

Report on completion of the short-stay study abroad program

School: Cultural and Social Sciences

Department: Comparative Studies

Name of the student: Farhana Yeasmin

Destination country: Bangladesh

Receiving university/institute: University of Dhaka

School of the host university: Faculty of Social Sciences

Department: Anthropology

Period of study: July 4, 2011 to January 4, 2012

My host university, the University of Dhaka consists of 13 Faculties, 66 Departments, 8 Institutes, 17 dormitories, 3 hostels and more than 35 Research Centers. The number of students and teachers in the University has risen to about 33,112 and 1,805 respectively. Sir P.J. Hartog was the first Vice-Chancellor in 1921. At the beginning a distinctive feature of the University of Dhaka was its non-affiliating, residential character like that of the Oxford of England. I had affiliation with the department of Anthropology from where I graduated. The Department of Anthropology at the University of Dhaka was established on December 03, 1992 and the first course was offered in the autumn of 1993. The Department of Anthropology offers degrees of BSS (Honors) in Anthropology, a 4-Year Course, MSS in Anthropology a 1-Year course and also M. Phil and Ph.D. of 2-Year and 3-4 Years duration respectively. The Department's joint research programs further enhance the learning and sharing opportunities with other research units of international excellence, both at home and abroad. The Department is noted for its strength in Social and Cultural Anthropology, at large, along with significant accomplishments in specialized areas like the anthropological study of traditional societies, urban societies, ethnic minorities, modernity, religion and symbolism and ethno-science. My host supervisor was Prof Shahed Hassan who came to Japan twice under Japan Foundation program at Osaka University and Visiting Researcher at Nagoya University. He has been supervising many international students as well as Japanese students. He was the local supervisor of Dr Kazuyo Minamide who graduated from the Graduate University for Advanced Studies. Dr. Hassan is now supervising Ishizaka Takami, a PhD candidate at the University of Tokyo who is working on human security. It was a great advantage for me to get him as my supervisor at the host university, i.e. the University of Dhaka.

I am fortunate in getting fund for the short-stay study abroad program because I was planning for long fieldwork that is required for my PhD thesis writing. My senior schoolmate Shirabe Ogata, who works in Nigeria and enjoyed this program, first shared about it and forwarded all papers to me. Then I talked to my supervisor Prof Nobuhiro Kishigami about it and he immediately told me to apply for this as though it seemed impossible to get. I was really fortunate that I got it and then I started feeling very confident to finish my fieldwork on time unless it could be really harder for me doing fieldwork for long time in Bangladesh. Actually I did research on education in mother tongue among the ethnic communities in the northern region of Bangladesh after I completed masters' degree, at that time I started learning their language. That fieldwork was helpful to interact with the local people in their language. For my

fieldwork, I worked on Oraons and they speak Sadri. When I came to know about this fund, immediately I wrote to my supervisor in Bangladesh about this program. He sent me an acceptance letter as well as from the Chairman of that department.

Precisely my research is about Education and Socio-economic Development. Specific title is 'The role of NGOs in Enhancement of Education among the Ethnic Communities in the Northern Region (BARIND) of Bangladesh' I went to Bangladesh for long fieldwork to collect data for writing my thesis. I learned Sadri to interact and for daily conversations with villagers. I worked in a village in Rajshahi district, which is far from the capital city of Dhaka. I followed participant observation method. I stayed there with an Oraons family in the village. I visited schools run by NGOs and government in the same village as well as other villages. I also visited NGOs and government offices, research centers, universities, libraries, archives etc. I collected materials, documents, reports, and books for my research as secondary sources. I interviewed students, teachers, parents, villagers, education officers, NGO personnel, fieldworkers, researchers, community leaders, professors in Dhaka and Rajshahi. I talked to them individually and in groups. I presented my research paper in an international conference at the University of Rajshahi. I gave a seminar on my field experiences at the Ashrai Training Centre where professors, researchers, fieldworkers, teachers, community leaders, Oraons people attended and actively participated in discussion. My supervisor in the host university, Prof. Shahed Hassan, and my friend Ishizaka Takami, PhD student of the University of Tokyo, working in Rajshahi, were also present. I got valuable comments, feedback and suggestions from that seminar.

I traveled some historical places in Rajshahi. I visited some museums and cultural academies. I attended and participated some religious and cultural festivals of Oraons and Muslim people. I met Dr. Kazuyo Minamide in the field and we discussed about my fieldwork. I had a chance to stay for couple of days with Takami at her place. We talked about many issues including research. She visited my family and we spent time together. I do believe all experiences have made my field stay meaningful.

As I shared before, the fund from this program helped me intensively and exclusively for my long fieldwork. It was not possible to undertake this fieldwork without the support of this program. Actually I was planning for fieldwork in Bangladesh from my savings. I put together my savings and the fund from this program and it went well for my research. Financial plans for travel expenses and for organizing a seminar was expensive but living cost did not affect me. Even I could give a feast for villagers as they arranged a small farewell ceremony for me. The rest money I could spend for travels and buying gifts for those who helped me during fieldwork, and books and DVDs for the children in the village. It was indeed a good fieldwork for me.

I spoke Sadri and sometimes Bengali in the village. That language was useful to communicate with the villagers. When I did fieldwork in Dhaka and Rajshahi, Bengali and English were required for research. Sadri was only spoken in the northern region, popularly known as the Barind, where Oraons live. I used three languages---- Sadri for research and living; Bengali for research, seminar, travels and living outside the villages; and English for research at international NGOs and in the conference. At the host university I spoke both Bengali and English for conversations but all academic works was done in English.

I made all contacts before I went to the field. I let them know what I want to do in my fieldwork. Sometimes it took away my time, patience and energy to get people at the institutes or in the offices. If I could make contact beforehand, it could be great for me in conversations even in collecting information.

From my own experiences, I would like to share few words for the future researchers in this program. It is always better to contacts the Host University and the people in the field beforehand, then it is appropriate to go to the field to make them understand about what we want to do. Making advance contact for research and even for discussions it is always necessary.

Besides making advance contact with the host institutions for all possible support a researcher should remain prepared to adjust in an alien culture, stay in a place that is devoid of all civic facilities, eat what they eat and physical fitness is a must to walk a lot. My humble suggestion is made here on the basis of what I learned and experienced while doing my fieldwork among the Oraons in a hard to reach rural setting in Bangladesh.



School going children with fun



An Oraon woman with child



An Oraon woman carries water for drinking





In break children came out for drinking water



Children playing in weekend



The house I stayed with a family



Villagers in 'Shohrai' festival



Lighted the house during 'Shohrai'



For worship in Karam



Villagers in 'Karam' festival at night