

Navigating Fieldwork Challenges: An Anthropological Exploration of the Jaunsari Tribe of Uttarakhand

FARZANA[†] & P. R. MONDAL[‡]

*Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi,
Delhi 110007*

Email: prmondal1@rediffmail.com

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ABSTRACT: This present paper explores the fieldwork challenges encountered while studying among the Jaunsari tribe of Uttarakhand from an anthropological standpoint. The Jaunsari tribe, which is mainly resides in the Jaunsar-Bawar area of the Dehradun district, presents a distinct, intricate, and diverse social and cultural structure. However, conducting fieldwork in this remote area presents a logistical challenge due to its remote and hilly areas, which is often affected by landslides and poor road conditions, particularly during the monsoon season. Furthermore, there are significant challenges for the data collection and interactions with the people due to the insufficient infrastructure, which includes poor connectivity to the internet, electricity, and facilities for health care and hospitals. This present research paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, including participant observation, interviews, surveys, and fingerprint collection of the Jaunsari tribe. The study highlights the significance of comprehending regional customs and traditions in order to carry out respectful and successful research. This paper intends to add to the broader discussion about anthropological methodologies and the challenges of exploring indigenous communities by providing a thorough analysis of field experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropologically, the study of human being includes not only their physical evolution, but also the complex structure of their societies. This is specifically prominent in India, where tribal populations provide a significant contribution to the nation's cultural diversity. These tribal communities, which are distributed over mountainous and plain regions, have diverse customs and history, various languages, and social and cultural structures that reflect their strong connection to the land and their ancestral past.

In India, cultural diversity is particularly pronounced among its tribal populations (Vidyarthi

and Rai, 1977). India is home to numerous tribal communities, each with its own distinct cultural identity, traditions, and social structures (Kumar and Sarraf, 2024). These tribes, officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes, inhabit various regions across the country, from the northeastern hills and central plateaus to the western deserts and southern forests (Xaxa, 1999). Each tribal group has developed unique ways of life adapted to their specific environments (Verma, 1990).

The cultural diversity of tribal populations in India is reflected in their languages, arts, rituals, and belief systems (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1977). Many tribes have their own languages and dialects, contributing to the linguistic richness of the country. Traditional art forms, including music, dance, and crafts, are integral to their

[†]Research Scholar

[‡]Professor, corresponding author

cultural expression and community life (Mohanty, 2006).

The anthropological research indicates that learning about these tribal groups provides important insights into cultural stability, human adaptability, and how social structures change in response to environmental changes. In an increasingly globalized world, tribal groups in India present a living example of the diversity and complexity of human cultures, emphasizing the significance of protecting and comprehending these distinctive practices of their existence. Our understanding of human cultural diversity is enhanced when we examine these societies through the study of anthropology, which also emphasizes how important it is to preserve and value indigenous cultural heritage.

Comprehensive fieldwork is frequently necessary for population studies in order to fully comprehend the social and cultural customs of a community. The Jaunsari tribe of Uttarakhand is an interesting area for cultural anthropological research because of their wide variety of customs and traditions. However, a number of challenges with this type of fieldwork exist, which may have an impact on the purpose of the research and outcomes. To give an anthropological point of on these challenges, this research highlights from substantial fieldwork conducted in various Jaunsari villages.

Aim of the Present Paper: In order to address the practical and scientific challenges that come with conducting fieldwork in isolated and underdeveloped areas, this research article aims to explore and document the cultural, social, and lifestyle of the Jaunsari tribe of Uttarakhand.

Selection of the Jaunsari Population: I decided to choose the Jaunsari tribe for my study because of the number of compelling reasons. First of all, the Jaunsari community, who live in Uttarakhand, one of the most beautiful regions of India, called Jaunsar-Bawar and this region and their communities presents a fascinating cultural and social landscape that is mostly unexplored in scientific forensic research. This absence of representation provides a special chance to add new insights and knowledge about the community. The distinctive customs, social structures, and cultural practices of the Jaunsari tribe set them apart from the majority of Indian culture. An interesting

field of research for comprehending the dynamics of indigenous cultures is their patrilineal system, traditional gender roles, and distinctive rituals and ceremonies.

