CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Along with describing the conceptual framework and rationale of the present study, the previous chapter also elaborates about the religious institutions within which the Bhaona and Cham masked performances are practiced. The present chapter therefore elaborates on the research methodology adopted by the researcher in order to conduct the present study on the masked performances, prevalent in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. The researcher delineates the application of qualitative-exploratory research design, and also mentions about the research aim and objectives identified to explore the socio-cultural functionalities of Bhaona and Cham masked performances. Highlighting about the validity of using ethnography as a strategy of inquiry, the researcher elaborates on the research areas identified in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim to conduct the fieldwork. The chapter also outlines the Data Analysis Design, which the researcher has inductively arrived based on the responses of the research participants.

2.1 Research Design

Approaching the present research from the perspective of communication studies, the researcher adopted a qualitative-exploratory approach to identify the different stakeholders associated with Bhaona and Cham masked performances, foster a broader understanding of the socio-cultural matrix in which the performances are embedded, and analyze the evolved social and cultural functionalities of Bhaona and Cham masked performances in globalized context.

The researcher comprehended the appropriateness of following a qualitative approach for the present study as according to Creswell (2011), qualitative approach serves as a mode of social inquiry which is focused on investigating the shared meanings of social and cultural processes that the community under study has constructed over time. The approach facilitates researchers to elucidate implications of the research phenomenon within the societal and cultural context(s), wherein the community is situated (Miles, Herberman and Saldana, 2014).

The exploratory approach deemed suitable in the present study as according to Stebbins (2001), the approach facilitates delving into research phenomenon with limited available information, and subsequently identify patterns to understand the research participants' thought-processes including, attitudes, behaviors, values, etc. Based on emergent theoretical framework, exploratory approach provides researchers with a composite interpretation of varied perspectives through which the research participants experience the phenomenon. Therefore, the implications of the research phenomenon could be explored and analyzed through the emic perspective of the research participants, avoiding imposition of meanings ascribed by researchers (Creswell, 2011).

In the present qualitative-exploratory study, the researcher adopted ethnography as a strategy of inquiry for the masked performances, as according to Creswell (2009) and Geertz (1973), ethnography is one of the most effective strategies for exploring any socio-cultural phenomenon of "an intact cultural group", and generating "thick description" on how the community members interact within the cultural ecology, situated in naturalistic settings, and existing independently of the researcher.

Ethnography therefore entails overt or covert participation of the researcher in the "field of study" over an extended yet specific period of time, in order to explore the context-bound behavior, and experiences of the community members, and address the research phenomenon through pertinent interaction with the illuminative informants from the community. Scholars thus defined ethnography as "to represent a culture" or a "portrait of a people", which revolves around authentic representation of the field of study through the eyes of the community being studied (Tacchi, Slater, and Hearn, 2003). Ethnographers always strive to capture "local interpretation" of the socio-cultural processes of the community, thereby avoiding imposition of theoretical frameworks on empirical data at the beginning of the research process, and inductively arrive at specific lenses to interpret the research phenomenon by positioning it within culturally meaningful context (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Fetterman, 2010).

The application of ethnography as a strategy of inquiry for the present study is also validated through the utilization of ethnography by scholars to explore socio-cultural functionalities of masked performances practiced by heterogenous cultural groups. In "*Tribal Masks and Myths*" (2003), Tribhuwan and Savelli explore emic perspectives on

the dynamics of Bohada masked ritual practiced by the ethnic groups of the Thane district (in the Indian state of Maharashtra), in order to shed light on the social status of mask-makers. In the study titled "*Jungle Rabha Masks and Masked Dance*" (2015), Sarkar situated masked dance within the interplay of nature, culture, and politics, in order to explore how government forest policies, acculturation processes, and economic activities exerted influence on the masked dance of the Rabha ethnic group, who resides in the forests of North Bengal, which is situated in the Indian state of West Bengal. In "*Masks, Metaphor and Transformation: The Communication of Belief in Ritual Performance*" (2004), Merrill explores the symbolic relationship between the "material world" and the "spirit world" in societies practicing shamanic masking, in order to analyze how the ritualistic masked practices influence the state of consciousness in participants. With the help of ethnographic exploration, the study titled "*Masked Ritual and Performance in South India: Dance, Healing, and Possession*" (2006), offers meta-psychological perspectives on masked performances as culture-specific expression in which primary issues of identity and self-knowledge are brought into play. In the study titled "*Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*" (1996), Emigh explores the performance dynamics of various masked performances prevalent in India, Indonesia and New Guinea by juxtaposing the Western concept of masks as "cosmetic disguise" to an Eastern concept that considers masks as "an instrument of revelation", thereby playing significant roles in the meaning-making processes of the cultural groups.

2.2 Research Aim, Research Objectives, and Research Questions

Situating mask traditions within the interplay of culture and communication, the present study endeavors to explore the masked performances prevalent in the North-East Indian states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, with the help of the following research aim, research objectives, and research questions.

Research Aim:

The study aims to analyze the masked performances of North-East India as medium for construction and comprehension of symbolic reality, and maintenance of ritual order pertinent to cultural spaces.

Research Objectives and Research Questions:

The research objectives along with the associated research questions identified for the present study are mentioned below: -

- to analyze the social significance of Bhaona and Cham masked performances as medium of communication in contemporary rationalized communicative process of the cultural groups
    - what role does masked performances play in the inter-generational transmission of indigenous knowledge system and social norms in neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies?
    - what role does masked performances play in uniting and/or fragmenting the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies?
- to examine the role of Bhaona and Cham masked performances in the meaning-making process of the cultural groups
    - whether and how the performative context, masks, and performer-audience relationship are interrelated?
    - whether and how the interrelatedness of performative context, masks, and performer-audience relationship influence in the meaning-making process in the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies?
- to analyze how Bhaona and Cham masked performances as medium of communication help in enkindling cultural identity
    - what are the inherent identity markers in Bhaona and Cham masked performances?
    - whether and how such inherent identity markers are being appropriated?
- to examine how Bhaona and Cham masked performances have re-contextualized and negotiated in a globalized technology dependent world
    - what is the impact of globalization on the social and cultural significance of masked performances in the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies?
    - what is the impact of globalization on the traditional institutionalization of Bhaona and Cham masked performances?
    - how Bhaona and Cham masked performances have created opportunities for appreciation of the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist philosophies in the globalized context

2.3 Context of Ethnographic Fieldwork

The present study on masked performances of North-East India started with purposive identification of field sites where the Bhaona and Cham masked performances could be appropriately explored by the researcher. In order to conduct the ethnographic research, the researcher visited Majuli district of Assam, Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, and East Sikkim district of Sikkim during the religio-ritualistic occasions in which the institutionalized masked performances are held within the religious institutions of Sattras, lay-Namghars and Gompas.

