Ethnographic Fieldnote Writing: Methodological Challenges in the 21ˢᵗ Century

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the methodological challenges in the 21st century of ethnographic field note writing using pen and pencil amidst the increasing use of modern gadgets. Many ethnographers have been using modern electronic devices to collect field texts. Thus, the ethnographers are in a dilemma whether to use the traditional field note writing method or the modern method using gadgets. To address the research problem I conducted in-depth interview with 23 participants focusing on Communist Party of Nepal Maoist female ex-combatants and observed their activities for a prolonged period in the natural setting. Fieldnote is considered the most important field text collection method in ethnographic research. Ethnographic research requires more descriptive and interpretive field text analysis with cultural aspects. This article considers the creation of ethnographic fieldnote in the act of seeing and writing through emerging insight and understanding. The challenges related to the method of writing ethnographic fieldnote have received less attention in methodological discussions. This indicates that while writing ethnographic fieldnote in the field may have some benefits looking at the field practicalities but is equally challenging. There are certain methodological aspects involved in every fieldnote writing mission. My personal experiences of writing ethnographic fieldnote about the experiences of the ex-combatants fail to exclude the researcher in terms of methodological aspects rather it is more multifaceted and inspiring.

Keywords: ethical, ethnographic field note, fieldwork, field text, methodological

Introduction

Ethnographic fieldnote is considered the most important field text collection method in qualitative research, and it is basically a primary method of taking field text for an ethnographic study. In fact, an ethnographic research requires more descriptive and interpretive field text analysis about the researched participants focusing on the cultural aspects in a natural setting. The goal of ethnographic research is thus to formulate a pattern of analysis that makes reasonable sense out of human actions within the given context of specific time and place (Fife, 2005). Thus, an ethnographer applies a different method to address the problem of the research. The best approach to collect empirical field text from the field is by writing field notes. Whether an ethnographer conducts formal interviews, informal interviews, observation, focus group discussions, key informant interviews or overheard conversations, writing the fieldnotes is virtually a significant way for the researcher to record the data (Dewalt & Musante, 2010). If the ethnographers do not write it down in their fieldnotes, recording data may not be possible. Thus, the field note writing is the most important means of documenting field data in an ethnographic research.

Highlighting the significance of fieldnote, Madden (2010) said that the researchers could make notes in their head to remember, but human brain probably persists with a poor and short-term recording device. To protect the field text it has to be documented in the written form looking at the lifespan of the researcher because the life of a human being is short. So, the fieldnote is crucial to preserve the fieldwork. However, conducting research on the female ex-combatants and writing fieldnotes by a male researcher was a challenging job. I struggled to get access to the female participants and faced difficulties to dig out the issues that could support the argument to answer the research questions. The men-lead socio-cultural norms and values that have controlled the women resulted in troubles to the male researcher. Most of the narrative researchers or case study researchers just describe the culture of their participants but I do not want to limit myself in mere description rather focus on in-depth study of the female ex-combatants. I therefore wanted to take the description further to interpret my findings and tried to understand the bases of the culture (Creswell, 2007). Hence, the method of fieldnote writing incorporating the culture of the female ex-combatants after reintegration will probably be of interest for academic discourse.

There are many alternative terms to fieldnote writing, and various arguments are shaped likewise. Bernard (2006) discussed jot notes, expanded notes, methodological notes, diaries, journals, and logs. Similarly, Sanjek (1990) wrote about scratch notes and journals. Ottenberg (1990) discusses meta-notes or analytic notes and headnotes. They argued about similarities and differences especially in the methods and understandings of fieldnote writing. However,

the writers failed to write about the challenges for accurate, organized and descriptive fieldnote writing using pen and pencil. Further, they missed talking about the dilemmas, struggles, and complexity paradigms of fieldnote writing. In the 21st century, many researchers have been using modern gadgets as a method to collect field text and they have also been using software to analyze the field text. Thus, writing fieldnotes using pen and pencil is a challenging job for the ethnographers because the participants might expect gadgets during the interview. They have known that the modern methods save their interview time. In contrast, using modern gadgets might also be challenging for the ethnographer if the participants' background is the fighters and if they have a negative attitude towards the researcher. The methodology literature failed to give an account of the challenges to be focused on fieldnote writing. Thus, this study is useful to address the methodological issues faced by an ethnographer in fieldnote writing against the context where massive modern tools and techniques have been used.

