The pandemic and a lockdown thereof imposed this purview of impossibility based on the looming threats of the virus. Yet, the resilience of ethnography's strength of uncovering the realities of the people, by the people and for the people, enabled the study to take up fieldwork under the then unprecedented situations that had never hit the field of anthropology before (Fox & Garcia 2021; Käihkö, 2020). Anthropologists have contended with disruptions before this pandemic, with the kind of research that the discipline witnessed during, the World War times, when Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and Sword* (1946), took up this study from afar, and popularised the idea of *"culture at a distance"* (Benedict, 2005) or as in the case of M N Srinivas's *The Remembered Village* (1976) where he lost his fieldnotes, due to the arson (Srinivas, 2020). These events did lead to differences and found new ways to take up research in anthropology but did not lead to a loss of our tradition of fieldwork yet presented new ways in which it could be kept in the sway of times (Boellstorff, 2020). A rapid group ethnographic approach in this study channeled this spirit of retaining fieldwork in these unparalleled times.

The team consisted of people from different places, coming together to work as one, all with their own attitudes, beliefs and fear of COVID, in the rapid ethnography. The only female member of the team stated her situation,

'As a passionate student of anthropology, how could I miss the opportunity. It was the time when airlines had just started to operate with strict rules in place, I had to fly to Varanasi. My parents trembled as they packed my bags, where sanitizers, toiletries occupied more space than my cosmetics. On top of a pandemic, it was for them a girl who would be doing this 2-month long research in the apprehensive times of pandemic.'

A sense of fear and apprehension could be observed, yet it was overcome through one's passion and a hope to start life as it was the new normal. While some listed their own ways of how they,

'I don't drink or eat anything once I leave my room. Also, I have worn two masks, one on top of another for the sake of my safety for the entire time I spent outside my room.'

This clearly showed that amidst all of the fear, a beaming self-awareness and a will to work for the betterment of the people, and touting ethnography as the one that could answer the problems arising due to the burden of morbidity of LF. It was as if, saving from what we could save the people, in the trying times.

'We wash our clothes daily, the moment we reach, the first thing we do is not touch anywhere, sanitize mobiles, wallet, watch, pen, registers and everything we have. Then we wash our clothes, take shower and at last sanitize every place that we think is necessary. We can't go and relax after the tiring field work, but instead the burden of washing, sanitizing, bathing adds to the tiredness."

This was a recorded narrative of the team, which incurred this tiredness of washing immediately after spending the entire day in the field not alone for their safety but for the people, they were out for.
The ethnographic teams went to the selected three blocks of both Varanasi and Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh and had to visit the Medical officer in charge (MOIC) of the area, to have a general idea of the LF-

MDA program, the locality to explore, and to understand their views about the problems faced during MDA program.

Amidst the COVID-19, all the hospital staff was busy with COVID duty and management. Hospitals were having cases of COVID patients and the news of COVID patients made the team a bit reluctant in the beginning. It was a primary health center (PHC) crowded with patients all over. But as the time passed and the ethnographers began talking to people around, to the health workers, the fear started receding. It felt fine and an imbibed inter-affectivity, of seeing all doctors and health staff work at that time, enabled them to gather strength to function at this time. Ethnographers went to the suggested village to explore the areas and population. Three selected localities were all different according to the settlement, occupation, MDA compliance as well as COVID cases. The rural settlement had the least number of cases and the selected villages had no reported case of COVID, which relieved the ethnographers working in those areas. The people there were aware of the disease and knew that it is serious, but since they had not encountered anyone with disease in their vicinity, or even people wearing masks, they would often urge the ethnographers to take off the masks as they made them believe that their village was safe, ignoring the fact that the ethnographers are outsiders. Strikingly, the second locality being a peri-urban settlement where people dwelled in pucca houses, apartments and high-rise buildings. It was very hard to work in this area as the people living in apartments or societies were reluctant about entry of outsiders and even had entries restricted. They did not entertain the ethnographers and asked them to leave. The ethnographers still managed to talk with the people as much as possible as they waited outside the premises and gathered the data from there and other surrounding areas. The third locality usually was an urban fringe with occupants working as labourers in the nearby factories and in cities. The area was more like a slum, with open sewages and garbage fills. The people here were highly ignorant of the COVID-19 and pandemic, and didn't take precautions despite the ample awareness about the disease. During the interviews, they often asked about the COVID-19 and vaccines but many of them were even reluctant to wear masks even after they were offered to them, by casually saying,