The ethnographic fieldwork started in the year 2018 and was carried out through 2022, with two rounds of field visits to each selected districts in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. The initial field visits in each state were mostly focused on exploring structural and functional facets of neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, identifying different stakeholders associated with the masked performances, documenting the masked performances, and building rapport with the performing communities. The subsequent field visits involved corroboration of primary data through more number of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders associated with the performative traditions.

Serial No.	Month	Year	State	District	Context
1.	November	2018	Assam	Majuli	Raas Purnima
2.	January – February	2019	Sikkim	East Sikkim	Losar
3.	October	2019	Arunachal Pradesh	Tawang	Tawang Festival
4.	September	2021	Assam	Majuli	Tithi of Sankaradeva
5.	December	2021	Sikkim	East Sikkim	Losoong
6.	January	2022	Arunachal Pradesh	Tawang	Torgya

Table 2.1: Context of Ethnographic Fieldwork

With the help of the following table the researcher provides a vivid description of the Context in which the ethnographic fieldworks were conducted.

Serial No.	Context (Calendrical Ritual)	Description of the Context
1.	Raas Purnima	Observed by the neo-Vaishnavites of Assam on the full moon night in the Assamese month of Kati or Aghun (i.e. October or November in the Gregorian calendar), in order to commemorate the 'divine dance' of Raas Leela performed by Krishna with the Gopis (female cowherds) of Vrindavana.
2.	Losar	Observed by the Tibetan Buddhists of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, which marks the end of the 12th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar – known as Gyal, and beginning of the 1st month of the Tibetan lunar calendar – known as Chu (corresponding to mid-February to mid-March in the Gregorian calendar), in order to celebrate the Tibetan New Year, known as Losar.
3.	Tawang Festival	Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Department sponsored annual folk festival which is held in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh since 2012, mostly in the month of October, in order to celebrate the cultural heritage of the State, and promote tourism in the region.
4.	Tithi of Sankaradeva	Observed by the neo-Vaishnavites of Assam to commemorate the birth anniversary (held in the Assamese month of Ashwin or Kartik i.e. mid-September to early October) and death anniversary (held in the Assamese month of Bhado i.e. September) of the Vaishnava apostle – Sankaradeva.
5.	Losoong	Observed by the Bhutia and Lepcha tribes of Sikkim (who are also adherents of Tibetan Buddhism), which marks the end of the 10th month of the

		Tibetan lunar calendar – known as Mindrug, and 1st day of the 11th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar – known as Go (that correspond to mid-December in the Gregorian calendar), in order to celebrate the Sikkimese New Year, known as Losoong.
6.	Torgya	Observed by the Tibetan Buddhists of Arunachal Pradesh during the end of the 11th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar – known as Go (which corresponds to mid-January to early February in the Gregorian calendar), in order to invoke the Tibetan Buddhist Dharma protector – Yamantaka.

Table 2.2: Description of the Context

2.4 Research Areas

This section precisely elaborates about the three research areas (i.e. Majuli district of Assam, Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, and East Sikkim district of Sikkim) purposively selected by the researcher in order to conduct the ethnographic fieldwork.

2.4.1 Assam

2.4.1.1 Geographic and demographic profile of Majuli district in Assam

Majuli, located in the North-East Indian state of Assam, holds geographical significance being the largest river island in the world. In 2016, Majuli became the first island district of India, after being carved out from the Jorhat district of Assam. Majuli district presently occupies an area of 352 square kilometers (after losing 1048 square kilometers to recurring floods and land erosion), and is surrounded by three rivers namely, Brahmaputra, Kherkutia Xuti and Subansiri. The rich cultural and natural heritage of Majuli has placed the island on the UNESCO's Tentative List for nomination as a World Heritage Site (since 2004).

According to 2011 Census by the Government of India, Majuli district has a population of 1,67,304, with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes comprising of 14.27% (23,878) and 46.38% (77,603) of the population respectively. The diverse

population of Majuli comprise of non-tribal caste Hindu Assamese, such as Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kaibartas, along with ethnic groups like Ahom, Chutia, Deori, Koch, Mising, and Sonowal Kachari. In the district, 99.04% of the population is Hindu[18], followed by 0.35% Muslim, and 0.15% Christian. Around 54.47% of the population speaks Assamese language, followed by 41.01% Mising language, 1.66% Bengali language, and 1.22% Deori language. The major economic activities of the inhabitants of the island comprise of agriculture, handloom, pottery, boat-making, fishing, animal farming, etc.

2.4.1.2 Identification of Majuli district in Assam as the field of study

The religio-ritualistic Bhaona performances are prevalent in all the thirty-five districts of Assam; however, the researcher purposively selected Majuli district as the field of study, owing to the significance of Majuli in the cultural map of neo-Vaishnavism. Majuli is revered as a sacred site by the adherents of neo-Vaishnavism, attributed to the historic "Manikanchan Sanjog" in the 16th century when the founder of neo-Vaishnavism – Sankaradeva had met another Vaishnava apostle – Madhavdeva on the island, and the auspicious meeting furthered the proliferation of neo-Vaishnavite movement. Eventually, Majuli became a seat of neo-Vaishnavite culture, as the island (also known as "Sattra Nagari") witnessed the establishment of sixty-five Sattras representing all four samhatis of neo-Vaishnavism, after the construction of the first Sattra at Dhuwahat Belaguri of Majuli in 1437 CE by Sankaradeva[19]. Therefore, being the cradle of Sattra institution of Assam, Majuli stands as the cultural epicenter of the Sankari tradition, housing renowned Sattras, such as Uttar Kamalabari Sattra, Natun Samaguri Sattra, Auniati Sattra, etc., whose exponents have earned national as well as international acclaim for proliferating the Bhaona and mask tradition of Assam.

2.4.1.3 Description of Sattras and lay-Namghars selected for the study in Majuli

This section provides a concise overview of the significant Sattras in Majuli which were selected for the present study to explore the Bhaona performances as

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[18] According to 2011 Census, the Hindu population can be divided into two cults namely, adherents of Saktism and adherents of Vaishnavism. However, among the Hindus, "Vaisnavite culture is predominantly practiced by the people in the district", with Majuli being "one of the pioneers of this Vaisnavite culture and religion" (p.17).