Many researchers, such as Seligman (1951), Burgess (1981), Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and Madden (2010), discuss the technical part of field note writing. However, it was difficult for me to find the rules of thumb to write research diaries or fieldnotes. The main initiative of the fieldnote writing is to ascertain a format and style that fits with the needs of the research. However, it is often useful to be able to connect one's own approach with others. The creating of notes and the writing of research diaries are not often discussed when researchers report on their studies (Burgess, 1981). Further, in line with the management of notes, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) coined an approach that has three categories "Observational Notes," "Theoretical Notes" and "Methodological Notes".The researchers recognized field note writing as diary volume has less attention on the main thrust of subjective account of writing accurately, descriptively and narratively to answer the research questions.

There are many other methods by which we can record ethnographic field text. In my observation, fieldnotes remain a central method in ethnography even though modern technologies such as cameras and audio recorders may seem to be better at capturing information and easier to use (Madden, 2010). An ethnographer could use modern tools and techniques in writing the field note such as Instagram and Vivo. Many would say that typing notes directly into a laptop is now equivalent to handwriting, and they are probably correct (Madden, 2010). I did not use the modern tools and techniques in my fieldwork. Thus, I am not writing about the use of a computer, Instagram and Vivo in field note writing rather I am discussing field note writing in a diary using pen or pencil.

In this paper, I have discussed the ethnographic field note writing on the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (CPN Maoist) female ex-combatants and my experience during the field work. The field work was conducted to accomplish the PhD thesis on reintegration of female ex-combatants in the post-war context. This study captures the experiences of the female ex-combatants who have

been living in Chitwan district, Nepal. The female ex-combatants were those who had fought during the CPN Maoist insurgency in Nepal and now reintegrated into the society after ending the war. I am writing this because relatively little has been written about the ethnographic field notes challenges on the dilemmas in obtaining access to the field, unease on writing accurately, struggles on organizing, rigour in writing descriptively, difficulties to focus on the research problem and complexities to record thoughts and insights. Further, this paper is considered as the methodological aspect of field note writing. Moreover, I discuss how I conducted the research and how I recorded my insights and thoughts in the field. The reintegrated female ex-combatants have been living in Shaktikhor areas where land is not registered in their name. They have a tension caused by landlessness.

Methodology

I conducted fieldwork two times, for the first time in 2017 and for the second time in 2018. I allotted the timeframe to conduct in-depth interviews and observations in 2017 and to fulfill the field text gaps in 2018. In the first-round of fieldwork, a total of 23 (15 female ex-combatants, 5 villagers and 3 politicians) were interviewed in Shaktikhor[1] area, Chitwan district. I conducted the first round of interviews during 21-31 March 2017.At that time, 15 reintegrated female ex-combatants, five local people and three political parties' leaders were selected for interview through the purposive and snowball sampling techniques. I spent 12 days in the field. The first round of field work helped me to identify the potential participants who could tell their stories in detail. Likewise, I conducted the second round fieldwork from 23 May to 22 June 2018. The field work that time was longer than the first time because it took more time to fit the schedule of the participants and I wanted to observe many subjects of the participants in the natural settings. I spent a month in the field. The Maoist female ex-combatants could express their views openly and they could talk for long hours. Thus, the interviews took a long time. The short interview period was for one and a half hours and longer interviews lasted for 4 hours in a single sitting. I took a small break in between during the interviews when it took a long time.

Further, I was aware of inclusion of the participants. Some participants were new for the interviews and some had earlier experiences. Most of the participants who joined were the cadres of the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Their age was below 18 years when they joined the Maoist party. The participants took different responsibilities during the war. Some were fighters, some were porters, and some were spies (to obtain information of the enemies). In the interviews, out of 15 ex-combatants, two were porters, two were spies and 11 were fighters. Out of five local people, one was a leading NGO worker, one was a priest, another was a business man and two were social workers. Out of three political party leaders, one was from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist

1. My research site

and Leninist), another was from Nepali Congress, and the last one was from the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (Center).

