CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 introduced many of the features of this investigation. This chapter provides an overview and analysis of various sources that were consulted in preparation for it. As mentioned earlier, the problem of determining whether young college-educated Dimasas differ in their attitude towards traditional religious beliefs and practices, and what factors surround decisions to cleave to traditional beliefs or rely less upon them is terra incognita. A great deal of research into western, mostly American, religious attitudes and behavior has been done. While individual studies from that research might not relate directly and specifically to Dimasa realities, taken together they provide insight into the terrain that must be explored.

For that reason, a wide number of experts were engaged, admittedly with the realization that in the end many of them would not contribute directly to providing insight into the unique Dimasa reality. Even so, all were helpful as prologues to attempts to understand what is going on.

The chapter is divided into two parts: a longer section on studies on religion and a shorter section on works consulted in developing the methodology for the study.
2.2. STUDIES ON RELIGION

Sociology of religion has long been embroiled in controversy about the place of religion in contemporary societies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the adequacy and cogency of these controversies in the arena of non-Western religious discourse must be challenged. At the same time, given the overarching pragmatic stance of this inquiry, these approaches were ignored at great peril. Until the present exploration was able to provide an adequate framework for understanding what is going on in the minds and hearts of young Dimasas, no resource could be dismissed at the outset peremptorily.

Disagreements about the very definition of religion, about what its salient characteristics might be, why individuals are attracted to it or repulsed from it, and whether its hold on society is growing or lessening are extensive. Much of the basic research in the field, specifically, studies of individuals’ attitudes and behavior in the religious realm, have taken place in the West, both geographically and culturally. The material on religious traditions of Asia is much more limited. That limitation further slims to essentially non-existence in the realms of India's traditional communities. That which is available for traditional communities tends strongly towards anthropology. They address questions about the gods, the feasts, family structure, and life events of a given people.

Given those dynamics, the question of the attitudes of a group of contemporary college-educated youths in a traditional community, is thematically more comfortable in the western tradition. At the same time, that tradition of study, though very rich, remains foreign to the realities of the major Indian religious traditions, and even more distant from the worldview and practices of traditional communities.

The dearth of basic research presented a challenge. Given an apparent scholarly aversion to fundamental research in the area, this effort had to cast a wide net. It presents an examination of 1) challenges to the prospect of the study of religious cultures; 2) efforts to trace religious dynamics, predominantly within the Western context, with special attention to secularization theory and rational choice theory; 3) an investigation of the elements of “religiosity,” what it means to be “religious;” 4) an exploration of patterns of
religious conversion, switching, and apostasy; and 5) after a short inquiry with respect to pre-literate cultures and modernity, approaches to traditional religious cultures, with particular attention to the religious culture of the Dimasa people.

2.2.1. Preliminary considerations

Several authors raise the challenge of the very concept of 'religion' as a noun. Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962) carefully traces the use of the word 'religion' through the last 2000 years. Rather surprisingly, he finds that it is first used in its present sense as an invention of the European Enlightenment. Many people, to be sure, have faith in something, many people are religious, but the word and concept of ‘religion’ must be approached with great caution. To speak of ‘a religion’ is to objectify and reify a very human reality, and so to distort it beyond any usefulness. Smith argues the term should be dropped, at least as a noun, as meaningless and seriously misleading. This is particularly good counsel for those of the Western world approaching the religious heritage of other people.

The challenge of 'religions' can be perceived in fundamental differences between religious styles of the West. Western religious tradition is traditionally seen as a divine revelation of exclusive truth, opposed to a broader approach to religious truth seen in Gandhi and others (Claerhout & De Roover, 2005). As early as the late 1960s, sociologists such as Larry Shiner (1967) warned of carrying western attitudes into a world context because of the reification Huston Smith warned of. This criticism is echoed by Richard Machalek (1977) who cautions that definitions of religion can be too inclusive and fail to reflect the multi-functional and multi-faceted realities of religious experience, and that a definition, even a tentative one, makes available some information while hiding other aspects.

Even so simple a term as 'supernatural' presents a danger in analyzing religious beliefs. Benson Saler (1977) presents a clear historical exegesis of the term so that it might be salvaged as a category in sociology of religion. Åke Hultkrantz (1983) cautions that the term 'supernatural' is fraught with difficulties, particularly in the context of Native American faith traditions. He finds no such conception in the world conceptions of North American traditional native societies, and finds similar challenges in the use of contrasts
such as sacred/profane and holy/unclean, (neither of which is parallel to natural/supernatural). These, he asserts, are used unreflectively and even carelessly. Indeed, while the natural/supernatural distinction can be specified only within a particular cultural context, he emphasizes that 'in primal societies religion is virtually diffused in the cultural life…. The supernatural dimension cuts right through mundane life…' (p. 249).

David Mandelbaum (1966) outlines one approach to the dilemma Hultkrantz presents, arguing that it is critically important to distinguish pragmatic and transcendental aspects of religion. While in traditional worldviews the pragmatic – desire for good crops, health, children – predominates, these faith traditions also contain aspects of transcendental goals, a salvation lodged somehow beyond mundane reality. In presenting this schema, Mandelbaum makes use of Robert Bellah’s (1964, 2011) discussion of religious evolution, a formulation to which we will return later. Suffice it here to recall that Bellah proposes that as human societies develop and become more complex, the symbolic systems human beings employ to ground themselves in that reality become more complex as well.

Schilbrack (2010) cogently summarizes many of these objections, and asserts the word 'religion' is a social construction suffering great ambiguities. Despite that, it refers to some kind of social reality. Admitting the problem of reification, in that 'religion' names a 'bounded and even static object'; of 'homogenization', in that the term gathers together realities that are very different (p. 1126); in that there is a problem of autonomy, implying the necessity of a free-standing distinct sphere; and, finally, the problem of privatization in that it carries the connotations of voluntary belief and inwardness. He finds some sympathy with Daniel Dubuisson’s 2003 neologism of 'cosmographic formation' as a substitute for 'religion'. For Schilbrack this term escapes these perils, yet admits that it still encompasses thoroughly western terms and ideology. In the end, Schilbrack returns to the term 'religion' with the understanding that it always describes, after all, a real and unique complex of behavior and belief.