[19] According to Borah (2020), due to recurring floods and land erosion in Majuli, presently there are only twenty-two Sattras in Majuli, and most of the Sattras have relocated to adjacent districts. The researcher also could not delve into the nuances of Bhaona performances of Kala samhati, as the sole Sattra representing the samhati in Majuli, namely Ahatguri Sattra, has been eroded in the flood of 2020.

practiced in the Sattra institutions of Assam. Additionally, a brief description of the lay-Namghars (tribal and non-tribal) selected for the present study to explore the performative tradition as practiced by the Vaishnava laities is also provided.

Auniati Sattra - Auniati Sattra was established in 1653 CE under the patronage of the Ahom king Sutamla, who was bestowed with the name Jayadhwaj Singha after initiation into neo-Vaishnavism through the first Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra – Niranjan Deva Goswami. The Sattra, affiliated with the Brahma samhati, houses an idol of Krishna (also called Gobindo Mohaprobhu) inside the Sattra-Manikut, which receives daily worship from the Kewaliya bhakats of the Sattra.

Dakhinpat Sattra - Dakhinpat Sattra was established in 1654 CE by the Vaishnava apostle Banamali Deva Goswami (1576-1683 CE), under the patronage of the Ahom king - Jayadhwaj Singha. Since then, the Sattra has maintained a lineage of Sattradhikar from the family of Banamali Deva Goswami (Shin, 2017). Affiliated with the Brahma samhati, the Sattra houses an idol of Krishna (addressed as Jadhav Rai) within the Sattra-Manikut, which receives daily worship from the Kewaliya bhakats of the Sattra.

Garmur Sattra - Garmur Sattra, affiliated with the Brahma samhati, was established in 1656 CE by the Vaishnava apostle Jayarama Deva Goswami, under the patronage of the Ahom king - Pratap Singha. Until the early 20th century, the inmates of the Sattra adhered to celibacy, with both the Sattradhikar and other inmates leading a Kewaliya life. In order to adapt to societal changes, the then Sattradhikar of Garmur Sattra – Pitambardeva Goswami turned Garmur Sattra into a Grihasti Sattra in 1915, allowing the inmates to marry, except for the Sattradhikar and Deka Sattradhikar (Sarma, 1996).

Samaguri Sattra - Samaguri Sattra was established in 1663 CE by one of the grandsons of Sankaradeva – Chakrapani Ata, under the patronage of the Ahom king Chakradhwaj Singha. Presently, there are two branches of Samaguri Sattra in Majuli namely, Prachin Samaguri Sattra and Natun Samaguri Sattra. Affiliated with the Purusa samhati, the inmates of the Sattra are allowed to marry, thereby functioning as a Grihasti Sattra. One of the exponents of the Sattra – Kosha Kanta Deva Goswami has earned international repute for promoting the Bhaona mask tradition, and received the Sangeet Natak

Akademi (SNA) award in 2003, followed by the recognition of Hem Chandra Goswami's effort towards preserving the mask tradition through SNA award in 2018.

Bihimpur Sattra - Bihimpur Sattra was established in 1635 CE by the Vaishnava apostle Govinda Ata, under the patronage of the Ahom king - Pratap Singha. The Sattra, affiliated with the Purusa samhati, allows the inmates to marry, thereby operating as a Grihasti Sattra. One of the exponents of the Sattra – Khagen Mahanta has been into the practice of mask-making for the Bhaona performances since decades, and has also earned national accolades for his dexterity in the tradition.

Alengi Narasingha Sattra – Alengi Narasingha Sattra was established in 1746 CE under the patronage of the Ahom king – Pramatta Singha. The Sattra, affiliated with the Purusa samhati, houses the idol of Kalia Gosai (also called Mahaprabhu Basudev), and allows the inmates to marry.

Uttar Kamalabari Sattra and Natun Kamalabari Sattra - Uttar Kamalabari Sattra, a branch of the Kamalabari Sattra, was established in 1673 CE by Badala Padma Ata, who was a disciple of Vaishnava apostle – Madhavdeva. The Sattra, affiliated with the Nika samhati, houses the Bhagavata Purana inside the Sattra-Manikut, which receives daily worship from around hundreds of Kewaliya inmates of the Sattra. Since the year 1975, the exponents of the Sattra have been visiting various parts of India along with foreign nations such as Nepal, China, Japan, Singapore, London, America, etc. for performing Sankari culture. Natun Kamalabari Sattra, also a branch of the Kamalabari Sattra, was established in 1936 CE, and is affiliated with the Nika samhati.

Tribal Mising lay-Namghar - The Mising population in Majuli who have adopted neo-Vaishnavism, established lay-Namghars across the island, one such Mising lay-Namghar is located in Borgayan No 2 village under the Chilakola Gram Panchayat. The Mising Vaishnava adherents associated with the lay-Namghar undertake regular training in Bhaona and mask-making from the exponents of Auniati Sattra, Uttar Kamalabari Sattra, Natun Samaguri Sattra, etc., and organize Bhaona performances on religio-ritualistic occasions. In 2018, two Mising male performers from the village received the honorary title of 'Bayan' from the Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra for their excellence in playing musical instruments such as, bor taal, khol, etc. The adherents have also been into the

practice of mask-making since generations, and earned accolades, particularly for craftsmanship in masks, while participating in Bhaona competitions held across Assam.

Non-tribal Gopalpur lay-Namghar – Gopalpur lay-Namghar, located near the Garmur Sattra in Majuli, has lay-adherents belonging to non-tribal communities, such as Brahmins, Kayasthas and Kaibartas, who have been into the tradition of Bhaona performances and mask-making since generations, and earned acclaim for continuing the performative tradition from Sattras and lay-Namghars situated across Assam.

2.4.2 Arunachal Pradesh
2.4.2.1 Geographic and demographic profile of Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh

Tawang, situated in the North-East Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, shares international border with Bhutan in the south-west, and China (or disputed Tibet Autonomous Region) in the north, and is separated from the rest of India by the Sela Pass. Until 1984, Tawang was a sub-division of Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh.

It is believed that Tawang derived its name from the majestic Tawang Gompa, which is situated in the western part of Tawang. However, the chequered history of Tawang documents the existence of an autonomous state known as Lhomon or Monyul between 500 BCE and 600 CE (Savada, 1993). The inhabitants of Monyul, known as Monpas, although adopted Tibetan Buddhism practiced in Tibet and Bhutan, and learnt Tibetan alphabet for religious purposes (Prakash, 2007), they were not considered as Tibetans, and were labeled as an "inferior race", who must be indoctrinated into the civilizing impact of Tibetan Buddhism (Nanda, 2020). In the 14th century, Monyul underwent increasing socio-politico-religious as well as cultural influence from Tibet, prompting to direct governance from Lhasa during the 17th century, which continued till 20th century. In 1914, the bilateral agreement of Simla Convention between Britain and Tibet led Tibet to cede a significant portion of its territory, including Tawang, to the British, which eventually became part of independent India (Shakya, 1999).