I had an MP3 recorder, two A4 size diaries – one was black, and another was brown. The MP3 recorder, diaries, pen and pencil were bought in Kathmandu. I had bought 2 Pilot Pen and a half dozen of Platinum Extra Dark Pencil. I used the MP3 recorder in an interview because a participant asked me to use the recorder keeping her busy time schedule. I used less the MP3 recorder fearing the loss of field text due to technical problem in the device and the notion of short term memory of the scholar (Madden, 2010). The primary note taking diary was the 211 pages brown diary during the observations and interviews. At the end of the field work only 2 pages were left in the diary, one pilot pen completely ran out of ink, and the second one was left with a quarter of ink. Two pencils were also used up during the note taking. I carried the black diary as a contingency plan which was also filled half way by my daily activities. I rejected using other small white papers, meta-notes and analytic notes (Ottenberg, 1990) and notebook during the interview because I was afraid of losing the field text that were written in various small papers. It was also difficult to collect and compile the accounts in the field if the researcher used various papers. After packing necessary logistic items in Kathmandu and informing the gatekeeper in the field I travelled by tourist bus to my research site in Chitwan. For the research work, I went to Shaktikhor with two diaries, two pen, half a dozen of pencils, an MP3 recorder and my backpack.

Challenges in the Field

The methodology I applied confronted various challenges in the field. Yes, I had learned from Hammersley and Atkinson (2008), Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and Madden (2010) that an ethnographer should face challenge in field note writing. These challenges were based on my personal experience, it might shed light on the subject of difficulties ethnographers encounter. Here, I share some of the challenges that I faced during the field note writing. These include: a) dilemma in obtaining access to field note writing; b) unease in accurate field note writing; c) struggle in organizing field note writing; d) rigour in descriptive field note writing; e) difficulties in focusing on the research problem; (f) complexities in recording insights and thoughts. I would like to discuss the challenges one by one.

Dilemma in Obtaining Access to Field Note Writing

I faced challenges in obtaining access to the field. I was in a dilemma where and how to contact a gatekeeper who could introduce me to my participants. I had some people in contact in the field to whom I was introduced during my work in the development field to get access and to record the observed field text. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) emphasized the importance of recording observations from the very beginning of the research; first encounters

and the routes to gaining access to research situations are all considered important research data. Hammersley and Atkinso (2008) further elaborated that it is most often difficult to have initial discussions to enter a setting. Keeping in mind the theoretical and methodological aspects of recording the field text, I proceeded to gain access to the field. Before starting the fieldwork, proper planning was necessary to gain good access to the participants. My 20 years of work experience taught me the significance of proper planning. I also knew the consequences and cost of improper planning in the results. With enough planning, I departed from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, to Chitwan district, my research site. Chitwan is a tourist area, people can travel comfortably by tourist bus. Fortunately, the bus was in a good condition but unfortunately, the road condition was poor. The road was under construction. Though delayed, I reached to Chitwan. After that, I had to catch a three wheeler tempo[2] to go to Shaktikhor, which was 15 kilometers south from Bhandara- a point of the east-west highway of Nepal. There were some tempos in a queue to take passengers to Shaktikhor.

A three wheeler female tempo driver gestured me to come. I went there because I was going to study about the female ex-combatants and the tempo driver was also a female, hoping I could learn something. I chose to go in her tempo. I intentionally sat in the front seat so that I could talk with her about local dynamics. I was hoping the tempo driver to be an ex-combatant. I had heard that after the reintegration into the society, some female ex-combatants received training on driving. I introduced myself to her and asked questions to know about her. The tempo driver was not an ex-combatant; however, she narrated me about the local context.

When I reached the Club Chowk at Shaktikhor area, the local staff of Pro-public had already been there to receive me because a friend of mine had already informed her to support me during the research. The friend offered me the support when I informed of my field plan because we had known each other when I worked in the development field. She inquired about the delay in travel. Despite the proper planning, unpredictable external factors could always disturb the field work. When I reached the field, I felt that all local people were potential respondents for the study and they were ready to respond to the ethnographer.

I had already notified the local staff about my stay in Shaktikhor area, I wanted to stay in an ex-combatant's home. When the staff observed my baggage then she questioned me. While she confirmed that I planned to stay in the research site, she asked her friends, who were around, for an accommodation. Nobody was responding positively. After her deliberate attempt, she learnt one uninhabited room in a female ex-combatant's home. In that way, the accommodation was arranged in the field. However, the understanding of local people towards the researcher was found different due to the different research methodology adopted in the field. Further, the researcher's selection of methods to have access to the field, selecting

2. A three-wheeler public vehicle that carry the local people for short distance

participants and confirming accommodation ultimately created dilemmas in field note writing.

