In Chapter I, I have tried to argue that culture and religion are ways of life where each is inclusively related to the other. Both culture and religion claim to be all-pervasive and all-inclusive that there is nothing which does not have their ingredients or falls outside their boundaries. Culture is all-inclusive that it includes many things under it. Religion though considered as an element of culture, claims to be all pervasive and includes many things just like culture does. In this way, one is tempted to think that culture thereby is identical with religion. I have argued that they are not identical; for religion is not merely one of the important elements of culture, it is in fact the core which determines the way of life of the people.

Traditionally, religion was considered to be all in all. It is an important factor which determines the way of life of the people in every sphere, be it social, political, economic and so on. It is the source of meanings and values. Many social scientists and anthropologists have shown that in primitive societies religion determines the whole way of life of the people. A. K. Saran, for instance, holds that a traditional man does not distinguish himself from nature and the creator. Man and nature are part and parcel of the divine. This view was also true of many societies and cultures where religion is the sole determinant of culture. Zen Buddhism, Islam, Christianity (to some extent) and the various tribal societies are examples of social groups where religion plays a vital role in determining the way of life of the people. It
becomes the overall authority in determining the meaning, purpose, and end of life. It is religion which gives meaning to our traditions, customs, practices, festivals etc. Culture no doubt patterns perception of reality into conceptualizations of what reality can or should be. These conceptualizations form what is termed as the ‘world view’ of a culture. Some thinkers are of the opinion that world view lies at the very heart of culture and influencing every other aspects of that culture.

In Chapter II, I have tried to show that with the coming of enlightenment or the so called ‘age of reason’ where science dominated the whole aspect of culture, religion lost its significance. Science claimed to be able to explain everything, therefore, in the eyes of science everything else are secular or having no religious significance. Religion, if it exists at all, it is only a kind of private affair, something personal and subjective. It is like an emotion which does not have any relevance to the collective life or culture as such. For the secularist, therefore, religion is only an element of culture which may not be relevant in determining the way of life of the people. It is merely an act of faith which cannot be verified empirically.

However, if one were to stick to the secularist position seriously, one has also to be ready to face the following consequence. Firstly, in the eye of secularist since religion is private and subjective, one can change from one religion to another without really affecting one’s way of life. Religious practices, like going to church, temple and more importantly prayer, sacrifices would be viewed as social acts which are meaningless and irrational in any case. Going to church or temple being
only a matter of fashion which does not have any other meaning. Secondly, one can claim to be religious without observing religious rites and practices, without observing religious obligations and without really understanding them. Moreover, one can claim to be religious no matter what kind of life one leads, whether one involves in serious crimes, corruption, and so on, provided one has faith.

What follows from this is that if religion is rejected as something irrelevant, the question is what then determines culture? Science would reply that it is science or knowledge based on sciences which moulds the whole way of life. As a result this leads to a kind of global culture, a culture which is same for all mankind where traditions, habits, practices will gradually wither away. In this way, identity will only be a matter of convention or for some benefits.

In Chapter III, I have tried to show that none of the critiques of religion have really been able to falsify religion. In spite of the fact that sciences have claimed to have been able to explain everything yet there is still some room left for religion, where science fails to penetrate. In fact religion has never been rejected but rather considered as:

The only agency which claims to offer a complete solution to the problem of suffering in its deeper and more radical form, it can also claim to be one of the forces which have continually dominated or affected the lives of man throughout historical times.¹

It can be defined as a set of values and beliefs which a person accepts. Some of these values and beliefs can be rationally justified and logically established, and others defy analytical treatment and demonstrative approach. But man accepts them all as inherent and fundamental truths without feeling the need to prove them by the logical or experimental method. Religion as some have said, involves faith which consists in having knowledge, though the knowledge may be totally different from the knowledge acquired in a scientific manner. Religion flourishes in a society in spite of the fact that it has been rejected by science as illusory or irrational. Religion and ethical values constitute culture at the early stages of human history. No doubt science has helped man to a large extent in easing his problems. This does not mean that science can do all the works. Science deals with facts as they are. But beyond the world of facts there are the world of values.

In Chapter IV, I have tried to show that both culture and religion are systems of values. I like to point out here that religion cannot exist without culture. Removed from the cultural context, religion becomes merely a blind faith in God and fanatic attachment with a set of rituals, beliefs, priesthood etc. Religion in this form has played havoc in the past. Even today religious rivalry, communal fanaticism, mutual suspicion and hatred between men of different faiths is ample proof of the fact that once we separate religion from culture, it is bound to become the most dangerous phenomenon of mankind. A man of culture is characterized by extreme sensitivity. A sensitive person is not only conscious of his social and physical environment, but is quick in his reactions to whatever happens around him.
Culture and religion are closely related in the sense that culture gives religion its language, and culture acquires its meaning from religion for culture is not just the sum total of artifacts or knowledge. It is such a wholeness that nothing 'human' could be totally alien to it, nor anything already accepted as human could totally be alienated from it. Moreover, culture and religion are value concepts which are related to human beings. But it is religion which determines the way of life of the people. In Judeo-Christian religion, adultery is forbidden by religion which becomes the practice of the people who belong to that religion. Eating of beef is forbidden by Hinduism which in turn becomes the practice of the Hindus. There are varieties of practices which are forbidden by religion which become the way of life of many societies or cultures. The Khasi religion stresses that one should earn righteousness (kamai ia ka hok) in this world. This means that in thought and deed one should cultivate righteousness. This becomes then the way of life or practice of the Khasi people.