Additional difficulty and excitement to the research comes from the Jaunsari region that is difficult topography and remote location. It is possible to learn more about the flexibility of the community and resilience by looking into how it handles these practical difficulties, like poor accessibility and infrastructure in the villages of Jaunsari community. A study of the effects of modernization and outside influences on the traditional way of life of the Jaunsari tribe is also made possible by concentrating on them. This can give an important new insight on how the cultures of the indigenous populations are changing and developing.

Overall, my decision to focus on conducting research on the Jaunsari tribe was driven by my aim to gain an understanding of the India's diverse ethnic and tribal cultures by exploring and documenting the distinctive characteristics of their social and cultural environments. I therefore rather spontaneously decided to choose Jaunsar-Bawar as the field area for my research because of its scenic beauty and, more importantly, since it was a new and interesting location for my research because there had not been any previous studies in the field of fingerprint research.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The research methodology involved extensive fieldwork, including participant observation, interviews, surveys, and fingerprint collection conducted with in two months in different Jaunsari villages. The data was collected through interactions with community members, local leaders, and government officials. Fingerprints were collected systematically to study population variations within the tribe. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the Jaunsari tribes way of life and fingerprint characteristics.

Uttarakhand and Dehradun

The northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, sometimes known as the "Land of the Gods," is renowned for its breathtaking scenery, extensive

religious sites, and rich cultural heritage. The state, which is tucked away in the Himalayas, is divided between the regions of Garhwal and Kumaon (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttarakhand>).

The capital of Uttarakhand, Dehradun, is located in the Doon Valley in the Himalayan foothills. It is well-known for its pleasant climate and beautiful surroundings and serves as a gateway to some of India's most respected pilgrimage sites, such as Rishikesh and Haridwar (<https://uttarakhandtourism.gov.in>). The Jaunsari tribe is mostly found in the hilly regions of the Kalsi and Chakrata tehsils, which are only reachable by twisting, narrow roads that connect isolated communities.

The Study Area: Jaunsar Bawar

The Dehradun district of Uttarakhand comprises the area of Jaunsar Bawar, which is known for its distinctive geography and culture. It is home to the Jaunsari tribe, whose customs, social structures, and way of life make it a significant area of anthropological research. The Jaunsari tribe resides in the Himalayan foothills. Practically challenging, their isolated location and rough terrain help to maintain the unique aspects of Jaunsari culture. Exploring this region offers important insights on the ability to adapt and persistence of its inhabitants, who protect their rich cultural legacy while living in peace with the natural environment.

Overview of the Jaunsari Villages

The Jaunsari tribe resides in the Jaunsar-Bawar region in the Dehradun district, specifically in the Kalsi and Chakrata Tehsils. The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the villages of Sahiya, Nevi, Bohari, Khatasa, and Korwa. These villages represent the life styles of Jaunsari population, which is characterized by traditional customs, methods of agriculture, and a close-knit community structure (Pathan and Mondal, 2020). Fieldwork in Sahiya, Nevi, Bohari, Khatasa, and Korwa villages highlighted specific challenges and provided valuable insights into the culture of Jaunsari population. Every village had distinct experiences that emphasized the significance of adaptation and cultural awareness in ethnographic study.

Sahiya Village: Sahiya is a village in the Chakrata block, situated on the border of Dehradun district.

Sahiya is one of the primary towns in the area, and it provides a center for the neighboring towns and villages. It is recognized for its active marketplaces and serves as a gateway to numerous government services and facilities. It hosts a prominent market that serves as the central hub for the surrounding villages. This market is the main destination for villagers to shop and access transportation services. Sahiya is the only location in the area with a transportation facility, as there are no other transport services or auto stands available nearby. Additionally, the village is home to a BSF camp and an army training center. Sahiya market features a variety of shops catering to all shopping needs. Educational institutions are also present, including two or three private schools, a polytechnic college, and a girls' college. Children from the village attend school in Sahiya, while some also travel to Vikas Nagar and Kalsi for schooling and higher education.

Nevi Village: Nevi is a smaller, more isolated village where traditional Jaunsari practices are strictly observed. Agriculture and cattle are the primary sources of income for the people and their livelihood.

Bohari Village: Bohari is known for its picturesque landscapes and terraced farming traditions. The people here are extremely dedicated to maintaining their tradition of culture through numerous local festivals and rituals. There was a well-known temple dedicated to Lord Parshuram in Bohari village. The idol of Lord Parshuram was crafted from silver and gold. The temple was maintained by a keeper known as Pir Ji, also referred to as Pujari Ji. People from various regions would visit this temple to offer their Prasad and seek the blessings of Lord Parshuram.

