

# The London School of Economics and Political Science



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28 October 1998

Dear Barbara

Thankyou for your letter. I am sorry about the delay in replying, but I have been very busy and I also knew from Johnny that you were doing fine anyway. The forms and my cv have been sent to Wenner-Gren.

Your letter is very impressive, as you have managed to do a huge amount of useful work in a short time. I am glad to hear that you have located a village to live in, and hope you are settling down. I have never really been in remote and forested part of India, so I am not sure what it is like, but I hope it is what you want and I am sure there are many advantages to being surrounded by trees instead of dusty streets! I hope the politics in the village turn out to be interesting and not a problem in the sense that you might get dragged in so that it is hard to stay neutral. This can be tricky to handle, but no doubt you are aware of it and because you have permission from the headman and the people, I expect you will manage well enough.

You say you are already finding that you cannot stick to the research plan. Do not worry about that and you are right to work on any other issue that appears to be important, clearly including the Bhumjas and their relations with the Hos and the royal family. The history of the state would clearly be very interesting too, and it is definitely a good idea to explore the documents being eaten by white ants. Here you will have to make your own strategic choices about how much time it is worth spending on the documents, given the need to do fieldwork as well. From here I cannot tell you the answer, but I am sure you will trust your own judgement about it. You also say that some parts of the research proposal are already revealed as nonsense, eg. comparison of plains, forests and hills. That kind of thing is common enough too; in Kerala all the data I had read suggested that Hindus and Christians lived mixed up in the same villages, so I wanted a mixed village. I rapidly found out that they live in separate villages, and that the data were misleading because administrative villages as recorded in the censuses, etc. were not the same as real villages. End of proposed research before I had started. It happens to most of us and you should not worry about it at all; just do what is sensible. Jack Goody used to tell a story of a man who couldn't handle the fact that his research proposal was unworkable in this sort of way, and was last seen drinking himself to death wandering across West Africa! The moral of course was that we must all be willing to change direction completely if necessary.

Your diary of the things you have been doing is impressive, and you have obviously got started quickly and efficiently. It is an excellent start and I hope all continues to go well. I know this is a short letter, but it is clear, as I say, that you have been making very good progress already, and there are not lots of problems to try to resolve at this stage. I look forward to further reports and will of course try to answer any questions you have. I am coming to India in December on a very fast trip; I shall arrive in Delhi on 15 Dec., probably staying chez Béteille for 3 days before leaving for Bombay. As it is a long way from Bihar to Delhi and the timing may be hopeless for you, I don't know if you could possibly come, but if you could be in Delhi c. 15-18 Dec., we could meet and that would be a good idea, I think and I would like to see you anyway.

The weather here is non-stop gales and rain, and term is too busy. So if you get fed up, think about what you are missing. But I hope you are not fed up and that everything continues to go well.

All the best,

*Chai*