Unease in Accurate Field Note Writing

Ethnographic field note writing in social and cultural field is observed subjectively in a natural setting. It is situated between the researcher and the participants (Hastrup, 1992). Ethnographers cannot write everything down, so the choices they make to record or not record information are always strategic and sometimes subjective (Madden, 2010). However, writing field notes accurately is a primary concern of the ethnographer. Thus, I went to the field with two diaries, two pens and an MP3 recorder to record the field text. The research diary provides a form through which the interaction of subjective and objective aspects of doing research can be openly acknowledged and brought into a productive relationship (Darren, 2001). I took the interview in Nepali language and wrote it down in my diary. Accuracy in field note writing has significant impact on the results. It depends on the skills, knowledge and experience of the ethnographer in the field. As an experienced development field worker with perfect and precise writing skills I felt that the writing field note for the research purpose was different than writing for development use.

During an interview with an ex-combatant, I faced problems in pronouncing the terminology of the Maoist armed conflict. The Maoist party and the ex-combatants pronounced terminologies differently than what could be seen in the academic convention. I used the term "Maoist armed conflict" during the interviews. Most of the participants that I interviewed did not have any complaints, but one participant opposed. She preferred pronouncing 'people's war' to 'Maoist armed conflict'. It was true that I had been using Maoist armed conflict during the interview. When I pronounced that phrase, the participant accused me that I was biased with the Maoist people's war. Her logic was that the insurgency was not only of the Maoists, it was a people's war. So, she had an expectation that I would use people's war in speaking and writing. She denied taking part in the interview unless I agreed to use 'people's war'. The actual words people use can have huge analytic meaning. The positioned vocabularies employed provide us with valuable information about the ways in which members of certain culture organize their perceptions of the world, and so engage in the social construction of reality (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2008). When the participants took position based on their culture it would have significant meaning for the researcher. My participants challenged me to pronounce the vocabulary accurately in line with their understanding and Maoist schooling.

I tried to convince the participant about the similarity in the meaning, but she was not convinced. The quality of the data gathered is intimately related to the quality of relationships the researcher can establish with participants in the field (Darren, 2001). She was not ready to take part in the interview if I did not use the term "people's

war". I therefore used the terminology she preferred, and we commenced the interview. She offered additional information than other participants had given. Therefore, I learned that the researcher should be careful to pronounce the terminology and should be flexible to rewording during the interview and writing field note, especially with those whose background is fighter. Further, the participants who could contend in pronouncing the words with the researcher might present comprehensive information on the topic. However, it was difficult to write comprehensive information in the form of field notes.

The female ex-combatants were frank and confident during the interview. As a result, it consumed more time to complete. On an average, it took around four hours to complete an in-depth interview. Four hours was a long-time for the interview and hard to write accurately in the diary. In this situation, I recorded the field text in my head. Around one hour was then spent to read the field text. It was hard to understand the field text and make meaning. It took nine hours to type on the computer because it was tricky that which had to be typed on the computer and which left in the diary.

It is suggested that the function of the research diary is the vehicle for ordered creativity in field note writing (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). I agree with the ideas of Schatzman and Strauss because maintaining the research diary, I, as an ethnographer felt easy to write observed and interviewed account in the diary. Field note writing practice is important to capture a location regarding number of people, the site and group dynamics. It helps the researcher to organize his or her own style of interviews and observations accurately, promptly and perfectly despite many struggles of ethnographer in organizing field note writing.

Struggles in Organizing Field Note Writing

Ethnographic field notes are almost magical scribbling: raw, primary, unadulterated; a window onto real human lives and events (Madden, 2010). Keeping in mind Madden's views, my first interview started on 21 March 2017. I worked on two interviews a day. I prepared an outline to ask the questions and observed in the natural settings. The outline was divided into six parts to maintain a smooth flow in the interview and efficient field note writing that would make analysis easy. Firstly, I asked the background information of the ex-combatants, secondly, the roles of the ex-combatants before the war started, thirdly, the participants' role during the war, fourthly, the perceptions of the female ex-combatants on the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes, fifthly, the situation of the participants after reintegration into the society, and finally, its consequences.