Khatasa Village: Khatasa is distinguished by its close community relations and traditional wooden architecture. The villagers here work in both agriculture and handicrafts, maintaining a balance between both occupations.

Korwa Village: Korwa, an additional isolated village, encounters difficulties such as restricted access to modern facilities and infrastructure. The people of the village, in spite of every aspect, maintain a strong sense of persistence and respect to their cultural customs.

FIELDWORK CHALLENGES

The Jaunsaris of Dehradun District

Anthropologically, the Jaunsari population is one of the largest populations of Uttarakhand. The Jaunsari tribe known as the indigenous population is mainly located in the tehsils of Kalsi and Chakrata, Dehradun district, Uttarakhand. The word “Jaunsaris” or “Jaunsari tribe” is frequently used to describe the people who live in Jaunsar-Bawar. The Jaunsaris, who live a traditional lifestyle and are recognized for their unique cultural practices. This tribal community is connected with a strong foundation of their ancestral customs. These people trace their origins back to the Pandavas of the Mahabharata. The Jaunsari people have historically practiced polyandry, in which a woman marries more than one husband.

The Jaunsaris caste system is divided into three categories: Brahmins, Servants, and Landowners. The majority of them reside in joint families. Since it is the main source of income for Jaunsaris, agriculture is the predominant occupation in that area. Generally speaking, Jaunsari people are tall, have fair skin, and have thick hair. Jaunsaris are bold, industrious, and hardworking people who farm and work in agriculture. They also have simple lifestyles. Rice, daal, curd, buttermilk, and onion salad are the favorite foods of the Jaunsari people, most of them eat it for lunch. They also consume lentils, wheat, and maize. These people have extremely demanding tastes for food as well as drinks. The Jaunsari people enjoy “Makke ki Roti” as part of their regular diet in addition to curd and buttermilk.

Social Structure and Organization: A patrilineal system, in which ancestry and inheritance are determined through the male line, characterizes the social structure of the Jaunsari people. The clans represent the structure of the civilization, and each has a unique identity along with a set of customs. The leader of the clan, known as the ‘Khandari’, takes responsibility for protecting the social system and resolving the disputes and conflicts of the family. Marriages are usually organized within the tribe, with the complex rituals and ceremonies that represent their deeply held traditional values (Majumdar, 1960; Naswa, 2001; Joshi, 2014; Gautam, 2015; Soni and Ghai, 2020).

Cultural Practices and Traditions: The Jaunsari culture is full of age-old customs that have been passed down through the centuries. Religious ceremonies and festivals are the most significant part of their cultural life, such as ‘Magh Mela’ and ‘Bissu Mela’ which attract significant participation from the community. They also express their culture through the music and dance, with folk dances and traditional instruments being essential to their social gatherings. The tribe worships deities such as Mahasu Devta, who is considered the primary deity, and practices a distinctive fusion of Hinduism and animism. They performed offerings and rituals in order to please the gods and at the time they also pray for their protection and blessings on prosperity (Bihan, 2015; Gautam, 2015; Bisht, 2017; Soni and Ghai, 2020).

Economic Activities and Livelihood: Agriculture is the main source of income for the Jaunsari people, and because of the hilly terrain, terraced farming is a popular practice. In addition to horticultural pursuits like apple and apricot production, major crops include wheat, barley, and millets. Their agricultural income is supplemented by raising farm animals, especially sheep and goats (Pandey, 2009; Pratap and Pratap, 2021). The Jaunsari community has witnessed a slow transition in recent years towards other forms of place of employment, such as government jobs and small-scale businesses. The demand for more economic stability and the impact of modernization are two factors contributing to this change.

Impact of Modernization: Even while the Jaunsari community has been able to maintain an important part of their traditional way of life and the modernization effects are becoming more noticeable among them. Positive developments have resulted from improved access to the healthcare and medical sectors and education as well because of these developments their traditional beliefs and practices are still under threat. Particularly the younger generation is highly impacted by metropolitan habits, which causes a slow change in social and cultural standards of Jaunsari people. With the provision of resources and facilities to raise living standards, government programmes targeted at tribal welfare have contributed to this change. But maintaining cultural heritage while allowing for growth is still a major problem (Dangwal, 2009; Joshi, 2014; Kumari,

Srivastava, and Sahani, 2021).