Religion plays a vital role in prescribing meanings to most cultural activities. Festivals, for instance, will not be meaningful bereft of religious meanings attached to them. Christmas is a Christian festival, it is the festival of the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Every Christian celebrates it with glamour and happiness for the saviour of the world has come. But if we take away religion from it Christmas will become a mere party or an enjoyment where one can enjoy oneself without really understanding the meaning of it. What I am stressing here is that, it is religion which flowers our traditions, marriage, festivals etc. But with the scientific bias or prejudice, we may
lose sight of this as some anthropologists such as Tylor, Frazer have tended to commit this mistake and thereby conveyed a one-sided account of religion.

Frazer, the protagonist of scientific culture finds that the primitive tribes engaged in various religious and semi-religious practices which reveals their lack of scientific understanding of the world. Their religion and magical practices are signs of their not having any scientific view of the universe. The worship of spirits and their magical forces shows that they have a very poor understanding of the forces of nature. He therefore condemns savage culture into non-science or primitive science and terms the savage mind as irrational and non-scientific. Wittgenstein resents the over-bearing attitude of the scientific minded anthropologist who rejects the primitive man’s worship of nature and other religious world views as acts of stupidity. He writes.

The very idea of wanting to explain a practice for example, the killing of the priest king – seems wrong to me. All Frazer does is to make them plausible who thinks as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity.

But it will never be plausible to say that human kind does all that out of stupidity.²

---

The anthropologists with the so called scientific method of study tries to account for religion and religious practices of the uneducated and unscientific peoples as based on a misunderstanding, on an erroneous foundation. With this scientific capability they try to interpret and translate the various practices and beliefs of various religions in their own way of which as a consequence miss the hidden meaning and significance of these practices.

Any interpretation or translation of a religious practice or belief would be possible only within the purview of the form of life in which they occur. Any attempt to explain from outside is bound to be unacceptable.

Is the polyandrous woman in Tibet doing the same sort of thing as the Bombay film star who moves easily from man to man? Is the naked sadhu on the banks of the Ganga doing something really similar to the nudist on an American beach? Is performing a hunting ritual the same sort of thing as tightening one's bow string or cleaning one's own gun? ‘In each case the answer is No’. The sociologist or anthropologist will indeed accept this answer but often they do not realize the profound implication of this acceptance.³

The explanation of the native’s action Miri points out, by a social scientist must be such that given the framework of his thought, it is possible for the native to see it as an authentic explanation of the action.

For otherwise, it will follow that it may be impossible for the native to understand his own action. In short, "to understand native's action is, therefore, to know one's way about in this framework." To understand the meaning attached to religion in this way one has to see from the use of it, and one has also to participate in the form of life in which it occurs, or before we evaluate we must understand.

Scientific method fails to capture the value and meaning of the cultural practices of the primitive man. The primitive man has a value system that underlies his cultural practices that represents his conception of the self, its fulfillment, above all his conception of the divinity that governs the universe. In this manner worshipping a tree or a stone, or other natural objects cannot simply be said to be absurd or irrational. In fact, one has to look for the meaning (or use) attached to it for they are only symbolic expressions that God is everywhere, all present, all powerful etc. Bowing before the statue of Lord Krishna will appear to be non-sense for those who do not know the meaning attached to it. Indeed it is only in the form of life that we have 'per picous representation' of the inner connection of the meaning of life and actions of man.

In culture as well as in religion various actions and interactions are noticed for they are the ways of life. Values on the other hand are the basic ingredients of the human actions. For the very possibility of both culture and religion, being forms of life, it is necessary that, there

be underlying norms or principles that guide these actions. These norms are the values or the ideal objects that guide human life. In this way, cultural values overlap religious values and vice versa. Religion determines the cultural values.

Every culture is founded on its own world view which answers to the questions of man's being in the world with others and himself, of his relation to other men and animal, God and nature. Answers to these are inseparable aspects of culture or civilization and these are mostly contained in one's own religion. In religious societies, earlier everything was religious in the sense that the entire universe and all that we did in it was a meaningful design of the Divine/Sacred.

Man is self-conscious, self-enquiring creation. Therefore, he looks for the purpose, meaning and nature of his life. Science cannot give him solutions for it deals with the world of facts only. But the highest rational order of life does not lie only in the knowledge that follows from our interaction with the world, but also with the power to use nature for the purpose of the excellence of life. Values constitute the meaning of life and culture and therefore are at the centre of cultural life.