In light of this, it is here that a preliminary definition of religion can be offered that seeks to overcome the difficulties of Smith and others. As discussed in Chapter 1, the
definition by Clifford Geertz (1995) seems least culturally laden, and provides an understanding that bridges the chasm between western assumptions and Dimasa realities.

With this in mind, then, it is possible to carefully proceed with sociological research into the complexities of these symbolic systems. Virtually all of this research, unfortunately, has been grounded in Western and indeed in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. The examination of this research, then, is not intended to uncover a suitable paradigm for an investigation into Dimasa religious culture, but rather to attempt to uncover elements that might prove helpful in the attempt to analyze its dynamics, particularly the dynamics of religious change. To provide a homely comparison, an understanding of American baseball does not provide a parallel understanding of the game of cricket. Given this, an element such as pitching in baseball can help one understand bowling in cricket, though with the many conditions that limit ball delivery in each unique sport. So, too, insofar as a family resemblance of religious traditions is possible from Geertz’s definition, symbolic conceptions and behavioral tendencies from the western tradition ought – albeit with great care – to illuminate to at least some degree the inherited Dimasa tradition. At the same time, however, given the contrariety between the traditions, these studies need to be approached with great caution.

2.2.2. Secularization Theory

Two radically different theoretical approaches form the foundation of much of the current research and reflection on religious dynamics. Of these, secularization theory is the more venerable. Its fullest treatment is found in Charles Taylor’s exhaustive account of its history and present reality in A Secular Age (2007). Here Taylor outlines the roots of the approach found in the Enlightenment to its contemporary shape in North Atlantic cultures. Taylor, as had been mentioned, carefully limits himself to that geographical/cultural area. Chief among these is his description of the process of rationalization and disenchantment, models that form the core of the writings of Max Weber (Swatos & Christiano, 1999).

At the risk of egregious oversimplification, the core of the secularization paradigm can be found in what Taylor describes (and eschews) as a 'subtraction story' in which 'once we slough off our concern with serving God, or attending to any other transcendent reality,
what we’re left with is the human good, and that is what modern societies are concerned with’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 572). When ongoing scientific discovery narrows and then eliminates the space for God as a causative agent, people are left with the immanent sphere – concrete and earthly realities as the arena of life – as the transcendent is eliminated. Taylor refuses to settle for such a simplistic characterization of the process. Rather, he describes contemporary western life as a 'disenchanted' realm of the 'buffered self', in which one’s 'ultimate purposes are those that arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my response to them' (p. 38). These and other of Taylor’s elements are among the core concepts this study explores, particularly in its effort to uncover 'Whence young Dimasas?'

Development of the secularization paradigm preceded Taylor’s work. Most prominent, perhaps, is Peter Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy* (1967/1990) where the process of differentiation is explained. This is the process in which the transcendent is separated from a holistic world-view, leading to two independent spheres: the religious and the non-religious secular, the sacred and profane, the immanent and transcendent. This in turn leads inevitably to a structural separation of the religious from other aspects of society. This gives those newly independent aspects (such as economy and politics) space in society to develop and eventually dominate. The book’s original publication in 1967 placed it prominently in the rising tide of the secularization paradigm among sociologists. Swatos and Christiano (1999) provide what is almost certainly the best account of the history of the paradigm.

Larry Shiner offered an early critique of the theory in his paper 'The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research' (1967). As did Smith for the concept 'religion', Shiner teases six contradictory meanings of 'secularization'. Of these, the most useful are 'differentiation', by which a transcendent sphere becomes separate from the earthly immanent domain, 'desacralization' by which rational science replaces religious faith (Taylor’s 'subtraction') and 'transposition', by which what was previously sourced in divine power is now seen as originating in human creation. While Shiner finds each of these three useful, he recommends dropping the term 'secularization' (along with 'religion') completely from social scientific discourse.
Going further in this direction, Jeffrey Hadden (1987) complains about the lack of scrutiny that the concept of secularization has received. He claims that secularization is a doctrine and ideology consisting of a 'hodgepodge' (p. 598) rather than a cogent scientific theory. He then provides evidence that the existing data simply does not support the conclusions of the theory, citing the experience of the United States where there is no evidence of religious decline despite modernization and development. The controversy these papers created continues to animate discussion in the field.

Olivier Tschannen (1991) presents a systematic synthesis of different researchers’ approaches to secularization theory, and so proposes a unity to the theory that Shiner denies. He outlines the presence of similar phenomena such as differentiation, privatization, and rationalization (among others) common to different presentations of the theory, while admitting different formulations of structures to those theories. As such, the paper serves as a most useful introduction to the geography of the secularization thesis.

Another clear opponent is Rodney Stark, who aims a broadside against the theory in the somewhat provocatively titled 'Secularization, R. I. P.' (Stark, 1999c). Here Stark provides more substance to many of Hadden’s assertions, going so far as claim that there is no evidence for a decline in religious practice even in Europe, the theory’s home ground. Stark contends that the thesis of secularization does not limit itself to institutional differentiation – e.g. politics becoming independent of religious control – the facet that he contends the theory's defenders now minimally resort to. Stark contends that 'if this were all that secularization means, there would be nothing to argue about' (Stark, 1999c, p. 252). Another article the same year accuses mainline social scientists of an unexamined atheistic bias:

What early social scientists would find particularly upsetting is that there is no lack of things to study – that religion has not only failed to disappear but is, in many ways, stronger than ever… Granted that even today, most social scientists continue to display a substantial bias against those who take their religion very seriously ('fundamentalist' being a deadly epithet), but unabashed village atheism no longer passes for scholarship (Stark, 1999a, p. 53).