Presently, Tawang district covers an area of 2172 square kilometers, with an elevation ranging from 6,000 to 22,000 feet above the sea level. According to the 2011 Census of Government of India, Tawang district has a population of 49,977, with

Scheduled Tribe consisting of 69.7% (34,811) of the population, out of which Monpa is the dominant ethnic group. In the district, 69.87% of the population practices Buddhism, followed by 23.69% Hinduism, 3.09% Islam, and 1.55% Christianity. Around 68.71% of the population speaks Monpa language, followed by 10.22% Hindi language, 7.01% Nepali language, 3.89% Assamese language, and 2.45% Bengali language. The major economic activities of the Monpa tribe encompass agriculture and yak farming.

2.4.2.2 Identification of Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh as the field of study

Although the Tibetan Buddhist adherents of Arunachal Pradesh reside mostly in two districts namely, Tawang and West Kameng, the researcher selected Tawang district as the field of study, owing to the geo-politics of the region and subsequent importance of Tawang in the cultural map of Tibetan Buddhism. Tawang is considered as a sacred site by the adherents of Tibetan Buddhism as five kilometers southeast of the Tawang town stands the Urgyelling Gompa, which is the birthplace of Tsangyang Gyatso – the 6th Dalai Lama. Tawang district also houses the two most revered Tibetan Buddhist Gompas of Arunachal Pradesh namely, Tawang Gompa (belonging to Gelug school) and Khinmey Gompa (belonging to Nyingma school) that have been playing pivotal roles in preserving Tibetan Buddhist religious tradition in the Monyul region since 15th century.

The importance of Tawang Gompa and Khinmey Gompa in upholding the religious tradition could also be traced from the work of Niranjan Sarkar (1981) where the scholar-bureaucrat mentioned that the Tawang Gompa has been a centre for religious as well as political powerhouse for Monyul, which was directly governed by Lhasa; thereby providing the scope to the Government of Tibet to exercise socio-politico-religious authority over the region and the Monpa ethnic group, who remained subjects of Lhasa till the year 1951. The Khinmey Gompa of Tawang, associated with the Mindrolling Gompa of Tibet has also been successfully practicing Tantric rituals, and institutionalizing the Tibetan Buddhist knowledge system among the inmates of the Gompa comprising of Monpa locales as well as Buddhist practitioners from Nepal and Bhutan. The district also houses Ani Gompas, such as Bramadung Chung Ani Gompa, Gyangong Ani Gompa and Singsur Ani Gompa that provide insight about the lives of the Buddhist women who have embraced monasticism.

2.4.2.3 Description of Gompas selected for the study in Tawang

This section provides a concise overview of the significant Gompas in Tawang, which were selected for the present study in order to explore Cham performances as practiced by the inmates of the Gompas. Additionally, a brief description of one of the Ani Gompas selected for the present study to examine the dynamics of Cham performances within the Ani Gompas of Arunachal Pradesh is also provided.

Tawang Gompa - Tawang Gompa, also known as Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, stands as the largest Gompa in India and the second largest in Asia. Nestled in the valley of the Tawang Chu River, and close to the borders of China and Bhutan, it was established by Lodre Gyatso in 1680-1681 CE at the behest of the 5th Dalai Lama – Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso. Affiliated with the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gompa has religious association with the Drepung Gompa of Lhasa in Tibet. Prior to the introduction of the Gelug school in Tawang, the Nyingma school of Tibtan Buddhism was predominantly followed which resulted in hostility between the two sects. The religious conflict was compounded by the Drukpas of Bhutan, who being adherents of the Nyingma school tried to exert control over nearby Tawang region. Consequently, the Tawang Gompa was built at a strategic location in a fort-like structure (Mibang and Chaudhuri, 2004).

Khinmey Gompa - Khinmey Gompa, also known as Sang-ngag-Choekhorling, belongs to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, and is situated in the Khinmey village of Tawang. According to legend, Sonam Rinchen, a legendary hunter from Yubu village encountered the monk – Kudun Sangey Yeshe during a hunting expedition. Captivated by the monk, Rinchen gave up hunting and became an ardent devotee of the monk. In a gesture of reverence, Rinchen offered land to the monk for the construction of Khinmey Gompa in 1440 CE (Sarkar, 1981). Presently, there are more than hundreds of monks, hailing from Bhutan, Nepal and Monpa community, engaged in studying ancient Buddhist texts and contemporary subjects under the guidance of the Rinpoche.

Bramadung Chung Ani Gompa - Bramadung Chung Ani Gompa, located approximately ten kilometers from the Tawang Gompa, is the oldest Ani Gompa in Tawang. During the 1595 CE, the Gompa was established by Lama Karchen Yeshi Gelek belonging to the Tsang Province of Tibet. Presently, there are almost fifty Anis in

the Gompa who conduct monastic rituals associated with the Gompa, and sustain on donations offered by lay-devotees.

2.4.3 Sikkim

2.4.3.1 Geographic and demographic profile of East Sikkim district in Sikkim

East Sikkim, nestled in the southeastern corner of the North-East Indian state of Sikkim, spans over 964 square kilometers, and stands at an elevation of 2,000 feet above the sea level. In the year 2021, the district underwent administrative reorganization, which led to the renaming of the district as Gangtok district, along with carving out of the Pakong region as a separate district.

Historically, East Sikkim was an integral part of the sovereign monarchical state of Sikkim, and during the 19th century, the territory came under the Bhutanese rule. Followed by the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864, the territory came under the command of British forces (as per the Treaty of Sinchula), who aimed at establishing trade routes with Tibet through Sikkim. Post India's independence in 1947, the region remained part of the Kingdom of Sikkim, and was under the protectorate of India, until it was integrated to India in the year 1975 (Subba, 2007).

Presently, according to the 2011 Census by the Government of India, East Sikkim has a population of 2,83,583, with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes comprising of 5.4% and 27.7% of the population respectively. In the district, 62.74% of the population practices Hinduism, followed by 25.55% Buddhism, 8.25% Christianity, and 2.19% Islam. Around 65.59% of the population speaks Nepali language, followed by 8.63% Hindi language, 8.16% Sikkimese language, 3.41% Lepcha language, 2.25% Bhojpuri language, 1.68% Bengali language, 1.55% Limbu language, 1.49% Tamang language, and 1.14% Sherpa language. The major economic activities of the inhabitants of the district comprise of agriculture and ecotourism.

