INTRODUCTION

A. Theme

The thesis entitled “A Philosophical Analysis of Religion and Morality in Tribal Culture: with special reference to Ao Naga tribe” focuses on analyzing the tribal culture through the realms of religion and morality from a philosophical perspective. The thesis mainly discusses conceptual issues in relation to the central role that religion and morality interplay in the tribal cultures, generally and in the Ao Naga tribe particularly.

Throughout the ages, religion has been the driving force of every culture and civilization. As it is believed, religion stems from the fear of the unknown encircling superstition, symbol, myth, taboo and so on which is believed that it can only be intervened by a higher power. In the vast field of religion, moral values cannot be ignored as they play an immense role in knitting the conduct of man.

Without religion, talking about morality can be difficult because moral codes emerge from religion. They are not independent but are interdependent of each other as they interplay a major role in both the cultures of tribal and world communities as well. The ardent spirit with which the tribals practised their religion needs to be reviewed so as to bring out a substantial world-view of their rich culture, as their practices are looked upon with low dignity at present time.
In this context, the thesis would like to contribute to human knowledge a critical and philosophical analysis of religion and morality in tribal cultures with reference to Ao Naga tribal community. The findings in the thesis will pave the way for

a) Understanding the present ethos of the tribal communities in general and the Ao Naga community in particular,

b) A philosophical analysis of their life-style especially in the realms of morality and religion and

c) A comprehensive study of their future prospective life.

B. Objective

All human beings have values and they come about as a combined result of instinct, social conditioning, and life - experiences. As humans are a unique species – capable of both incredible compassion and unequaled brutality, it is the moral codes and values of religion that brings out directly the behavior of individual and societies according to their customs and traditions. Philosophy is an important subject connected broadly with religion, morality and tribal culture. Philosophy should provide ample atmosphere through which the often neglected rich religious and moral culture of the tribals should be brought upfront for a lucid world-view.

Keeping this in mind, the thesis has three objectives –

1. To philosophically analyze the role of religion and morality in tribal cultures

2. To explore and bring out a refined ethnographic worldview of the Ao Naga tribe

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3. To expand and enrich the worldview of the Ao Nagas through the interplay of religion and morality.

C. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is explorative and analytical, yet hermeneutical in its approach and nature, allowing re-examining and interpretations as the text becomes alive in the reader’s own acknowledgement. The project takes seriously, keeping in mind the interdependency of religion and morality, in bringing out its analysis on tribal culture. The thesis being hermeneutical (explanatory) in its approach, critical assessments and analysis are also incorporated. The giant pillars of religion and morality in philosophy cannot be embraced in their wholeness in this thesis as there are certain limitations in analyzing the tribal culture. So, it is indispensable to leave room for different interpretations.

D. Execution of the Research

The steps taken in the presentation of the thesis are briefly given below:-

D.1. Collection from Literary sources:

Since the present research includes both theoretical and analytical studies, it commences with collection and review of literary sources available on the subject matter. The following are the books which were collected to start the research: Christopher Augustus

**D.2. Consultations:**

In order to do justice in the data collection of literary resources, the research scholar underwent for collection of reviews and information to various sources across the cities. The scholar had an opportunity to access the following libraries, offices, museum and ashram for consultation:

- Private Office library of Art and Culture Department, Government of Nagaland, Kohima
- UTC college library, Bangalore, Karnataka
The consultations enabled this scholar to explore several innovative and worthwhile information.

**D.3. Field Research:**

As a major part of the research work, the field research was mainly focused on observations, participation and interviews with knowledgeable individuals. These approaches gave an impetus to this scholar to broaden his understanding and widen his wisdom about the life-pattern of the Ao tribes and from that to enhance the horizon of specializing the theme of this research. Further, the scholar participated in the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland which is held from 1st to 7th December every year, where all the major Naga tribes represent themselves with their traditional heritage. During the festival, the research scholar had an opportunity to observe and locate how symbols and meanings were utilized with ritual context.

Since the research topic is with reference to Ao Naga tribe, the research scholar undertook a field trip to Molungyimsen (Ao Naga village) which is considered to be the first village where the seed of Christianity was first planted in Nagaland in 1876 by Dr. E.W. Clark an American Christian Missionary. As the research scholar himself belongs
to Ao tribe and is from the mentioned village, the manner of identifying knowledgeable individuals was not troublesome. Personal interviews were conducted with them and the scholar was facilitated with a sizeable information and knowledge which are essentially used in the third and fourth chapters.

E. Limitations

There are a few limitations in conducting the research of this thesis. Firstly, since an in-depth study of religion and morality would be beyond the scope and limits of the researcher, so ample priority is given to the analysis of tribal traditions and culture. Secondly, ever since the initial period of the thesis, the researcher is aware of the non-availability of written sources and records particularly pertaining with the traditional practices of Ao Naga tribe. Thirdly, it is almost impossible to understand the worldview of the Ao Naga tribe as it is immeasurably influenced by the rapid growth of modernity and Christianity. Fourthly, much has not been researched by scholars on the subject of “philosophically analyzing the role of religion and morality in the Ao Naga tribe” and hence only limited works on this area are available.

F. Unfolding the Research project

The thesis unravels into five chapters, and they are divided in such a way that each chapter deals separately but at the same time relatively with the main thesis. Chapter one examines some of the important fields of religion, morality and tribal culture by defining them from collective literary sources and highlighting their limitations. Chapter two
specifically presents a critical and philosophical study of tribal culture from the perspective of religion and morality. Chapter three introduces an ethnographic world view of the Ao Nagas of Nagaland. The fourth chapter brings in the Ao Naga culture through a critical assessment and contemporary analysis of religion and morality. The final chapter gives the conclusion of the thesis presenting a summary of the previous chapters and the contribution of the thesis to human knowledge.

G. Contributions

The research project brings out its contribution to knowledge by exploring and highlighting the tribal cultural philosophy in a new limelight from the perspective of religion and morality. Every tribal culture has its own philosophy at least at an implicit level and an understanding of life. So, there is need for re-visioning our view of tribals and their traditions. The practice of religion and its moral codes in the tribal culture needs to be reviewed so as to bring out a substantial worldview by accepting the tribals’ way of perceiving the Divine, the Man and the Cosmos. Much has not been researched on the Ao Naga traditional culture from the perspectives of religion and morality so the researcher would like to bring out a world view contribution either by unearthing new truths or by exhibiting known knowledge from a new angle.

Mankind from time immemorial had been bifurcated as believers in a Supreme power beyond human comprehension or a non-believer of an ultimate reality, but believed in nature or perfected human personalities. In due course natural sources and enlightened persons also have been elevated to the level of God-head. This kind of belief in a supra-natural power, whether in a primitive period or in the advanced state of science and
technology, enable mankind to realize the ‘transcendence’ and immanence of God. Owing to the development of civilization and culture, materialism has gained momentum pushing aside religious and moral values to the background. At this juncture, the pathetic plight of the tradition-stricken tribal masses could not totally result to materialistic culture at the cost of their deep rooted beliefs and customs, nor could they completely get rid of religious practices and moral codes. Hence the findings in the thesis become more significant in the sense that the tribal culture must be recognized and revamped in the arena of world-cultural settings.
G.1. Contributions of previous scholars and authors towards a comprehensive study of this thesis:-