From another relevant field, J. C. D. Clark has provided a withering
historiographical refutation of the theory, again asserting that it is a program rather than a theory. He concludes that 'Religious practice changed greatly in the twentieth century, as it has changed in every century, and these changes are historically important; it is highly problematic to argue from that evidence to an underlying change in religiosity' (Clark, 2012, p. 182). Instead, he posits that religiosity is a human characteristic like musicality, falling roughly on the standard bell curve. The specific way in which individuals manifest religious beliefs changes but numbers of those believing remain more or less constant.

Despite Stark’s and Clark’s efforts the theory is far from dead with defenders proposing full defenses (Lechner, 1991) or admitting both the theory’s problems and its challenges (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). Even so, while some researchers have shown great caution in applying the theory on a worldwide basis (Duke & Johnson, 1989), others such as Ian McAllister (1988) find evidence of it in countries such as Australia.

Some brief comments on secularism in India are now in order. As with other areas of social science, discussions of Indian secularism are based more on theoretical possibilities than on basic investigations of individuals' attitudes towards their religious stance in the modern nation. Most articles, in fact, approach secularism and secularity from a political, legal, or constitutional standpoint and so barely touch upon the present study. Thus the reflections of T.N. Madan (1993, 2003; 1987) explain the concept’s history in India while affirming that, because it is an imposed European idea, it ignores the deeply religious nature of the population and so leads to communalism. This accusation seems common (Acevedo, 2013; Sikka, 2012). Others see the profession of secularism by the government to either serve as a Trojan horse for Hindu nationalism (Upadhyaaya, 1992), or simply an empty constitutional phrase devoid of meaning (Biswas, 2006; G. Chakroborty, 2006). With the concept so much a political football, there is no need to enter the scrum. Until social science begins to investigate secularization as a (possible) social process and thus replaces the current social commentary on political secularism, the work Madan and others have no bearing on this exploration.

What to carry forward from this brief discussion? Despite its opponents, the secularization paradigm does seem to have some worth in describing facets of contemporary Western reality quite well. It remains a thesis worth investigating in an
examination of the intersection of the faith traditions of traditional communities as they encounter contemporary culture. Further, it has served as the theoretical basis (and at times, perhaps, an unexamined assumption) for much of the research that was consulted. As will be seen, while it is indeed helpful to investigate secularizing Dimasas, whether the secularization theory can be embraced will be discussed in Chapter 6.

2.2.3. **Rational Choice Theory.**

The other paradigm that more recently dominates contemporary research in Europe and the United States is Rational Choice Theory, which takes elements of the model that was developed to explain human economic behavior into the realm of the sociology of religion. The leading proponent of this model has been Rodney Stark, whose ongoing critique of the secularization paradigm seems to have helped opened up the field for this theory.

The philosophical underpinnings of Rational Choice Theory can be found in Lorne Dawson’s (1990) 'Self-affirmation, Freedom, and Rationality'. Dawson posits that human beings are directed towards the goal of self-realization. Part of this process might include trying on different religious roles to maximize this self-realization, to find that which fits best with one’s aspirations and beliefs. Notable here, and critically important, is Dawson’s distinction between 'free' actions, those that are rationally chosen, and unfree 'determined' actions. While admitting that this distinction is in fact a continuum, Dawson contends that it is inappropriate to claim that all human behavior is socially determined. For Dawson there is more to human reality than the person as *Homo sociologicus*. What follows from this, Dawson states, is that if it can be judged that the person acted 'rationally', for good reasons, then there is little profit in pursuing sociological determinants for the decision.

Accepting this premise opens the door for rational choice arguments. The link here is Stark’s admission that while secularization is a reality, it is also a self-limiting process. Abandoning hitherto accepted and useful forms of religious expression foments the demand for new, more relevant ones, and does so on the basis of what people judge to be the best investment of time and energy for the rewards received (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985a). The development of this theory was paved by several articles studying church membership and cult formation (Bainbridge & Stark, 1981; Stark & Bainbridge, 1979). The paradigm suddenly drew great attention (Gartrell & Shannon, 1985) and continued to develop in later works (Bainbridge & Stark, 1996; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985b), and has
been adopted by yet other researchers (Iannaccone, 1995) who have further developed and nuanced it.

To provide the barest outline of the theory, all individuals seek rewards and avoid costs. Rewards are scarce and unequally distributed. The most valuable rewards – eternal life is a good example – are not available at any price in mundane reality. Religion offers rewards, both specific such as blessings on crops and such, and in addition explanations about the fundamental questions of human life, explanations that are credible only in the context of the supernatural. Individuals choose religions based on the perceived reward counted against the cost demanded in attaining them, that is, the investment demanded of time, treasure and talent. Thus, for example, mainline churches with somewhat minimal demands will prove more popular than extremist sects that reject society and demand high commitment of time and belief. Yet, high-demand forms of religion offer, in the judgment of those sects' followers, much more sure rewards.

Crass as this might sound, the paradigm has proved quite effective in providing theoretical grounding for a wide range of religious behaviors, both by individuals and churches. Unsurprisingly, it has also generated a great deal of opposition and criticism. Of particular interest for this study is that of Stephen Sharot (2002), who raises two questions. The first pertains to the amount of actual individual freedom in the free choice of religion. Based on the reflections of Max Weber, Sharot asserts that alongside the rational and irrational is the non-rational, for Weber *wertrational*. This 'non-rational' is the realm of affections and dispositions associated with cultural values, which form the basis for a large proportion of human behavior. The second of Sharot's challenges accuses Stark *et. al.* of basing their theory too much on Western, even American, realities. The congregational style of church membership that underlies rational choice is simply absent for many in India, China and other parts of the world. In those places, religious reality is often 'private', not bound to a single religious tradition or, in the case of traditional communities, so bound up with the rest of life that the idea of choice really makes little sense.