'This is a rich man's disease, it won't affect us' or 'we don't need to wear masks, God will protect us.''

The placebo put in place in the name of God was unsurmountable. It was a usual sight to encounter ladies sitting in their idle hours gossiping or men playing cards together. The ice breaking for the rapport establishment seemed a tough task, as seeing the mask clad, ethnographers, people would assume an air of arrogance in them, as if through their mask, they were trying to belittle their beliefs. As ethnographers venture into the fields, as writers of the people's stories, it was heart breaking to see, initially, people drifting from us due to the mask, but eventually they became used to us, and even imbibed in them the sense of wearing mask and identifying COVID-19 as a potential risk. Eventually the rapport was built, owing to how people respected our stance in the field which they even compared with an equivalent to altruism, who were there to gather insights about how to make a government run MDA program more people centric, despite the ongoing pandemic.

With our position as brokers in the social setups, negotiating with the ends of both sides, we were taken as examples for imitation of use of masks or sanitizers, which was accorded to meanings and even sometimes looked down upon, but eventually people became comfortable seeing us like that. At times the ethnographers also reported of hearing to sirens of ambulances taking the patients away, struck from COVID-19. It used to be a fearful sight for the ethnographers and also many a times the places they would visit a day before would be shut and labelled containment zone the next day, owing to the COVID-19, and all the established rapport and efforts would go in vain, on top of which catered a looming fear of catching the disease. A small prayer to the almighty at the end of the day also worked for the ethnographers. As an ethnographer at the field, when the time is limited in a rapid turn of events, the option is not to back off and remain amidst all of it and witness it with an eyeful of an observer. Hence, the proposed safety norms were always safeguarding us in these situations.

The Group Analysis: Aorta of The Research, Pumping Through the Pandemic

As it was rapid team ethnography where all the teams were working in means to derive a common end, the bi-weekly group analysis sessions were the pulse of the research design. Amidst the strict rules of lockdown in place, it was really hard to find a place to gather, meet and discuss the findings. We all ended up in an apartment that was rented by the team for the sole purpose. All of the team mates ending upon that meeting coming from all kinds of places was in itself enough to give chills about the unforeseen fear, that was COVID-19. All people would wear masks at all times and keep their notebooks and pens confined to themselves. The analysis was planned in such a fashion that, all team mates had to make collaborative notes on their flipcharts, narrate their findings, which would later go on a separate flipchart, in order to cumulate everybody's data, so as to derive a coherence out of it. To put in practice, we all used to sit on chairs gapped at six ft distance from each, thus hearing one another in the semi- summery weather became a big affair that would often be floored by switching off fans, so that we could hear each other clearly. With masks on and fans off, it used to make us suffocated at times, yet the grit made us persistent about the presentiment of the implementation plan for the MDA.   The analysis sessions were usually of long eight to nine hours, and with time, we came to eventually drop things a bit on our fate and started to ease the mask wearing for so long. With a coherence we derived as a team, we could build a trust on each other's safeguarding habits, and that kept us moving. All the sessions were recorded and note taken, so that nothing is missed. So, after going back the flip charts were also sanitized, which sometimes let the ink flow along with it. These basic and simple things went out of the window of common sense during such tiresome endeavors that were always due to a looming fear of catching the virus. Yet, we learnt from our mistakes and imbibed the new way of our life as an ethnographer, who had the responsibility to ensure one's health for the sake of rest of the others on whom the research was resting. We could not afford to hold a virtual meetup for the analysis, due to the nature of the things being discussed as per the research plan. It is a nice substitute but trying it once, not everyone had good network, the voice broke out for a while, one person took quite a long time to respond to queries and above all the situational manipulation it caused. Hence, the bi-weekly analysis had to go all along in a physical meet up with full norms in place for all the six weeks. It was fruitful owing to its spontaneous nature and for the equal platform it boasted for all of us.