2.4.3.2 Identification of East Sikkim district in Sikkim as the field of study

According to the database maintained by the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim (2012), there are total hundred and eleven Gompas across four districts of Sikkim namely, North Sikkim, East Sikkim, West Sikkim and

South Sikkim[20]. Among the hundred and eleven Gompas, only twenty-three Gompas conduct Cham performances, as not all Gompas are equipped with substantial number of inmates required for organizing the religio-ritualistic Cham masked performances. Among the twenty-three Gompas conducting Cham performances, East Sikkim district houses the most number of Gompas, i.e. eleven, followed by ten Gompas in North Sikkim, and one Gompa each in South and West Sikkim. Along with the presence of the most number of Gompas where Cham is being performed, East Sikkim district also houses the two most revered Gompas of Sikkim namely, Rumtek Gompa (belonging to Kagyu school) and Enchey Gompa (belonging to Nyingma school) that have been preserving the religious tradition since 17th century, and functioning as transnational Tibetan Buddhist religious institution which attract national and international Buddhist devotees. East Sikkim also houses an Ani Gompa, named Khachoed Pema Woeling Ani Gompa, which offers an insight into the lives of Buddhist women who have embraced monasticism. Therefore, owing to such relevance of East Sikkim in the cultural map of Tibetan Buddhism, the researcher selected East Sikkim as the field of study.

2.4.3.3 Description of Gompas selected for the study in East Sikkim

This section provides a concise overview of the significant Gompas in East Sikkim which were selected for the present study, in order to explore Cham performances as practiced by the inmates of the Gompas. Additionally, a brief description of the Ani Gompa selected for the present study to delve into the dynamics of Cham performances within the Ani Gompa of Sikkim is also provided.

Enchey Gompa - Enchey Gompa, also known as Sang-Nga-Rab-Ten-Ling, is affiliated with the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, and was established in 1840 CE by Lama Drubthob Karpo, who was revered for his power of flying from one place to another. According to the database maintained by the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim (2012), the Gompa was reconstructed in 1908 by the 10th Chogyal of Sikkim – Sikyong Tulku. The architectural design of the Gompa mirrors the five-peaks of the Mount Wutai Shan (also referred to as Gyanak Riwo Tse Nga by the

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[20] Although presently there are six districts in Sikkim, two being carved out in 2021, the website of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim has not updated the data yet. The present study has started in 2017 with completion of data collection by 2021, therefore, the researcher has mentioned about four districts in Sikkim, and not six.

Tibetans) of Shaanxi province of China, which the Buddhist community considers as the worldly abode of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom – Manjushri.

Rumtek Gompa - Rumtek Gompa, also known as the Dharma Chakra Centre, is associated with the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, and was established in the mid-18th century by the 12th Karmapa – Changchub Dorje, in order to serve as the primary centre of the Karma Kagyu lineage in Sikkim (Gyatso, 2005). According to the database maintained in the website of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim (2012), the Gompa was reconstructed in 1962 by the 16th Karmapa – Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, after fleeing Tibet due to the Chinese invasion of 1959. The Gompa houses Tibetan Buddhist relics that were brought from the Tsurphu Gompa, which is the primary seat of the Karmapa in Tibet. The Gompa also mirrors the architectural design of the Tsurphu Gompa with four-storied building. Being the seat of the Karmapa in exile since 1962, Rumtek Gompa serves as the international headquarter of the Kagyu school, with more than four hundred monks residing in the Gompa.

Situated at a distance of half a kilometer from the Dharma Chakra Centre is the 'old' Rumtek Gompa (also known as Karma Thubten Chokhorling), which was established in 1734 CE by the 4th Chogyal of Sikkim – Gyurmed Namgyal, and is recognized as one of the major Kagyu Gompas in East Sikkim district of Sikkim.

Khachoed Pema Woeling Ani Gompa - Situated at Ranka village of East Sikkim district, the Khachoed Pema Woeling Ani Gompa was established in 2006 by Khamtul Jigme Thinley Lhundup Rinpoche, in order to proliferate the Dudjom Tersar lineage, which as described by Jane Tromge (2004) is one of the principal Terma lineages of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism that was revealed by Dudjom Lingpa and Dudjom Rinpoche. As informed to the researcher by the head ani of the Gompa – Ani Sonam Wangmu, the Gompa was designated as the main Dudjom Tersar of Sikkim in the year 2011 by Dungse Thinley Norbu Rinpoche. Presently, there are around thirty Anis in the Gompa who conduct monastic rituals as well as ritualistic practices in the houses of lay-adherents.

2.5 Research Tools and Techniques

In order to achieve the research objectives of the present study, the researcher used three research tools and techniques of qualitative data collection namely, non-participant observation, in-depth interview, and focus group discussion. Detailed descriptions about the application of the three research tools and techniques of data collection in the research areas selected for the present study are mentioned below.

2.5.1 Non-Participant Observation

In qualitative research, particularly in social sciences, observation is considered as "one of the oldest and most fundamental approaches in research methods. This approach involves collecting data using one's senses, especially looking and listening in a systematic and meaningful way" (McKechnie, 2008). There are mainly two types of data collection methods through observation namely, participant observation and non-participant observation. While participant observation encompasses an "extended immersion in a culture and participation in its day-to-day activities" by the researcher, non-participant observation entails entering the social setting to observe the research participants without actively participating in the research phenomenon (Liu and Maitlis, 2010; Calhoun, 2022).

In qualitative research, non-participant observation is considered as a significant method of primary data collection for varied reasons. According to Williams (2008), non-participant observation is a "relatively unobtrusive" qualitative method of collecting primary data about the social system which is being studied, without any direct interaction between the researcher and the research participants. In the naturalistic setting, also known as "research site", the researcher is physically co-present with other research participants for an extended period of time in order to observe the "reified patterns emerging out of the social actions"; however, the researcher does not subjectively experience different dimensions of the social actions through direct participation. Therefore, there is no systematic manipulation of the research variables through the interference of the researcher. Non-participant observation, thereby, enables the researcher to document the behavior patterns of the research participants pertaining to predetermined research phenomenon through audio and video recording, and most importantly facilitates the access of the researcher to the research participants' behavior

patterns taking place within social settings, which could be considered as their "natural habitats" (Altmann, 1974; Barner-Barry, 1986).