Fieldwork Challenges: During my fieldwork in the Jaunsari villages of Kalsi and Chakrata tehsils in Uttarakhand, I faced several specific challenges, particularly as a female research scholar. These challenges could be broadly categorized into three types: logistical, cultural, and personal.

Logistical Challenges: During my fieldwork in the Jaunsari villages of Kalsi and Chakrata tehsils, I faced numerous challenges that significantly impacted my research experience. The first major hurdle was accessibility. The hilly environment of the Jaunsari region presented a significant logistical challenge. Many of the villages were remote, often requiring long walks through rugged terrain or relying on unreliable local transportation. The problem was exacerbated by the spread-out nature of Jaunsari communities across isolated and hilly landscapes. This issue became particularly acute during the rainy season when roads, already lacking good surfaces, became even more treacherous and susceptible to landslides. On several occasions, landslides blocked my path, forcing me to find alternative routes or wait until the roads were cleared.

Infrastructure Posed another Set of Challenges: Basic utilities such as internet access, electricity, and medical services were limited and often unreliable. There were days when the electricity would be out for hours, disrupting my ability to charge essential equipment or access digital resources. The lack of consistent internet access made it difficult to communicate with colleagues, access online databases, or submit regular updates on my progress. Medical services were sparse, adding a layer of risk to the fieldwork. On one occasion, a minor injury required me to travel several kilometers to find a basic medical facility.

These logistical challenges were compounded by cultural and personal difficulties. However, overcoming these obstacles provided valuable insights into the resilience and resourcefulness of the Jaunsari people and enriched my understanding of their way of life. Despite the hardships, the experience reinforced the importance of thorough preparation and adaptability in fieldwork.

Cultural Challenges: I encountered several

cultural challenges that significantly impacted my research process. One major hurdle was the language barrier. In these villages, Jaunsari is the primary language spoken, especially among the elder population, whereas Hindi and English are not widely understood. This language gap necessitated the use of local translators, which sometimes affected the accuracy and validity of the data I collected. I often found myself questioning whether the nuances of my questions and the respondents' answers were fully captured.

Another significant challenge was navigating traditional gender roles deeply embedded in Jaunsari society. Many areas in these villages are male-dominated, and as a female researcher, gaining access and credibility in these spaces was particularly difficult. On multiple occasions, male informants were hesitant to engage with me or take my research seriously. This cultural norm not only limited my ability to gather comprehensive data but also required me to consistently prove my credibility and intentions, adding an extra layer of complexity to my fieldwork. These experiences underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in conducting research in such traditional communities.

Personal Challenges: I also faced personal challenges that tested my resilience and adaptability. Ensuring my safety and security was a constant concern, given the remote and isolated nature of these places. Navigating unfamiliar areas often presented risks, and the lack of immediate medical attention in case of health issues added to my worries. There were instances when I fell ill, and finding proper medical care required long and arduous journeys to the nearest town, which disrupted my research schedule.

Cultural Sensitivity was another Significant Challenge: To earn the trust of the community members, I had to immerse myself in the local customs and traditions. This required a deep understanding of Jaunsari cultural norms and a respectful approach when interacting with the villagers. Building rapport and establishing trust was a time-consuming and delicate process. As an outsider, I often found it challenging to gain access to private and sacred spaces where much of the cultural life took place. These areas were not readily open to outsiders, and entering them required a great deal of sensitivity and

patience. I had to carefully navigate these cultural boundaries, showing respect and understanding, to be accepted and allowed to observe and participate in these vital aspects of Jaunsari life.

These personal challenges highlighted the importance of cultural immersion and respect in conducting anthropological fieldwork. Despite the difficulties, these experiences enriched my understanding of the Jaunsari community and underscored the importance of patience and perseverance in ethnographic research.

Specific Challenges for Women Researchers: Due to the fact that there are gender dynamics in the Jaunsari villages, women researchers can encounter

additional difficulties. It might be challenging for women researchers to collect comprehensive data because of the ways that traditional gender norms limit women's mobility and participation in particular activities. Effectively navigating these gender norms is crucial to building credibility and winning the trust of the informants, both male and female.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following table provides an overview of the strategies used in successful fieldwork to get beyond the challenges that were encountered when working with the Jaunsari community.