Varanasi And Chitrakoot: Two Cords In The Same Pandemic

"These days, every epidemic is international. Even if the pathogen doesn't travel beyond particular borders, the narrative about it travels across those borders."
–Charles L. Briggs, president of Society for Medical Anthropology (Al-Fanar Media, 2020)

The virus and the rhetoric travelled across all borders, and exerted its differential treatment on the people and vice versa. The urban clad Varanasi, forwarding itself in the global turn versus the still catching the pace with the global, Chitrakoot, were two fields operating in their own manner in the pandemic. Not stating that Varanasi didn't have the rural flavour of life, but it was more prominent in the lanes of Chitrakoot, where though the highway crossed the city, yet behind those stretches was a life untouched by the fast pace and also COVID-19. The severity of resonating with the pandemic withered as we moved away from Varanasi, precisely from the urban realms. The way people reacted to the pandemic varied strikingly in the two areas. Varanasi had strict lockdown rules like a complete shutdown after 6 pm and a total lockdown on Saturdays and Sundays, while Chitrakoot was a lot calmer when it came to the implementation of these rules, owing to lesser number of cases and precisely the rurality, that ironically bore the simple lives closing early in the evening unlike the city life, which anyway not had much of a resistance in the current times. From the sight of the pandemic the fieldwork became an easier and relaxed exercise in Chitrakoot, but the other problems that were larger than life in the area, not only dethroned pandemic as a problem, but opened to us, an ethnographic realm's liminal zone, where as a researcher we drive ourselves in the land of dilemmas and start questioning our identity in the field. The people there struggled with issues like water, electricity and sanitation, what was in place for us to care about MDA and

on top of it COVID-19! A living that was already endangered was less bothered with COVID-19. A boatsman on the banks of river Mandakini, spoke at length about it,

"Ram ki nagri mai, ye corona ka paap nahi ho sakta. (Chitrakoot is the place where lord Rama spent his life during exile and thus in his land the sin of corona can't prevail)."

The faith people bestowed upon the almighty, was an answer to all their sufferings and Coronavirus was not a new class of problem, from their perspective. As an ethnographer, we have to abide by our participants faith and do as Romans do in Rome. It was equivalent to feeling as Geertz must have, during, stating the same, in his submission of the Balinese Cockfight (Geertz, 1973). This faith didn't loom in a trivia, yet had a deep impact on the psyche of people that grew socializing with God, roaming where they live presently. To some extent, in Varanasi, lord Rama was replaced by *Ganges* and *Kashi Vishwanath*. For all reasons COVID-19 stayed and was adhered to, but as soon as a little miss on norms was observed by the people, they would instantly resort to their faith mechanism. This resonates with Mark Nichter's (1987) documentation of a viral outbreak of Kyasanur Forest Disease in rural South India, where he found how cultural interpretations guided people's local engagement with the outbreak. It was very distinct from how the government called it, rather it went among the people as a social and political force that disproportionately affected the poor, where in case of COVID-19, the people in Chitrakoot, knew of this inequality in terms of access to medical care, from a history of negligence in terms of treatment, despite all the governmental efforts. Thus, the entire realm of faith went to God, the answer in all precedent and unprecedented times (Nichter, 1987).

Nobody wore a mask in Chitrakoot and bothered less to wash their hands frequently, and we were initially the aliens who did wear the mask, but we succeeded in making them realize our position and responsibility as a fieldworker, and they happily submitted to our ways.

