

In June 2011 I complete my approximately two years of fieldwork toward my dissertation, provisionally titled "Translations of Indigeneity: communicating Khasi identity and alterity in Bangladesh." The research has been primarily ethnographic focused on three sites: Srimangal fish market, Khasi village in Moulvi Bazar District, and Srimangal town. My objective was to find out ethnographically how self-identifying and representing themselves as "indigenous" (adivasi) was affecting community consciousness and identity among Khasis in rural Sylhet. Methodologically I observed, and in some instances audio and video recorded, language use (mostly narration and ritual performances), and interaction. I believed this focus to be theoretically and socio-historically justified, theoretically because subjectivity reveals itself through language more than through any other semiotic form, and socio-historically because of the paramount symbolic role of language in the development of Bangladeshi national consciousness.

While on a Fulbright-Hayes Doctoral Dissertation Abroad Fellowship I completed the following stages of my field research.

April-May 2009: Srimangal Fish Market

During this stage I video and audio recorded bargaining interactions in an open-air fish market in the small town of Srimangal, and did surveys of kinship networks and residency patterns among fish sellers. I also conducted extensive interviews with fish sellers and with customers. I intend to use this research to comparatively elucidate some social features of Khasi village life and their relationship to, and institutionalization of, authority.

Aug-Sept. 2009: Srimangal-based Khasi village research

After receiving last minute notification that my original village research site would no longer be possible (because of instability at the border) I spent these two months visiting Khasi villages in Moulvi Bazar District with the help of a Khasi social organization and a Catholic mission. At the end of this I secured permission to carry out twelve months of fieldwork in a different Khasi village.

Oct. 2009-June 2010: ethnography of Khasi village

The bulk of my village ethnography was completed during this stage, and in addition I participated in a host of extra-village Khasi ceremonies and events (weddings, funerals, religious gatherings, student meetings), much of which I was able to record for subsequent analysis.

While an AIBS Junior Dissertation Fellow:

Aug. 2010-June 2011: Srimangal-based research/analysis

This final phase of the research was carried out while based in a rented house in Srimangal. I had planned to remain in the village until October 2010. When the house that we rented in the village changed owners this no longer was possible. I also had the setback of a major lower back operation that kept me from

my fieldwork activities for most of September and October 2010. Nonetheless, this was a very successful period of research. It allowed me to follow up on various themes that revealed themselves in the previous year. For example, I did extensive follow-up interviews in a village near the one where I had been based. This provides the basis for my dissertation chapter on the repression of cultural memory among the Khasi and the tendency to see "tradition" as something future-oriented rather than recoverable from recollections.

Most of this period, however, was spent working with some college-student Khasi consultants in Srimangal transcribing, analyzing and translating selections of my Khasi language recorded corpora. This has presented difficulties, which themselves have alerted me to things that were previously unknown to me. The young, town-dwelling Khasis--the only ones available and willing to provide regular such research assistance--do not have the same breadth of knowledge of dialect varieties of War (the spoken register), nor do they understand much of the technical language of Khasi (the mostly written register) used in religious sermons. This drew my attention to the sociolinguistic effects of a difference in consciousness between the formally educated Khasi 'youth' and the under-educated Khasi elders in the village. With the help of reference materials available to me I have been able to fill in the blanks.

During this period I also began organizing my field notes into themes and have a rough outline of the dissertation. In addition, I have used this time to read lots of secondary literature in Bangla on the development of language consciousness during the Pakistan Period, and the nature of class relations and the development of national consciousness in the lead up to the Liberation War, all of which I see as a framing context for my study of the Khasi. I conducted a brief fieldwork stint in Dhaka during the Ekushe Book Fair (that memorializes the role of Bangla in the national liberation struggle) in order to put Khasi ethnolinguistic consciousness into a comparative frame within Bangladeshi linguistic nationalism. Finally, I have begun surveying the written archive that I have collected over the past two years: a combination of news articles in national and local papers relevant to the Khasi specifically or to adivasi issues in general, recent books in Bangla published on adivasi issues or the Khasis, and written materials collected from Khasi social organizations like the Khasi Student Union, Christian missions, and NGOs (Bangladesh Adivasi Forum).

In the coming year 2011-12 I plan to present papers on at least two of my dissertation chapters, one at the AIBS office in Dhaka, and another in the Semiotic Workshop at the University of Chicago.