Following the above-mentioned moves, I conducted interviews and observations. Most of the interviews I inscribed in my diaries. My field research was in the summer; a factor that could have made the paper wet and destroyed the field text. There is more than one way to build up field notes, and my practices have been to keep the

process as simple as possible by having a single notebook that includes the participatory, consolidated, reflective and planning aspects of field notes (Madden, 2010). I used one notebook which was fit for all my field notes writing during the period.

However, one day when I was ready to conduct the interview putting my diary and pen on my knee, then a participant asked me about the recorder for the interview. Many researchers come up with recorder. Some come up with diary and pen. Those who come up with a recorder diary feel easy for the interview and it finishes on time. Those who come up with pen and diary it is difficult to record, and it takes a long time. In the case of observing outlines of social interaction and gathering participants accounts, the task of taping data is much more significant and time-consuming (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2008). It is better to use a recorder for the interview. The participants who are unable to allocate hours for the interview because they have to go for their personal work such as to jungle to collect fodder and firewood, or home to look after their children, feel that the researcher use a recorder.

I had carried a recorder thinking the participants might ask about it because some participants might have been familiar with the technology. I held the diary and pen in the bag and recorded the interview on the MP3 recorder. It was obstinate to stop the participants during the interview. When I asked a question then after I did not get chance to ask another question because the participants spoke continuously without taking a break. After completing the interview, I typed the field note into the laptop and translated the interviews into English later. However, many ethnographers will take the opportunity to enter the consolidate notes straight into a word processing program or indeed into qualitative software (Madden, 2010). I wrote my reflections on my personal computer after completing the in-depth interviews. I also wrote down the key points in a diary to protect the field data because I had an old personal computer that could have potentially created problems during the fieldwork. If the project is poorly managed and is neglected to fulfill the minimum obligation for the researcher, it increases the tension in the field due to lack of laptop and quality recording devices.

During the field note writing it was difficult to be organized because I had to actively observe and pay attention to the participants. Based on my past experience, I pre-planned to document the observed in the diary and the conversed into the MP3 recorder. I conducted it strictly chronologically. I was aware that I had to follow the procedures and be organized. I felt it essential to follow the procedures and be organized to avoid difficulties during the field text interpretations.

Rigour in Descriptive Field Note Writing

The term rigour is defined as to think critically, creatively and more flexibly in the field note writing. Looking at the ideas of Huges (2000), the quality, or even adequacy, of a research project is not only the result of the questions asked or concepts used, it is also the result of keeping rigorous field notes (Hughes, 2000). Further, writing descriptively to record the field note that the ethnographer interviews or observes has sensible meaning in the study. It helps the ethnographer to present the details of the field text as evidence. In my research being rigorous meant preparing myself with enough accurate evidence that I did not wrap-up making statements about what I meant when I wrote the final research thesis. Thus, field notes are always selective and it is not possible to capture everything (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2008).

During the field work I often remembered the ideas of Darren (2010) about purely descriptively observational field notes. He mentioned that it is often incredibly difficult to separate out the writing of purely descriptive observational field notes; as one records events, theoretical concepts, or other leads to follow up, often come to mind (Darren, 2001). One day I was resting in the shade of a tree in the backyard. Staying in the room was terrible due to hot weather. The roof was of zinc sheer. I left the door open so that the air could pass from the outside and the room temperature would become normal. Surprisingly, the house owner, whom I had interviewed, entered into my room. I could see her, but she did not see me. She probably thought I was out to nearby home to talk with her neighbour. I used to go to next home which was a house of a male ex-combatant. I did not ask anything to her. She occupied my room for about 15 minutes. I supposed either she was looking at my writing about her interview or entered to clean the room. However, it did not concern me much at that time. Looking at the activities of the participant on that day, I felt that the participant wanted to read the interview to confirm the researcher's writing. It was difficult for me to describe the activities conducted by the participant in my room. I could go to the room if my participant was male and could describe the events properly. However, due to the eastern cultural practices I was not able to go there because we have a practice that a male cannot go into a room where a female is alone.