Glancing at their stance, with struggling to have water to drink, it was difficult for them to keep up with the compliance demands of COVID-19, keeping up with them was unachievable. Anthropologists have often reported such experiences where people with limited access to basic water services may fall prey to the pandemic, by not alone becoming physically sick but also through mental distress from being viewed differently as non-compliant by choice and also as the potential transmitters of disease (Ennis-McMillan and Hedges, 2020). As it was reported, during cholera outbreaks in Mexico, rural residents understood messages about washing hands and purifying water, but they were suffering from local water scarcity that the government's cholera control efforts did not address (Ennis-McMillan, 2001).

The experiences varied and challenged our stance, sometimes luring us to just not be alert for some time, but the call from within, the duty of an ethnographer was the same, that spoke loud of and about the participants.

Realities Through 'Gendered' Actualities: The Tale of The Ethnographers

The impetus of this section of the paper lies closely in relation to Dorothy. E. Smith's take on telling the truth of the actual social world, where realities are subject to the worldviews that we imbibe as a part of our social cultivation, in which gender becomes a crucial lens of viewing these scenarios (Hart and McKinnon, 2010). Social constructionism is a constantly growing phenomena, as to why we state this, because of how we made sense of the pandemic during the fieldwork, as different gender identities. Our social actuality reinforced somewhat differently when it came to the pandemic. We were all the 'community ethnographers' working to achieve the same desired outcomes, yet we were different as fieldworkers, of course it might seem, a lullaby running in the anthropological discourse since the advent of feminist stature in our discipline, but the pandemic held it in another right. A female researcher with a male researcher on a field during the pandemic and a female researcher alone on the field during the pandemic, garnered different kinds of gazes from the participants. The only female ethnographer on the field narrated her ordeal as,

"People didn't believe that I was actually on a fieldwork, when I went alone, without my male colleague to a separate lane. The women sympathised with me and thought I was troubled and had some

financial issues or was dominated by my male colleague, who sent me alone during the pandemic to work. While some men, who were the powerful of the society such as the Gram Pradhan etc, constantly demanded my Identity card and consent letter, even after which I had to anyways call my Male colleague to make them believe that we were actually on a fieldwork to know why do people not consume free government medicines for the prevention of haathi paon. There were fields that were 30-40km away and I wasn't selected to go to those, as I was a woman, for whom it would be challenging to continue the course during the pandemic, amidst the strict lockdown in place. It felt okay when I constantly rubbed sanitiser on my hands, but not when my male colleague did. His taking off the mask was normal, but mine wasn't. The etiquette of the pandemic somewhat became a feminine symbol in the field we worked on."

The excerpt is a clear indication of how the perceptions change with the gender on the roll, of course it isn't new to anthropology of how the responses of the people vary seeing a male versus a female researcher, but what was uncommon was the judgement of our hygiene practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sanitizer held a different meaning for the people in the field, especially in the rural lands wherein people associated that with being feminine or getting scared from the pandemic, which wasn't considered male enough. It became a feminine symbol, and most of the male ethnographers too refrained from using sanitiser on the field, as they felt that it alienized them on the field, while the female ethnographer gathered attention, which was positive for following the hygiene practice. It eventually came across to us that fear of the pandemic according to the people suited women and thus did these practices.