Perhaps as a result of these criticisms, Stark reformulated his theory, presenting it once again in 'Micro Foundations of Religion: A Revised Theory' (Stark, 1999b). At first glance, his approach claims to explain the main aspects of religious behavior in terms of
exchange theory. In 20 definitions and 27 propositions, Stark grounds religious behavior solidly in people rationally seeking goods and making intelligent religious choices. Individuals do this in the same way they make other choices, through subjective comparison of costs and benefits. He asserts that religion is, at its root, an exchange with supernatural beings that he calls gods. Some goods, for example again eternal life, are things only gods can provide and indeed only very powerful gods. People offer sacrifice and behave devotedly towards gods to secure the rewards those gods can offer. With typical panache, Stark asserts his propositions are entirely consistent with the anthropological record – that the propositions apply as appropriately to the beliefs of Buddhists in the Burmese highlands, to pig sacrifice among the Tsembaga in New Guinea, as to Catholic prayers in Rome or concerts by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. (Stark, 1999b, p. 265)

In this he is quite successful. An added benefit is how clean a theory it is, relying only on rational principles rather than emotion. With Rational Choice Theory, one can proceed methodologically believing what people think and say about what they are doing, and, as Stark intends, makes religious behavior very similar to other types of human behavior. A discussion of some of the details of this theory will also be presented in the final chapter.

Other criticisms are that the theory is 'gloriously American and androcentric' (Carroll, 1996) and that it is crassly commercial and fundamentally flawed in equating the choice of beliefs with, for instance, the choice of deodorants (Bankston III, 2002). Needless to say, lively debate continues. Laurence Iannaccone (1995) writes persuasively that such criticisms arise from the long-held assumption that religion is irrational and that humans behave in a fundamentally different manner religiously than they do in any other social sphere. He goes on to emphasize the number of new questions the theory has generated and its ability to provide insight into many of these areas.

Any interface between the theoretical stance of Rational Choice Theory and the realities of the religious behavior of traditional communities seems prima facie unlikely. Despite this, there is some possibility that this approach provides some important insights. The strongly traditional nature of the worldview and practices of traditional communities seems to preclude rational choice to a great extent, to be greatly controlled by Weber’s wertrational. At the same time, such an assertion appears to posit that traditional people
behave in a fundamentally different way than other people. Further, young Dimasas, as we shall see, are exposed to a very different world when they leave their native place to seek higher education in the cities and towns. That exposure makes new realms for choice available. While India is certainly not the wide-open religious market Stark posits in his work, there is ample scope for choice. As mentioned earlier, that very scope for human choice must be considered in any examination of human behavior. In that light, Rational Choice, too, must be among the possibilities for theoretical grounding of the attitudinal change among Dimasa youths.

2.3. (WESTERN) RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR

Bringing some order to the welter of studies of religious behavior is a Sisyphean task. As the initial section of this review implied, there is a wide variety of definitions of what religion is and how individuals express it. Despite this, some research proved of great value in the study of Dimasa religious attitudes. The literature coalesces around two themes. These are, first, those dealing with the characteristics of religious faith or “religiosity,” and, second, those that investigate changes in individual’s religious status including conversion, defection, and apostasy.

2.3.1. Elements of Religiosity

An early attempt to describe religiosity was by Charles Glock in 1959 was comprised of four dimensions. Fukuyama (1961) sees four dimensions as well, but added a knowledge dimension later incorporated by Glock. The result is Glock’s ‘On the Study of Religious Commitment’ (1962), which later was modified slightly into the famed Glock-Stark Model, gaining wide attention in Religion and Society in Tension (Glock & Stark, 1965). Glock asserts that despite immense variations in beliefs and practices, religious groups have remarkable convergence on five manifestations of religious faith. These are 1) ideological, the specific beliefs held by the group and its component individuals; 2) ritualistic, the religious actions expected of believers such as prayer, service attendance, offering pujas and so on; 3) experiential, either a direct sense of divine presence or other feelings—awe, terror, peace and other emotions accompanying belief, ritual, or life in general; 4) intellectual, knowing the basic tenets of the faith and 5) consequential, how one
behaves (or admits one ought to behave) as a result of the religious tradition. All of these are supposedly present in varying degree in all religious traditions, but vary within each specific tradition, and vary further with individuals: one Catholic, for instance, might be very ritually oriented, another Catholic more intellectually attached to the faith community. Glock continues by offering a short analysis for each component, indicating possible ways of approaching each of the manifestations. The paper was immensely important, spurring many to conduct research precisely along the lines Glock encourages and, inevitably, research that challenges the entire system.

Research that followed has been characterized as slicing the religiosity pie in slightly different ways (Mueller, 1980). Variant models are considered (Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 1986), reconsidered (De Jong, Faulkner, & Warland, 1976) comparing United States and German students on the five dimensions and implying a relative independence of the dimensions. Fichter (1969) discards the 'experiential' aspect, but adds one of 'community feeling' for Catholics. Some measures have been developed for Muslim populations (Gonzalez, 2011). Some studies affirm the relative independence of the dimensions (Davidson, 1975), while others show that the dimensions measure the same thing (Clayton & Gladden, 1974), implying that religiosity is univariate rather than complex as Glock and Stark assert. Perhaps the most trenchant criticism is found in an early paper 'Structural Examination of Religion' by Milton Yinger (1969). Yinger resists prematurely describing religion as consisting of predetermined aspects whatever the number, because such listings in fact limit the possible scope of manifestations of religious tendency. Isn’t religion, as Geertz has implied, open to the possibility of non-theistic options? Individuals who are seriously seeking deeper meaning to their lives, (as Taylor allows as well) must be considered 'religious'. Yinger follows with a small survey (that he admits could not be validated because of small sample size) that attempts to capture this possibility, and does so with intriguing positive results. Later attempts to replicate this approach were successful both in the southern United States (Nelsen, Everett, Mader, & Hamby, 1976) and U. S. northeast (Roof, Hadaway, Hewitt, McGaw, & Morse, 1977). These findings played an important role in the early construction of the qualitative interviews of this study. One would not expect heart-felt yearning for congregational models of religiosity among educated Dimasa youth; one
might well find, at least implicitly, the 'invisible', non-doctrinal seeking that Yinger and others describe.