On the same day at dinner time the participant expressed that she researched the interview that I wrote. Writing descriptive words of observation and interview is effective for better analysis. Being descriptive means supplying yourself with enough factual evidence. I had written clearly what she had expressed. I guess, she had doubts on me before reading the field text, which she no longer had. After reading the interview she trusted me. Then she invited another ex-combatant for the interview. I was a bit worried that she would have any objection to my writing. I could imagine the behaviour of the combatants if they were to become angry. However, after this incident, I thought that the researcher should be careful about what should be written descriptively in the field note and what should be recorded as a headnote. Most importantly, the field note should be written correctly (Strudwick, 2014) and should be written as descriptively as possible. The researcher might have reflection on the subject matter, but it would be safest not to write the critical views in the diary during the interviews. The ethnographer could make headnote and could inscribe after return.

I felt it secured to stay in the participants' room discussing with the participants and observing the objects in the room. The bed, bed sheets and furniture indicate the economic condition of the participants. The ex-combatants were unconcerned about it, they were happy about their condition. The physical condition of the objects and the happiness of the participants contradicted. It also challenged my positionality that poor economic condition could be the main factor of sorrow. They had hung the photographs with different posture on the wall. It presented their psychological condition. There were many photographs which were taken during the war – holding gun in the arms together with their comrades. An ethnographer watching those photographs normally could not be able to describe them perfectly. Some photographs confirmed the progressive marriage ceremony of the participants. Leaders were shaking hands with the newly married couple. Newly married couples were wearing the garlands. Photos with families and their relatives were almost taken after ending the war. As Young (1998) points out in his discussion of Malinowski's field work that the descriptive power of photographs is highly significant. However, the ethnographer must work hard to describe properly. I tried to describe them best in my research work, but it was insufficient.

It was not viable to write the extended note during the interviews and the observations. As Emersion, Fretx, and Shaw (1995) pointed out, there are often very practical reasons why writing extended notes at the time of observation is not possible. My one participant had a small shop which was run near a public school. At around 10am each day, students would come to buy some chocolate and biscuits for tiffin. My participants dealt with the students and she returned some money to them. It was not possible for me to write the details at that time because many students would come and go. They had their own communication style and responses. I could not allocate time to produce many written notes on the spot. In such circumstances, it is recommended that as soon as possible, and preferably the same day, the rough notes are expanded into data properly (Emersion et al., 1995). Thus, I wrote the notes immediately after reaching the room.

Difficulties in Focusing on Research Problem

In qualitative research questions might be revised many times depending on the field text available to the researcher. As an ethnographer I felt that it was difficult to document everything what I interviewed and observed, and to include countless details about aspects of the research problem and the theoretical concepts supporting my research. In a methodologically sound position I captured everything in my diary keeping in mind the research problem. When I was asking for background information and the participants' role before the war, I found it was easy to write down field notes because the participants spoke slowly. They had less interest in their early age story. However, when I turned into the war-related story, it was difficult for me to write everything down. However, I did not want to write everything. The participants spontaneously became excited, felt proud and narrated their stories swiftly, which made the note taking quite difficult. When the participants elaborated stories without caring and looking at my writing performance then I stopped writing and continued to listen to them carefully. After minutes of continuous story telling the participants stopped. Then I asked the participants about their non-stopped story, they responded that they were excited when telling the war story. They did not stop in between when talking about the war story because they felt overwhelming, excited and proud to tell it. During the war they performed hard work, and spent their productive time. They were injured during attacks in various parts of the country. Their blood was poured onto the land. However, I did not want to record all the war time stories because my purpose was not to study the details about the Maoist war. My purpose was to look at the discursive interactions between the female ex-combatants and the villagers in the post-war context, especially socio-cultural and economic reintegration, and political participation.