With the local transportation facilities being hampered during the pandemic, it was only male ethnographers who could be sent to distant places, as they could drive on their own, and perhaps a woman's safety could not be risked through private cabs, was a common assumption. It was the usual verbatim and on being questioned critically about the loss of the female perspective, it would be batted well by the responses gathered through the detailed methodologies put in place of the approach. It was even seen by the other male ethnographers as a burden to take a female all along on the unusually empty roads and highways, due to the pandemic. It was their genuine concern and they gave in extra time to build rapport with ASHA and ANM workers, who would then make it easy for them to talk comfortably to other women on the field. What it reveals, analytically, is that, be it a pandemic or any other situation, this attribute of being feared or a fear for is attached to Simone de Beauvoir's 'the second sex' (Beauvoir, 1989). The pandemic deepened this gap further. A female ethnographer was seen as a desperate and a needy entity on the field, yet a male enjoyed the status of doing the job. A participant on the field remarked it as *majboori* (helplessness to oblige) for the female to work in those conditions, while the same was not accorded to the male counterparts. It was as if seeing males roaming around and gathering data during the pandemic felt normal, unlike a female. It won't be unlikely to quote the female ethnographer, who brought the dilemma that COVID-19 brought with it for the gendered actuality,

"Has the pandemic thrown us back to pre 'feminist' times of the ethnographic discourse, where it became a big deal to see female researchers on the field or confining them to talk to women only?"

This gendered impression of the scenario gets us to thinking that if the ethnography would wither during a pandemic, more likely it will wither a chance for the women to set foot on the field, and would endanger the voices of the women on the field (Reyman, 1994). All the challenges overcome would fade in time. Gathering the voices of people during the tough time of pandemic is indispensable indeed, to prevent the presentiment into dereliction.

Conclusion

With this reflexive account, it can be well asserted in the conclusion that as it is usually found in anthropology that, there is means to an end, similarly is an ethnography that is both a means and an end, that takes us closer to the people and their problems or their resilient ways of life, where nothing is trivial

(Bierstedt, 1938). Thus, it's value and worth cannot be lost in a pandemic (Podjed, 2021; Saleh, 2021). Quoting an ethnographer,

> *"I came back safe and sound from my fieldwork, testing negative at the airport and instantly I closed my eyes, and my fieldwork flashed across, beaming loudly that nothing is impossible with a little grit and a lot of precautions."*

We all turned out negative from the virus but enthralled positive about the fieldwork, which initially we all were also apprehensive about during these testing times. After spending two months amidst the people, interacting with them the way we used to but with all precautions in place, it turned out that it won't be wrong to say that the traditional way of doing the ethnography will never go out of place. The satisfaction and the girth of data that came out of the study was in itself commemorating a lot of people's own terms and dictums on which their MDA program had to be based even in these times of the pandemic. Despite only one female in the research team, it wasn't a hindrance to the study and we could well manage to gather all the perspectives from various sects of the society, greatly owing to the meticulous design of the research. With proper precautions at sight and the passion for the fieldwork, can make things work, it may sound difficult, but not impossible. If it is the people living in those setups, an anthropologist just normally has to slip in their ways, being the bridge. The places remain the same, genders the same, yet the pandemic changed it up for all (Arya & Henn, 2021; Favilla & Pita, 2020). This account details what it is like to get back to the roots of our ethnography, with opening a panorama of discourses setting in amidst this pandemic (Eggeling, 2022; Fine & Abramson, 2020).

With constant efforts and more time on the field, with all the precautions taken rightly, it became possible. A rapid ethnography in a steady pandemic became a way of life in the new normal, theorizing the ways in which we saw the pandemic.

Implications

The need of the in-person engagement within the socio-cultural setting under a stipulated time which is usually required to be an extended one, was threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings tend to implicate that the ethnographic research creates unparallel understanding of the phenomenon the researcher is set to take up on the field, which yields latent elements of the people's life which are often the answers to most of their problems. But during the unprecedented times of COVID-19, a slight modification in the distribution of the ethnographic task among a team of researchers aiming to find answers to similar research questions over a shorter period of time, significantly acts as a modification in the traditional ethnographic way, which was found difficult to be conducted during the times of the pandemic. The reflexive accounts of the fieldworkers reveal their positionalities on the field, where their daily lives, priorities and values were also being challenged due to the pandemic amidst the responsibility of the fieldwork. The paper will help in adding knowledge about how the fieldwork can be carried out during a pandemic in place, along with upholding the ethnographic virtues high.

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