Invisible religion might lead to the more conventional beliefs and practices of a religious faith-community. Another option is the adoption of a civil religion, where the symbols that give depth and meaning to one’s life are those of the 'new gods' (Bellah, 1967; Casanova, 2009; Crippen, 1988; R. C. Robertson, JoAnn, 1985).

2.3.2. Joining, Persevering, Switching, Apostatizing

As mentioned earlier, both 'Grand Theories' of contemporary religion, the secularization paradigm and the rational choice paradigm, have generated an immense amount of research into why people behave as they do with respect to the religious aspects of their lives. Why do people enter into religious beliefs and communities of religious belief? Why do they stay within them or leave them? Why and how do they fall away from believing and taking part in faith communities? Are any of the factors uncovered by research applicable beyond a western, congregational environment? Here, too, there are differences between that congregational environment and the operant social forces that come to play in Western conceptions and those of the unique cultural heritage of the Dimasa people. Because of this difference one's hope was to find not equivalences but analogies that prove helpful in understanding the dynamics among Dimasa youth.

Many of the conceptualizations of how individuals change their religious status was born of the influx of religious cults in the United States in the early 1960’s. One of the first attempts to abstract a general pattern was a paper by John Lofland and (again) Rodney Stark (1965). Lofland and Stark determined that seven conditions were present among those who joined new religious cults: 1) a perception of tension in the individual’s life; 2) a propensity to see religion as a problem-solving strategy; 3) self-definition as a religious seeker; 4) awareness of life being at a turning point; 5) establishment of affective bonds with cult members; 6) a lack of affective bonding outside the cult; and 7) intense interaction with cult members. While their schema was limited to members of cults, the researchers opined that it might be more widely applicable to religious conversion in general.
Publication of Lofland and Stark’s theory spurred a great amount of research into the questions raised and raised further questions. Research called into question the pre-conversion tensions and cognitive orientation of converts (Snow & Phillips, 1980), and the use of constructed recollection as representative of actual mind-sets at the time of conversion (Beckford, 1978). Other critics found that the model was minimally involved with social forces and so failed to stress the importance of 'referent others' in decision-making and identity formation (Greil, 1977), and lacked depth in not pursuing what circumstances might destroy an individual’s clarity about their present reality and how precisely material is presented that makes the alternative reality credible (Heirich, 1977).

Other work was done on the effect of life events (S. Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989) coming to the unsurprising conclusion that negative life events can challenge an individual’s stance of faith. Gooren (2007) reduces the Lofland and Stark model to four stages, reemphasizing the crucial importance of social networks at all stages of conversion. Gooren finds that personal relationships with the members of a group of believers before and during the process is the single most important factor in conversion. This stepping back from a checklist of individual characteristics and completely autonomous choices reflects a growing approach in the field as a whole (Christian Smith, 2010, Loc. 7476). Lofland returned to the fray, proposing that conversion was best modeled in terms of six 'motif experiences' (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981, p 374), each of which present different dynamics. Others have developed this as well, most extensively by Kilbourne and Richardson (1989). While, again, such research might appear to be far removed from the dynamics of educated, largely urban Dimasas, it is important to return to the fact that no studies have been made of this group and that there was simply no way of predicting their attitudes in advance. Their new environment and new social complexities bring into play questions of new life experiences with accompanying tensions, new reference groups with whom to bind, and the reality of learning new behaviors and ideals. This possibility was actively pursued.

Needless to say, just as individuals have numerous paths into new beliefs and, often, into some faith community, there are many ways out. A. L. Mauss (1969) isolates three dimensions of defection, (intellectual, social, and emotional), which he combines to provide eight different styles of apostasy. This is helpfully simplified to four by
Brinkerhoff and Burke (1993), combining the presence and absence of first, belief, and second, attachment to the religious community. They range these from 'fervent followers', who identify strongly with both doctrine and community to 'apostates' who do neither. Intermediate are 'ritualists' who have lost belief but continue to identify with the community and 'outsiders' who believe but have no identification with the community.

Factors associated with defections from religiosity in the United States vary in importance depending on researcher and method. Three vectors for apostasy given by Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) in *The Religious Drop-outs: Apostasy among College Graduates* are secularization, rebellion against parental norms, and a strong orientation toward achievement. These factors were challenged in studies of Mormons who disaffiliate with their church (Albrecht & Bahr, 1983) in which a higher level of education correlated positively with church membership (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984). Children whose early upbringing stressed the importance of religious belief and membership tended to remain religious, (B. Hunsberger, 1980), and have positive relationships with parents (B. Hunsberger & Brown, 1984), while general happiness, academic achievement and political orientation made little difference with respect to future church membership (Hunsberger, 1983). Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) reveal that apostasy, like conversion or switching, has aspects of both holding beliefs and engagement with the church community and is a process where doubt often precedes disaffiliation.

One popular assumption in the United States was that attending a non-religious college strongly influenced young people against believing and church membership. The connection with this study is obvious: the focus of the study is Dimasa young people with at least some college education. Removal from a home environment where the traditional worldview and religious practices are the norm to a free, unregulated, and religiously neutral, or perhaps even hostile, atmosphere would seem to have a strong influence on continued religiosity. Might colleges breed atheists? Indeed a “godless” curriculum might as easily breed reactionary fundamentalists, though this was not considered when these studies first began.

Yet another study (Albrecht & Heaton, 1984) with Mormon college graduates found strong evidence that this was not the case, that higher education did not beget a
secular outlook (though many of the subjects studied attended Mormon religious universities). One study (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007) indicates decline in religious practice, and that belief is actually stronger among young adults who have not attended college. A study of Seventh-Day Adventists also found that most long-lasting and positive attitudes toward religious involvement was strongly related to family background (Dudley, 1999), and others that disaffiliation began, in fact, prior to leaving home for college (Regnerus & Uecker, 2006; Wuthnow & Mellinger, 1978). Taken together, these studies imply that college attendance in itself is not a strong factor in changing religious attitudes in the United States. The importance of an individual’s religious stance before college years encouraged a slight expansion of the target group for this study to at least briefly look at pre-college students as well.