Following the directives of Creswell (2011, p.178) on data collection procedures in qualitative research, the researcher purposefully identified the research sites, research events, and research participants in the three research areas, i.e. Majuli district of Assam, Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh and East Sikkim district of Sikkim for non-participant observation, which could help in better understanding of the research phenomena. The research sites, research events, and research participants involved in the present study for non-participant observation are mentioned below.

Research Sites

• Sattras in Majuli district of Assam where Bhaona masked performances are held (description of each Sattra selected for the study is mentioned in Section 2.4.1.3)
  ▪ Auniati Sattra
  ▪ Dakhinpat Sattra
  ▪ Garmur Sattra
  ▪ Samaguri Sattra (Natun Samaguri Sattra and Prachin Samaguri Sattra)
  ▪ Bihimpur Sattra
  ▪ Alengi Narasingha Sattra
  ▪ Uttar Kamalabari Sattra
  ▪ Natun Kamalabari Sattra

• Lay-Namghars in Majuli district of Assam where Bhaona masked performances are held (description of each lay-Namghar selected for the study is mentioned in Section 2.4.1.3)
  ▪ Tribal Mising lay-Namghar
  ▪ Non-tribal Gopalpur lay-Namghar

• Gompas in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh where Cham performances are held (description of each Gompa selected for the study is mentioned in Section 2.4.2.3)
  ▪ Tawang Gompa
  ▪ Khinmey Gompa
  ▪ Bramadung Chung Ani Gompa

• Gompas in East Sikkim district of Sikkim where Cham performances are held (description of each Gompa selected for the study is mentioned in Section 2.4.3.3)
▪ Enchey Gompa
▪ Rumtek Gompa
▪ Khachoed Pema Woeling Ani Gompa
• Government Training Centres in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh and East Sikkim district of Sikkim
▪ Government Craft Centre of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh
▪ Directorate of Handicraft and Handloom in East Sikkim, Sikkim

Table 2.3: Research Sites for Non-Participant Observation

Research Events		
(description of each research event is mentioned in Table 2.2)		
Majuli (Assam)	**Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh)**	**East Sikkim (Sikkim)**
• Raas Purnima • Tithi of Sankaradeva	• Tawang Festival • Torgya	• Losar • Losoong

Table 2.4: Research Events for Non-Participant Observation

Research Participants		
Majuli (Assam)	**Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh)**	**East Sikkim (Sikkim)**
• Sattra based Bhaona performers • Sattra based mask-makers • Inmates of Sattras other than Bhaona performers • Lay-Namghars based Bhaona performers • Lay-women Bhaona performers • Lay mask-makers	• Gompa based Cham performers • Gompa based mask-makers • Ani Gompa based nuns • Inmates of Gompas other than Cham performers • Lay mask-makers • Audiences of Cham performances • Teachers in Government	• Gompa based Cham performers • Gompa based mask-makers • Ani Gompa based nuns • Inmates of Gompas other than Cham performers • Lay mask-makers • Audiences of Cham performances

	Training Centres	Teachers in
• Audiences of Bhaona performances	• Students in Government Training Centres	Government Training Centres
		• Students in Government Training Centres

Table 2.5: Research Participants for Non-Participant Observation

In the present study, with the help of non-participant observation the researcher delved into diverse social, cultural, and religious aspects of the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist masked performances which include, associated rituals; performers-audiences relationships; relationship between the inmates of Sattras or Gompas with lay adherents; behaviors of performers and audiences within the religious spaces of the Sattras, lay-Namghars and Gompas; status of different performers; attitudes of performers and audiences toward different masks used in the performative traditions; interaction among the members of the religious community; interaction with the national as well as foreign tourists, etc. The insights gleaned from non-participant observation not only anchored the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted by the researcher with the research participants, but also aided in the analysis of the masked performances by corroborating the emic perspectives of the religious communities with the etic observations of the researcher, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the Bhaona and Cham masked performances.

2.5.2 In-Depth Interview

In qualitative research, particularly in social sciences, open-ended in-depth interviews are extensively used by the researchers as a method of primary data collection, which entails exploration of research phenomenon through verbal interaction between the researcher and the research participants. Such interaction facilitates deeper understanding of the processes through which the research participants learn, adapt and attribute meanings to values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior patterns within the social system. While the participant and non-participant observations provide primary data on behaviors and actions of the research participants, the in-depth interviews provide the scope to learn about the research participants' reflections on their own behavior patterns,

co-related situations, identities, etc., thereby gaining an "insider's perspective" by the researcher (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015; Das, 2000; Babbie, 2013; Groh-Samberg and Tucci, 2010). Therefore, in qualitative research, research participants for in-depth interviews are purposefully selected based on their expertise on the phenomenon under study, ensuring they provide valuable insights to the researcher (Creswell, 2011, p.178).

In-depth interviews also enable the researcher to immerse themselves in the research participants' lived "everyday world", thereby establishing rapport with the research participants prior to delving into their personal details (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Mellor, 2003). The semi-structured in-depth interviews also provide the research participants the scope to share their responses on the research phenomenon through less controlled broader narratives (Briggs, 1999).

In the present study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders associated with Bhaona and Cham performances such as, Sattra based Bhaona performers, lay-Namghar based Bhaona performers, and Gompa based Cham performers; lay-women Bhaona performers; Sattra based mask-makers, and Gompa based mask-makers; lay mask-makers in the three districts; Ani Gompa based nuns; tour agents in the three districts; and teachers and students in Government Training Centers in Tawang and East Sikkim. The researcher purposefully selected the stakeholders or research participants for in-depth interviews based on different criteria such as, ranks as functionaries in the Sattras or Gompas, resourcefulness (as mentioned by community members), willingness to be interviewed, and availability at the time of interviews. The researcher conducted a total of one hundred and five in-depth interviews, with data saturation playing a crucial role in determining the final number of interviews. With the help of the following table, the researcher further elaborates about the criteria for purposefully selecting the research participants, as well as the total number of in-depth interviews conducted in each of the categories of stakeholders associated with the Bhaona and Cham masked performances.