Before 1996, when I was a student, I wrote thousands of pages note using pen and pencil. Later, after completing the Bachelor's degree I was employed in the development organizations as a professional. Since I have been using computer as a means of writing since 1996, it developed my writing skill on the computer. However, it decreased my handwriting skills. As a consequence, it was tough to capture the participants' view writing in the diary. It was not fair to ask them to speak slowly because they were telling their story in their own way. If I had interrupted them, they might have lost their flow and the essence of the meaning of field text would be lost with it. Listening to the war stories of the female ex-combatants was inspiring but writing their war story responding to the research questions was challenging. Sometimes, I would forget to write while listening to the stories of the fighters. However, the stories used to come strongly and that ultimately became a strong headnote in my mind. Immediately after completing the interview, I reached to the room, reiterated the head note and described the points that answered my research questions. I avoided cluttering notes with irrelevant information since the researcher requires recording tactics that will provide an ongoing developmental dialogue (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

Complexities in Recording Insights and Thoughts

Note-taking and research diary keeping are much more than a mechanical means of storing information for later retrieval (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The developing insights from interviews and observation in the field to relate tradition helps the researcher to revisit the field notes with a fresh vision. After collecting the field text, it became information for me. I tried to make meaning from it. However, making meanings of the field text was difficult. I realized that when the researcher faces troubles in make meaning then it's hard to understand and gain insights. During the interview, for all participants, I asked questions regarding the job of their husbands, especially

about those who were abroad for employment. They said that the income of their husband was bad. Their husbands were in a problem. Nobody cared about their husbands there. Their husbands wanted to return home, but they did not have money to buy the airplane ticket. The ticket of the plane would cost around $ 600 per person, and it was huge money for them. Nobody trusted them to lend that much money. So, they were in a trouble looking at the condition of their husband. Having said those things, they were deeply soaked in thoughts. Probably, they memorized the problem faced by their husbands. However, it was intricate to narrate in the diary what they thought.

During the interview the participants expressed that they were not involved in any groups. The groups were the drinking water and forest users committee, saving and credit groups, youth clubs and Mother's groups. Later, during the observation it was known that most of the participants were a member in a group. It was uncovered when they went to participate in the groups meeting. One day I was sitting in front of a house talking with a villager about the culture of the village. At the same time some women were walking towards a youth club office. The villager said that the women were going to participate in drinking water consumer's groups' meeting. He also elaborated that many women were groups' members. It raised a question in my mind why they told a lie to me about their involvement. When the meeting ended and they departed crossing me on the way, but nobody looked at me. They walked past looking straight on the road. So, it was remorseful for me to describe their personal behaviours. Why did they behave that way? Were they all kidding with me or were there other reasons? It always struck my mind. It was tricky to read their psychological condition. Some participants got inter-caste marriage. During the interview they stated that what they did was good. They did not have any regret for that. During the observation their gestures showed that they had different things in their mind. That might be their regrets about the marriage. However, I could not write just by guessing. So, reading the psychological conditions of the participants was intense for the researcher. Some participants were injured at the war. They were living with plight with physical disability. They had difficulties to work in the farm and to walk. Some participants did not have legs, hands and some living with bullets in their body. During the interview they expressed that they felt proud because they contributed to the political change during the war. Unlike the result found during the observation period, they were facing problems due to physical condition and their gestures showed that they were in trouble. However, it was difficult to record their physical conditions. Practice is therefore a form of research, and the reflective diary a means of capturing and communicating knowledge (Scön, 1991). Despite the difficulties to capture their physical pain and plights in the field note, I wrote my feelings in the diary when I got back to my room.

After completing the interview, I used to come back directly to the room to read the text and describe the note further. If the room was far and I had to walk a little bit further to get there, I would instead choose to stay in the shade of a tree and read the field text and complete my thoughts on it. Staying in the shade of the tree gave different joy in the summer. In the summer, it was difficult to write in a notebook because of sweat in my fingers and arms due to the hot temperature and humidity. Sometimes, even the pen would not work properly. However, I handled it using handkerchief and a towel. Thus, the researcher needs to be careful about the weather before conducting the research and should manage necessary things accordingly because it directly impacts the field note writing. It might also negatively impact on writing the insights and thoughts of the participants.