As hazardous as it is to summarize such a number of often contradictory findings, certain elements stand out as important factors in religious participation. Demographic factors play little role in religious participation, though they probably have some small role in the style of denomination—fundamentalist or mainline, for instance. Strong family lives and regular practice within the birth family are good predictors of future church involvement. A person’s reference group, one’s friends, strongly influence religious behavior (Cornwall, 1989; Roberts & Davidson, 1984), and belief and practice (such as attending services and other congregational events) are mutually reinforcing (Alston & McIntosh, 1979).

Conclusions from studies conducted in the United States can not be translated uncritically into the present study: background and cultural conditions are simply too different. While granting this wide diversity, the complete lack of studies similar to this present attempt demanded casting this far wider net. Theories and factors uncovered in a different, western culture provided at least possibilities and directions that might be useful in uncovering sources of the religious attitudes of young, educated Dimasas.
2.4. TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND MODERNIZATION

As early as 1970, the height of writing on secularization and modernization, C. Arnold Anderson could express surprise 'that most sociological writing on development offers only piecemeal evidence about change or even about modernization' (1970, p. 5). His reflections caution against the hazard of equating education to development, declaring that unless great care is taken, the path of modernization through education is unreliable and, in some cases, counterproductive. Perilous as Anderson contends it is, what role might education play in modernization? The answer depends on one’s definition of modernity. Alex Inkeles developed a 'modernity syndrome' (1969, p. 210) that included the characteristics of openness to new experience, independence from traditional authority, belief in the efficacy of science and medicine, educational ambition for oneself and one’s family, promptness, strong interest in community affairs and politics, and preference for national news over sports, religion or local news. This was tested in an interview of four hours encompassing the respondent’s attitude toward 'nature, to time, to fate, to politics, to women and towards God' (p. 213), stances which, like the defining standards, seem to measure one’s cultural fit with liberal Americans. Inkeles found the strongest correlation with modernity to those who have been most educated and, rather surprisingly, those who work in factories.

Inkeles’s findings, and those of other 'Individual Modernity Scales' came under severe criticism (Armer & Schnaiberg, 1972) from the failure of efforts to replicate the findings among a sample taken from the United States. This called into question the validity of the scales. After a spasm of debate for some years, efforts of this type were abandoned.

The apparent dead-end reached by these exertions seems to call into question how, and even whether, modernity or secularity can be measured quantitatively. In examining the movement of attitudes towards traditional religious culture by Dimasa youth, the way is open to examine if there is difference between generations. While the finding that attitudes and beliefs have changed might appear minimal, this study seeks to at least establish something of the direction in which real people are moving in their cultural stance. What they are moving out from is an area for which clarity is critically important.
2.4.1. Pre-literate societies and their religious cultures.

The religious beliefs and culture of small societies throughout at least the region of Northeast India bear some family resemblances. Robert Bellah writes of 'Religious Evolution' (Bellah, 1964, 2011). The concept of religious evolution, Bellah asserts, is in no way prejudicial to any human faith experience. Rather, he characterizes religions developing 'from a compact to a differentiated symbol system' without claiming any such system to be 'a better, a truer or a more beautiful one' (p. 359). Alternately, one can see the growing complexity of religion as reflecting the growing complexity of the societies they inform. Religions, seen as a crucial unitive component of a society and culture, will reflect the society it helps shape. Such a generic approach to what Bellah characterizes as 'archaic' religious traditions, is also employed by Redfield in *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (1975), though the latter is weighted with currently unacceptable characterizations such as 'uncivilized'. Both help provide an overview of the main features of this broad type.

Of interest as well is the research of Robin Horton in Africa (1971, 1975a, 1975b), which describes African tribal religious practices changing their focus as the traditional community’s life situation alters. The widening of horizons in recent times broke the former relative isolation of African small societies. This led to the emergence or re-emergence of a 'high' god who had been relatively forgotten in previous practice, but proves more cosmopolitan and useful for the new and wider situation of the community. Helpful as this insight might be, Horton does not seek to establish the shape of that change directly through quantitative documentation.

'Archaic' religious formulations, according to Bellah, predominate in clan-based and egalitarian societies, usually engaged in simple agriculture. While stories of the gods, and the gods as well, have come to play some role in the traditions, the lack of a strong divine hierarchy reflects the community’s social conditions. Some specialization such as priests might emerge, but their status in not extremely high. Worship has emerged, mostly in the form of propitiatory sacrifice or asking a god or gods to protect from lesser gods or spirits. The gods and spirits communicate through shaman-type charismatic leaders or through diviners. There is very much a 'this-worldly' focus to interaction with these gods.
What people ask of the gods centers on human flourishing: good harvest, health and safety. In these societies, conceptions of an afterlife are generally vague or non-existent. Numerous anthropologists have studied 'archaic' societies in many places. Classic works include those of Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer in Africa (1956), Geertz’s study of the religion of Java (1960), and, closer to home, Spiro’s *Burmese Supernaturalism* (1996).

### 2.4.2. North East Indian traditional societies

Studies of small traditional societies of Northeast India provide even closer parallels, which might be expected, particularly in those groups that share a common linguistic heritage (Ethnologue, n.d.). Of particular interest are accounts of the religious culture of the Angami Nagas (Hutton, 2003 (1921)), Garos (Burling, 1997 (1963); Sangma, 1981) and Bodos (Devi, 2007; Endle, 1911). Works such as these vary widely in reliability: Devi’s work on the Bodos seems intent on convincing the reader that the Bodos are very much model Hindus; Burling, Hutton, and Endle provide more balanced and informative ethnographic approaches. Perhaps the fullest and most recent work is that of Babul Roy (2002), whose careful descriptions of Zeme Nagas provide unique insights. Of even more interest is the similarities and probable borrowings Roy dissects between the Zeme Nagas and Dimasas who share the North Cachar Hills. Several helpful articles such as the one by Joseph Pallikunnel (2012) are the products of tribal theology seminars. Yet, helpful as descriptions of the religious customs of these similar tribal peoples might be, cousins, related closely or distantly, are never identical.