Key-informants (Research Participants)	Criteria for Purposeful Selection of Research Participants	Total Number of In-Depth Interviews
Sattra based Bhaona performers in Majuli	• Sattradhikar or Deka Sattradhikar, Bor Bayan, and Bor Gayan (rank-wise selected) • Two performer-bhakats (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Forty-Five (five participants from each of the nine select Sattras mentioned in Section 2.4.1.3)
Lay-Namghar based Bhaona performers in Majuli	• Bayan, Gayan, and two performers (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Eight (four participants from each of the two select lay-Namghars mentioned in Section 2.4.1.3)
Gompa based Cham performers in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Champon or Chamjyu, and Umze (rank wise selected) • Two performer-bhikkhus (selected based on resourcefulness, availability, and willingness)	Sixteen (four participants from each of the four select Gompas mentioned in Section 2.4.2.3 and 2.4.3.3))
Lay-women Bhaona performers in Majuli	• Two performers (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Two
Sattra based mask-makers in Majuli	• One mask-maker (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Nine (one participant from each of the nine select Sattras)
Gompa based mask-makers in Tawang and East Sikkim		Four (one participant from each of the four select Gompas)

Lay mask-makers in Majuli, Tawang, and East Sikkim	• Two mask-makers from each state (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Six
Ani Gompa based nuns in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Head Ani (selected based on rank) • One Ani (selected based on resourcefulness, availability and willingness to participate)	Four (two participants from each of the two select Ani Gompas mentioned in Section 2.4.2.3 and 2.4.3.3)
Tour agents in Majuli, Tawang and East Sikkim	• One from each state (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Three
Teachers and students in Government Training Centres in Tawang and East Sikkim	• One teacher (selected based on rank) • Three students (selected based on resourcefulness and availability)	Eight (four participants from each of the two Centres)

Table 2.6: Total Number and Description of Selected Research Participants

With the help of the following table, the researcher elaborates about the research foci explored through the in-depth interviews of the research participants.

Key-informants (Research Participants)	Focus of Inquiry for In-Depth Interviews
Sattra and lay-Namghar based Bhaona performers in Majuli, and Gompa based Cham performers in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Performance purpose and occasions • Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Importance of the religious institution in teaching and

	learning of masked performances
	• Criteria for selecting performers
	• Social status of performers and their relationship with non-performers
	• Importance of audience in the masked performances
	• Language(s) used in masked performances
	• Characterization and narratives of masked performances
	• Influence of masks over the wearers during the performances
	• Different costumes associated with the performances
	• Different dances and musical instruments associated with the performances
	• Continued relevance of the masked performances within the religious community
	• Motivations of new performers
	• Changes in the performative tradition
	• Impact of digital technology and globalization on the masked performances
Lay-women Bhaona performers in Majuli	• Performance purpose and occasions
	• Motivations of women performers
	• Teaching and learning space of women performers
	• Social status of women performers in comparison to male performers
Sattra based mask-makers in Majuli, and Gompa based mask-makers in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Associated rituals while crafting and storing masks
	• Importance of masks in the performances
	• Different types of masks and color codes of each mask
	• Any adaptation and innovation for survival or revival of masks

Lay mask-makers in Majuli, Tawang and East Sikkim	• Difference in teaching-learning process of mask-making on the basis of religious institution based learning and lay learning • Motivations of lay mask-makers in learning the craft
Ani Gompa based nuns in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Roles of anis in Cham performances
Tour agents in Majuli, Tawang and East Sikkim	• Potential of masked performances for attracting tourists • Any Government schemes or endeavors to promote Bhaona or Cham as tourist centric performances • Changes brought about (if any) in the performative tradition due to tourism
Teachers and students in Government Training Centres in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Measures adopted by the State Government in encouraging potential students • Motivations of students to learn mask-making • Status of the Government institute based mask-makers in contrast with religious institution based mask-makers

Table.2.7: Focus of Inquiry for In-Depth Interviews

In order to conduct the in-depth interviews, the researcher prepared semi-structured interview protocols (attached in Annexure), which facilitated the collection of emic perspectives on the mask traditions from purposively selected research participants. The duration for conducting each in-depth interview varied from thirty minutes to one hour, depending upon the spectrum of data that surfaced during the interview process. The in-depth interviews were recorded in audio formats with due permission from the interviewees, and subsequently transcribed by the researcher.

2.5.3 Focus Group Discussion

In qualitative research, focus group discussion emerged as a significant data collection method wherein the researcher clubs six to eight research participants into a small group to collectively explore their perspectives on the predetermined research

phenomenon through interaction (Creswell, 2011; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Babbie, 2013; Morgan, 1996; Bryman, 2012). Focus group discussions are particularly effective for obtaining qualitative data for research questions that are focused on the processes by which meanings are constructed through dynamics of group interactions (Bryman, 2012, p.13). As the research participants of a focus group discussion exchange their views on particular research topic, they also consider perspectives of other participants in order to refine their own thought-processes (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015, p.26). The focus group discussion therefore, aims at collecting primary data from a group of purposively selected research participants who are conversant with the research phenomenon, instead of obtaining data from samples that are statistically representative of the large population. In focus group discussion, the group dynamics comprising of sharing of experiences and comparing of diverse viewpoints yield much deeper understanding of the research phenomenon as compared to interviews that are conducted among equivalent number of individual research participants (Nyumba et al., 2017).

In the present study, the researcher conducted focus group discussions with audiences of Bhaona performances in Majuli district, and Cham performances in Tawang and East Sikkim districts, in order to examine how masked performances contribute to the shared meaning making process within the cultural groups. The researcher purposively selected the research participants for focus group discussions from the audiences who attended the Bhaona or Cham masked performances at Sattras or Gompa respectively, and agreed to participate in the research process. The random selection of research participants was also based on factors such as, age (ranging from youth[21] to super senior citizen[22]), sex (both male and female), and educational qualification (ranging from secondary education to postgraduation level) in order to explore whether these variables influence their engagement with the votive masked performances, and overall meaning making process. Each focus group discussion included eight research participants, representing a diverse mix of age, sex and educational qualifications. In each state three focus group discussions were conducted, with data saturation playing a crucial role in determining the final number; therefore, a total of nine focus group discussions were conducted for the present study.

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[21] In India, as per National Youth Policy 2014, youth is defined as a person of age between fifteen and twenty nine years of age (Source: www.mospi.gov.in).
[22] The Income Tax Department, Government of India defines super senior citizen as individual who is eighty years of age or above (Source: www.incometax.gov.in)

With the help of the following table, the researcher elaborates about the research foci explored during the focus group discussions with research participants.

Key-informants (Research Participants)	Focus of Inquiry for Focus Group Discussion
Audiences of Bhaona performances in Majuli, and Cham performances in Tawang and East Sikkim	• Motivations of watching the masked performances • Importance of masks in the performances • Social status of the performers within the religious community • Perceived changes (if any) in the masked performances • Impact of digital technology in their roles as audiences of masked performances

Table 2.8: Focus of Inquiry for Focus Group Discussion

In order to conduct the focus group discussions, semi-structured interview protocols (attached in Annexure) were prepared by the researcher that facilitated in the collection of emic perspectives from the audiences representing diverse demographics including, age groups, sex, and educational qualifications. The duration for conducting each focus group discussion varied from forty minutes to one hour, depending upon the spectrum of data that emerged during the group discussions. The focus group discussions were recorded in audio formats with due permission from the research participants, and subsequently transcribed by the researcher.