TABLE 1

An overview of the strategies used in successful fieldwork

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Details</i> |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Preparation | Comprehensive preparation and prior knowledge of the community | Conducting thorough research about the Jaunsari community, their customs, traditions, and possible challenges before conducting fieldwork. |
| Language Skills | Learning basic understanding of the regional language to enhance communication | Acquiring basic proficiency in Jaunsari to facilitate better communication and reduce reliance on translators. |
| Local Connections | Establishing connections with local authorities and getting their support | Building relationships with local leaders and authorities to gain their support and facilitate smoother fieldwork processes. |
| Cultural Respect | Behaving respectfully for regional traditions while participating in community rituals | Showing respect for local customs and traditions by participating in community activities and rituals appropriately. |
| Adaptability and Patience | Being adaptable and patient, giving time for the establishment of trust | Demonstrating flexibility and patience, understanding that building trust with the community takes time and consistent effort. |

Experiences and Reflections

Conducting fieldwork in the Jaunsari villages of Sahiya, Nevi, Bohari, Khatasa, and Korwa provided me with invaluable insights into the Jaunsari culture and significantly enriched my research experience. From the moment I arrived, the warm participation of the Jaunsari people and their generous hospitality made the challenging journey feel more like an enriching adventure.

In each village, I was welcomed with open arms, and the residents eagerly shared their customs and traditions with me. Despite the demands of modernization and industrialization creeping into their daily lives, the Jaunsari people showed a profound commitment to preserving their cultural legacy. Their

willingness to explain and demonstrate their rituals, festivals, and daily practices was heartwarming and underscored the importance of cultural preservation in today's rapidly changing world.

One particular memory stands out from my time in Bohari village. The villagers invited me to participate in a traditional festival, where I witnessed vibrant dances, music, and ceremonies that have been passed down through generations. It was a colorful and lively event, and being part of it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the community's social fabric and values. This experience not only highlighted the resilience of the Jaunsari culture but also the intricate ways in which they maintain their traditions despite external influences.

However, the fieldwork was not without its challenges. The remote and rugged terrain often made travel difficult, and the lack of modern amenities was a constant reminder of the logistical hurdles. Yet, these difficulties were overshadowed by the genuine interactions and the knowledge I gained. The villagers' stories and experiences painted a vivid picture of their lives, providing context to my research and bringing my anthropological studies to life.

Adapting to the cultural norms of the Jaunsari people required patience and sensitivity. Gaining their trust was a gradual process that involved respecting their customs and approaching my work with humility. This respectful approach was essential in building meaningful connections and accessing private and sacred spaces, which were crucial for my research. The effort to adapt and be culturally aware paid off as I was able to delve deeper into their way of life.

These experiences were both demanding and rewarding, particularly as a female researcher. The fieldwork not only contributed significantly to my understanding of the Jaunsari tribe but also added to the broader body of anthropological and ethnographic literature on indigenous populations in India. The challenges I faced and overcame during this journey underscored the importance of adaptability, cultural awareness, and respect in fieldwork. They provided a profound understanding of the Jaunsari community and enriched my perspective as an anthropologist.

CONCLUSION

The Jaunsari tribe of Jaunsar-Bawar presents a rich and interesting area for research exploration because of its particular cultural practices, social structures, and geographical challenges. By selecting this group for the purpose of study, I get the opportunity to delve into a little-known field and discover fresh insights into their intricate rituals and ceremonies, patrilineal organization, and conventional gender roles. This research aims to significantly advance our understanding of India's diverse ethnic and tribal populations by examining the cultural legacy and contemporary dynamics of the Jaunsari tribe. In particular, it looks at how the tribe deals with modernity and outside influences.

In addition to being very challenging to work in

during fieldwork, the Jaunsari villages of Kalsi and Chakrata offer invaluable insights into culture and anthropology. The experiences of the Jaunsari people in Sahiya, Nevi, Bohari, Khatasa, and Korwa show their perseverance and cultural diversity. To overcome the practical, cultural, and individual challenges, people need adaptability, cultural awareness, and a strong dedication to moral and ethical research methods. These challenges can be especially difficult for female researchers, but they also offer unique chances for fresh perspectives and advancements in the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology.

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