### 2.4.3. Dimasa history; Dimasa religious culture

One distinguishing characteristic of a culture is its history. The Dimasas are no exception. While a description of their history and an outline of their beliefs and practices will be detailed later, a few words are helpful here as well. Like most traditional societies, the origins of the Dimasa are shrouded. Linguistic evidence argues for an origin in China or Tibet and a possible lengthy migration to Northeast India through Myanmar, an early settlement in the Brahmaputra valley, and establishment of a thriving kingdom first centered in Dimapur, Nagaland, then moving to Maibang, Dima Hasao District, Assam and eventually Khaspur, Cachar District, Assam, before collapse in 1832 (Barpujari, 1997; Baruah, 1985; Rhodes & Bose, 2006; C. A. Soppitt, 1885). S. K. Barpujari's (1997) *History of the Dimasas (from Earliest Times to 1896 A.D.)* is comprehensive, balanced,
and difficult to find. J. B. Bhattacharjee (1991) provides an excellent account of the later kingdom, drawing on Bengali language sources. Important, too, in gaining an understanding of the complex and wholly toxic relationship of the late Dimasa kingdom and the British Raj is provided by Gunnel Cederlöf (2014) in *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers, 1790-1840*. Pahi Saikia (2011) outlines developments among the Dimasa people since Indian independence, including recent insurgency and inter-tribal conflicts. Commentary on the plight of young Dimasas as their society confronts the modern world is available from P. S. Misra (1989).

Works describing Dimasa culture and religious practices are varied and often of dubious reliability. Accounts of the Hindu religious milieu of Assam can be found in Gait (1906) and S. L. Baruah (1985), and more specifically in Eliot (1910), Battacharyya (1995) and, for Tantric Hinduism, Urban (2001).

The first book on Dimasa culture was penned by the British administrator C. A. C. A. Soppitt (1885). Really an outline of most things known (or heard) about the Dimasas, it is quite sketchy, though serves as a gauge on Danda's work almost a century later. Much of what Soppitt wrote was confirmed later by Danda, reflecting the slow change in Dimasa culture over that span of years. The first, and (in English at least) the only proper ethnographic study of Dimasa society in English is Dipali Danda’s excellent *Among the Dimasa of Assam: an Ethnographic Study* (1978). Research that might fill the gaps in Danda’s overview is uncommon. Brief mention of some folklore and related customs has been offered by Birendranath Datta (1994) and Minakshi Chakroborty (2000); Parthsarathi Misra (1985) provides a mélange of cultural aspects. More helpful are Sarah Hilaly’s work (2006) on the Dimasas devotion to Ranachandi, their traditional goddess of war, Uttam Bathari on the unique double descent system of the Dimasas (2011), Babul Roy’s (2002) work on the same topic, and discussion of the complexities of Dimasa priesthood by Nilesh Parmar (2012).

One of the questions of interest is whether the Dimasa are Hindus, or a Sanskritized tribe. The answer depends to some extent on which Dimasas are responding. Dimasas in Cachar District of Assam who are known as Barmans or Burmans are heavily Hinduized, wearing the thread and keeping at least some Hindu dietary traditions. When Cachar was
the heartland of the Dimasa kingdom the last two kings became caste Hindus; presumably
other court officials did as well. Bellah’s thesis of religious evolution predicts this, and
would describe the change in religious stance to the drive of the kingship from an 'archaic'
clan-based polity to an 'historic' one, often found as kings become the focal point of
society. With the Dimasas, Bengali Brahmins (who provided the dynasty with a mythic
and divine origin) took advantage of the attendant growth of priestly power. How much
this affected most Dimasas in the northern hills is questionable. To use the terminology of
secularization theory, the Dimasa world view is undifferentiated: the religious sphere is not
yet independent and so there is no structural separation of religion from other facets of
culture.

Barman (or Burman) and other Dimasas have written a number of articles for the
Vivikendra Institute of Guwahati proposing to demonstrate their strong Hindu credentials
(R. Barman, 2012; U. C. Barman, 2012) and offer some information about cultural
practices. The hill Dimasas of the Dima Hasao District appear less certain of this (A.
Warisa, Personal Communication, 23 June 2013). This ambiguity reflects, perhaps, David
Mandelbaum’s (1964) characterization of South Asian religion as both pragmatic and
transcendent. Aside from the research mentioned above, there are no accurate sources for
contemporary Dimasa beliefs and practices. To investigate the attitudes of young people
toward traditional religion, then, had to be preceded by additional fieldwork to determine
current beliefs. One could, perhaps, rely on characteristics of tribal religion for sources,
though respect for the cultures of the Dimasas and of the academic world argue against
doing so.

2.4.4. The World View of Northeastern Tribal Communities

Two studies stand alone in the literature. The first, daring in its novelty of actually
entering into dialogue with tribal people is Pankaj Debnath’s (2000) study, 'An Empirical
Study of Conventional Religion'. Debnath queried a very small sample of members of
different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. While a high percentage of those interviewed saw
religious observance as essential to their community’s identity, a majority also saw
present-day changes in practice. Such results indicate that something is indeed happening
in traditional cultures as modernization touches the people’s lives. If and how that might
be happening among the Dimasa tribe is the focus of the present study.
The second, though not located specifically in North East India, is Deborah Tooker's 'Identity Systems of Highland Burma: "Belief" Akha Zan and a critique of interiorized notions of ethno-religious identity' (1992). 'While "belief", she asserts, 'as an interiorized, propositional capacity may be universal, when discussing the domain of "religion" it must be viewed as a trope, that is, as a particular and historically specific Western cultural idiom for expressing people's relationship to tradition.' Instead, Tooker prioritizes externalized expressions of religion as the key expression of Akha Zan religious reality. This offers an essential passage to Dimasa religious expressions as well, as will be developed later.