2.6 Data Analysis Design

In the present study, with the aim of achieving the research objectives, the researcher applied thematic analysis as a method for analyzing the qualitative data collected through the ethnographic fieldwork. The researcher deemed thematic analysis suitable for the present study, as according to scholars such as Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) and Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis entails systematic identification of repeatedly shared experiences and meanings (i.e. patterns) by the research participants, organizing (or coding) such repeated patterns from the qualitative

dataset into emerging themes as analytical categories, and establishing connections to a broader conceptual or theoretical framework.

Application of thematic analysis in the present study is also validated through the utilization of thematic analysis by different scholars who have explored varies facets of social, cultural and religious practices in both traditional and global contexts. In the article titled "*A thematic analysis of religious identity and volunteer motivation among emerging adult members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints*" (2023), Smith explored how in the traditional context the relationship with Church impacts the identity formation among volunteers. Smith analyzed the data with the help of four themes including, "membership in Church and development of self-perception", "key elements that infuse religious identity formation", "questioning and examining beliefs", and "family influence". In the article titled "*Heritage Tourism and Ethnic Identity: A Deductive Thematic Analysis of Jamaican Maroons*" (2021), Sinclair-Maragh and Simpson explores how heritage tourism serves as an important tool to promote ethnic identity, with the help of thematic analysis including, "factors that hinder the Maroon's identity and traditions", "factors that promote the Maroon's identity and traditions", and "the role of tourism in promoting and retaining the Maroon's identity and traditions".

In the present study, the researcher initially identified the repeated patterns (such as key phrases or similar line of thought) emerging from the responses of the research participants collected during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which were based on different focus of inquiry. Subsequently, in congruence with such repeated patterns, the researcher formulated different themes aligning with the set research objectives in order to code the dataset, and analyze the findings of the ethnographic fieldwork. It is imperative to mention that a single focus of inquiry has led to the formation of multiple themes due to the diverse and multifaceted responses shared by the research participants. In the following table, the researcher elaborates about the different focus of inquiry for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions that contributed to the formulation of each theme to achieve the set research objectives.

Focus of Inquiry for In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion	Theme Formulated by Researcher from Repeated Patterns in Responses
Research Objective - Social significance of masked performances in the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies	
• Performance purpose and occasions • Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Associated rituals while crafting and storing masks • Importance of religious institution in teaching and learning of masked performances • Criteria for selecting performers • Social status of performers and their relationship with non-performers • Motivation of new performers • Difference in teaching-learning process of mask-making on the basis of religious institution based learning and lay learning • Continued relevance of the masked performances within the religious community	Institutionalization of masked performances and authority of ritual-experts
• Criteria for selecting performers • Social status of different performers and mask-makers with non-performers • Roles of anis in Cham performances • Social status of women Bhaona performers in comparison to male performers	Embodied masked performances and social structure

• Performance purpose and occasions • Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Importance of the religious institution in teaching and learning of masked performances • Social status of performers and their relationship with non-performers • Importance of audience in the masked performances • Characterization and narratives of masked performances • Knowledge about masks, costumes, musical instruments and dances associated with performances • Continued relevance of the masked performances within the religious community • Motivations of new performers • Motivations to learn mask-making • Motivations of watching the masked performances	Religious socialization through masked performances
• Performance purpose and occasions • Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Importance of religious institution in teaching and learning of masked performances • Language(s) used in masked performances • Characterization and narratives of masked performances • Motivations of watching the masked performances • Continued relevance of the masked performances within the religious community	Social integration through masked performances

Research Objective - Role of masked performances in the meaning-making process of the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies	
• Performance purpose and occasions	Dynamics of Performative Context
• Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Social status of performers and their relationship with non-performers • Importance of audience in the masked performances • Characterization and narratives of masked performances • Influence of masks over the wearers during the performances • Importance of masks in the performances for audience	Masks-Performers-Audiences dynamics
• Importance of the religious institution in teaching and learning of masked performances • Criteria for selecting performers • Social status of performers within the religious community and their relationship with non-performers • Motivations of new performers • Importance of audience in the masked performances • Motivations of watching the masked performances	Performers-Audiences dynamics

Research Objective - Role of masked performances in enkindling cultural identity in the neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies	
• Performance purpose and occasions	Performance space, purpose, occasions and cultural specificity
• Associated rituals before, during and after masked performances • Associated rituals while crafting and storing masks • Characterization and narratives of masked performances	Associated rituals, narratives and cultural ethos and worldview
• Different costumes associated with the performances • Different musical instruments and dances associated with the masked performances	Costumes, musical instruments, dances and cultural specificity
• Different types of masks and color codes of each masks • Importance of masks in the performances • Influence of masks over the wearers during the performances • Associated rituals while crafting and storing masks	Visual conventions of masks and culture-specific belief system

Research Objective - Influence of globalization and digital technology on the masked performances of neo-Vaishnavite and Tibetan Buddhist societies	
• Changes (if any) in the performative tradition • Measures adopted by the State Government in encouraging potential students • Motivations of students in learning mask-making in Government institutes • Status of the Government institute based mask-makers in contrast with religious institution based mask-makers	Heritagization of masks and masked performances
• Changes (if any) in the performative tradition • Any adaptation and innovation for survival or revival of masked performances	Folklorization of masked performances
• Potential of masked performances for attracting tourists • Any Government schemes or endeavors to promote Bhaona and Cham as tourist centric performances • Any adaptation and innovation for survival or revival of masked performances • Changes brought about (if any) in the performative traditions due to tourism	Cultural tourism and masked performances
• Impact of digital technology and globalization on the masked performances • Impact of digital technology in their roles as performers of masked performances • Impact of digital technology in their roles as audiences of masked performances	Connectivity-Interactivity-Autonomy through digital technology and masked performances

Table 2.9: Themes Identified to Achieve Research Objectives

In order to shed light on the performative intent, performance repertoire, knowledge transmission process, performer-audience relationship, importance of masks in the Bhaona and Cham masked performances, and transitions observed within the masked performances, the qualitative data collected through the non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions based on different focus of inquiry are elaborated in the following chapter as the findings of the present study.

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