Discussion and Lessons Learned

The ethnographic field note writing on the female ex-combatants was a useful experience and insightful learning for me. For a male researcher, it was difficult to obtain access in the field and write the story of the female ex-combatants if the researcher did not have access with the gatekeeper who could guide the participants and the participants had trust on the researcher. I overcame this problem mobilizing a female ex-combatant who united the female ex-combatants at the local level. Similarly, writing field note accurately of the female ex-combatants was difficult because of their fluent story telling style of the war time gain and the post-war plight. They had a culture and leadership to express their views without hesitation and delay. I wrote key bullet points during the interview and wrote descriptively when I got back to the room. Further, I struggled in organizing the field note to make meaningful description of the subject because of the raw note keeping during the interview. I overcame the problem making themes and writing the text descriptively on the computer. I had already set my research questions to be answered in my thesis. When I interviewed with the ex-combatants I did not get straight answers that I expected. Thus, it took more time during the interview to probe so as to get the right answer encountering the lengthy conversation. As a result my diary was filled up with field notes. To get the right answer of the research question I turn over the pages many times of my brown diary. I also faced complexity in recording insights and thoughts after completing the interview because of heavy loaded language of the female ex-combatants during the interview. It took more time to generate themes from the field text.

Writing field note in an ethnography was challenging for the researcher. However, the challenges that I faced enhanced my skills and knowledge. The field note writing on the female ex-combatants did not only enhance my skill and knowledge but also taught me to deal with multiplex participants while taking the notes. When I completed the field work and got back home, I transcribed the field notes into English language on a computer. The transcribed field texts contained 65525 words. During the period I felt that writing field note using pen and pencil was both a challenge and also an opportunity for the ethnographers in the 21st century. It is a skill that does not require microphones, batteries, power supplies or technological savviness

(Madden, 2010).

As a professional of the development field I wrote numerous field notes since 1996 to 2015, before enrollment into the PhD study. At that time, the field note writing was different thing. It was focused on the simple activities which was conducted to deliver the result in the field. I went to the field and wrote something that was necessary for the reporting. Further, I used to write in a diary when I had to conduct a meeting with government and non-government officials. During the meeting, I had to note key points of the meeting for the reporting purpose. Basically it was focused on planning, monitoring and evaluation of the programme and project. I felt that means of writing note in a professional life and in academia are the same but objectives are somehow different.

Writing the ethnographic field note through thinking, seeing and doing is not like a simple task of writing a fiction imagining and staying in a room. The writing of field note on the experiences of the female ex-combatants is not an exception from writing field notes on non-combatants rather I experienced it was more complex and more challenging because the ex-combatants could ask critical questions if they had any doubt and disagreement with the researcher. My own areas of experience and expertise on the research subject lessened the complexity and challenges, though.

In the 21st century, researchers have been using many gadgets in the research. To be skillful in ethnographic field notes writing using pen and pencil is still significant for the ethnographers. The ethnographers need to see the context of the field, ethical aspect and technical part of the successful field text collection. The aim of the field work is to produce comprehensive field texts that help to produce a reliable thesis. On the other hand, the development countries are also importing modern technology due to the revolution in digital world. As a result the research participants in the developing countries are also aware of the emerging technology. In light of the problems associated with writing field notes, particularly in the context of interviews, the advantages of audio-recording, and perhaps even video-recording, are obvious (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2008). Despite the revolution in the digital technology there are both challenges and opportunities to use them in the research field. Due to the poor knowledge and skill on the use of modern technology the hand written field note method is still significant in research.

Conclusion

Following the traditional idea of Malinowski (1967) and completing the field note writing by using pen and pencil in a natural setting in the 21st century, where many research participants are also aware of modern gadgets (Madden, 2010), gives new insights, experiences and understandings to the ethnographer. The participants who are familiar with and enjoy the gadgets during the interview ask the researcher to use them to save their time and to some extent to show themselves more advanced than other participants. Those participants who are not aware of the modern gadgets prefer pen and paper for noting down their conversation throughout the interview. Writing the field note in the diary is more secure and safer than recording on the recorder even though writing field note in the diary is more time consuming. Recording interview on the recorder saves time for the busy participants and the researchers. Thus, there are methodological challenges/options for the researcher whether to write field notes in a traditional way or write them using modern gadgets.

This research provides support to the use of field note writing as a means of understanding on the challenges of ex-combatant's research. The research method agreed provides insights into the reality of ethnographic field note writing and offers many pragmatic implications for writing reintegrated female ex-combatants. Besides, many handy lessons surfaced from the ethnographic field note writing can be applied to other research areas. Thus, I felt that going preparing to apply both methods with options such as field note writing using pen and pencil and using modern gadgets to ease the field note writing is imperative to address the methodological challenges in the 21st century.

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