Rather than burden this review with constant references to the gap in research in which this study is located, it is clear that no previous examination has been undertaken in the specific area of this study, at least in English. An exhaustive search of the most likely possibilities, the online resources of WorldCat and JSTOR and the unmatched library of the North East Social Research Centre in Guwahati has provided, as has been seen, little original research on non-Western religious phenomena, less on change in religious worldview and practices amongst traditional communities, and, practically speaking, none on communities of the northeast in this important area.

Social research in this region inherits, to a large extent, what seems to be the particular spin of social research in general in India. That research appears to continue the interests and style of pre-colonial social research by focusing its eye on various problems in society and the means by which they might be addressed. Admirable and necessary as this task can be, it is much less focused on basic research. One can write on the challenges and misery of 'the tribals' without necessarily talking at all with any member of a traditional community. This exploratory study, quite limited and modest in the ways previously mentioned, seeks to bring some clarity to that area. It will show at least the gross geography of the question of religious change of one traditional community as it struggles with the new world those people have entered. It will accomplish that by accepted methods both quantitative and qualitative. In that way, again so far as can be determined, it marks a new approach and an apparently unique field of study here.
2.5. METHODOLOGY INPUTS

The necessity of using a mixed methods approach to the present investigation was explained earlier. To review briefly, the exploration was comprised of three main phases and one follow-up. Phase 1 consisted of qualitative interviews with older Dimasa residents of Dima Hasao District in an effort to ascertain the current beliefs and practices of 'mainline' Dimasas. That information enabled producing a quantitative instrument for use with older Dimasa and those who have continued their education at least through the first year of college, i.e. have finished the twelve years of primary and secondary schooling. Following analysis of the results, it was possible to formulate general areas for more specific discussion. Another round of qualitative interviews with college-educated Dimasas sought to gain a depth of understanding with respect to their attitudes toward traditional Dimasa religious culture. The follow-up was a second short survey of young Dimasas. With this plan, the investigation provided at least a preliminary picture of the current state and direction of Dimasa beliefs and practices. A very important part of the study has only now begun: communication of findings to members of the Dimasa community.

The concept and design of this investigation has been developed through consultation with Cresswell and Plano Clark’s Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (2007) and Cresswell’s Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (2009). Guidance for the qualitative interviews was found in Strauss and Corbin’s Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory (1998), and Rubin and Rubin’s Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data (1995).

With respect to the quantitative questionnaire, several challenges were present. Casley and Lury’s Data Collection in Developing Countries (1987) provided quite practical guidance for developing and executing a questionnaire amid subjects who are rarely questioned.
Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide, (Rea & Parker, 2005) a standard work in the field, provided solid help in constructing the questionnaire. With respect to the content of such surveys, a raft of models are available with a Judeo-Christian basis (Fetzer Institute, 1999), Muslims (Gonzalez, 2011), and a mix of Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in Malaysia (Krauss et al., 2007), and apparently the Hindu complex of faiths (T. G. Sharma, 2012). Constructing such instruments is also discussed (Berry, Bass, Forawi, Neuman, & Abdallah, 2011).

Of special interest here was the work investigating the validity and reliability of the Santosh-Francis Scale that gauges attitudes towards Hinduism (Francis et al., 2008; Lesmana, Tiliopoulos, & Francis, 2011). This scale has proven an effective measure of individual’s attitudes toward Hinduism with satisfactory reliability and validity. Unfortunately the unique characteristics of tribal religions in general, not least the lack of any scriptures, authoritative doctrinal statements, or other characteristics available in many religious traditions, made application of any of these efforts quite questionable. More intriguingly, the original scale, designed for Christians, has been pared to seven items while remaining reliable (Francis, 1993). While the Francis Scale has been 'translated' to Judaism, Islam, and Eastern Christianity with success, adapting it to a tribal context remains a challenge. Would statements such as 'Spirituality is important in my life', 'Prayer helps me a lot' and 'I find it hard to believe in God' (Francis et al., 2008, p. 613) have any meaning at all in a Dimasa context? Is 'believing in' something a usable concept in Dimasa thought? Such nagging questions made a preliminary qualitative study necessary, aimed at uncovering beliefs, practices, and categories of thought.

Beyond the challenges of content in the proposed survey, at least two challenges arose from the limitations of the researcher. The first is translation and use of second language which affects all phases of the study. Ervin and Bower (1952) lay out the challenges in translating material to the language of the target population, noting that 'in dealing with matters of attitude or ideology, one might be tempted to translate questions literally in order to examine cultural differences in responses. In effect, this becomes a study of differences in the meanings of word' (p. 598), and real differences between spoken languages and written ones, where such are available. King et al. (2011) provide techniques to help reduce translation errors. Weinreb and Sano in a highly technical paper
(2009) demonstrate that informal translations by interviewers appear to significantly decrease the validity of results. The common method of checking translation with back-translation does not address the issue of meaning for the subject of the survey, and so collaborative translations with careful pre-testing appear the safest procedure (Douglas & Craig, 2007). While there have been some journal articles on cross-cultural interviewing challenges (Sands, Bourjolly, & Roer-Strier, 2007), little has been written on challenges of interviewing subjects in their second language.

The second occasion for systematic error was with respect to the social desirability effect (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006; van de Mortel, 2008). Respondents want to please interviewers in survey responses; with a traditional population we can expand this to include the challenge that lies in the homogeneity of traditional cultures. Perhaps more than many groups, there is a tendency to provide the answer acceptable to the reference group rather than the respondent’s unique opinion. Though the amount of the effect has been dismissed as negligible (McCrae & Costa, 1983), to reject the possibility when surveying a traditional society seems hazardous, and means need to be sought to minimize the effect (Nederhof, 1985).

2.6. CONCLUSION

Previous work in both sociology of religion and in research methods had to be carefully adapted for this investigation. Whether the attitudes of the Dimasa people fit any theoretical pattern and whether their experience could be seen validly in light of Western experiences, measures and formulation are a matter for reflection in Chapter 5. With so unique a population, great care had to be taken in the art of seeing as well.