Culture as I have mentioned is a way of life for achieving perfection in life and self-realization. But this cannot take place in vacuum. Religion aims at liberating man from the tyranny of facts, contingencies and sufferings of the souls which helps man realize his own goal. Wittgenstein talks about the culture of 'progress' and the culture of 'liberation' where the culture of liberation strives for the
meaning of existence to be realized, which is free from the world – picture that captivated the human mind.

Today, the phenomenon of social change is inevitable. Culture being dynamic in nature undergoes changes in many respects. These changes are brought about by various factors. But one of the most significant changes is the changing of religion. Due to various reasons people change their religions, from one to another. What follows from this is that with the change of religion, customs, traditions, practices, etc., also undergo changes. As I have said traditions, customs, are meaningful only if they are attached with religion. In a Khasi society, for instance, ‘Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem’ which is a traditional dance is a sign of thanksgiving to God for his various blessings. Bereft of religion this dance is tending to become a mere entertainment for the Christian Khasis who have a new religion having a totally different system of meanings.

That religion is an extremely powerful motivator of behaviour, and that it forms a strong basis for social and cultural identity has been acknowledged by many scholars. It is “a common yardstick by which people compare themselves with others.” However, if religion of the people becomes the yardstick for determining their identity, the problem arises specially in connection with societies or cultures which have converted or changed their religion.

Religion becomes the core for determining the ways of life of the people. If the core changes, definitely the whole structure or form is disturbed. Change is the nature of culture. But change can be of two kinds: (i) change at the periphery, and (ii) change at the core. Change at the periphery is brought about by science, education, modernization, inculturation and others. This may include change in cultural traits, ideas, knowledge, habits, world view and some values. These may not affect the core. Change at the core is brought about by the change of religion where meanings and values are reflected. It is this change which really affects the way of life of the people. If religion determines the identity of the culture, it follows therefore that loss of religious identity amounts to the loss of cultural identity. Wit Wisadet\(^6\) considers Buddhism as one of the pillars of Thai cultural identity and equates Thainess with Buddhism. Religious identity for him is same as cultural identity. This implies that losing one’s religion is same as losing one’s culture. Cultural identity is a value-identity which has to be preserved and it is in religion that values are preserved as Hoffding maintains. If one loses one’s religion he is bound to lose the most important factor for determining one’s identity. Losing the core amounts to the disturbances and insecurity of the whole reality of culture which creates a kind of vacuum which cannot be refilled by other factors. Adopting a new religion in the strict sense, is the same as adopting a new way of

---

life. As I have said earlier, practices of one religion differ from the practices of another. Therefore, changing from one religion to another involves the changing of one’s practices. Or, if I can use language game, the rule of one game differs from the rule of another. Therefore changing one’s religion or adopting a new religion amounts to adopting a new way of life determined by the new religion.

The outcome of this will be that a person can start a new kind of life alien to him or her, and at the same time tend to uphold the old kind of life which he or she once practiced i.e., a traditional life style. A dangerous consequence of this would be that he or she will strictly belong to ‘neither’ the new nor the old. This kind of crisis may lead to the loss of the individual dignity or the feeling of alienation. Therefore, for the sake of security and identity, many persons who have adopted a new religion in desperation try to retain their old ways of habits etc., (like many tribal communities in North East). One is a Naga by culture and Christian by change of religion. More so, a mother may be a Khasi by religion, a father a Hindu and the children would be Christians.

Strictly speaking, it is not possible for the one who adopts a new religion to uphold the same way of life. It is inconsistent to claim that one can retain the way of life even when the religion changes for religion is the core which determines the way of life of people.

The meaning of a word or anything is determined by its use and in the context in which it is used. Traditions, practices, beliefs, rituals, etc., can be meaningfully understood in the context they are used and occurred. When use! in another context or forms of life, they will lose
their meanings. Therefore a man who has changed his religion cannot claim to have the same form of life. This means that the man who has changed his religion he cannot claim to retain at the same time, his original culture, he having acquired a new religion has also to acquire a new culture. Here comes the question of identity.

The problem of identity is full of ambiguities. Even the concept of self-identity as we know has created so much problem for philosophers. Cultural identity definitely is more complex and difficult for culture as I have shown in my dissertation is itself full of ambiguities and complexities. In order to understand cultural identity or any particular culture, one has to understand the delicate balance of the different values of each culture. Cultural identity is a value identity which has to be understood in terms of values and not in terms of anything else. Referring to tribal identity, for instance, Mrinal Miri\(^7\) is of the opinion that it is being determined by 'strong evaluation' – evaluation in terms of values such as "allegiance to the tribe" such that this value overrides other values in a fundamental way. It becomes a powerful reality, it is something for the sake of which one may be prepared to give one's life, or to take another's life. There are many good examples especially in tribal communities to illustrate this phenomenon.

But ‘allegiance to the tribe’ as Miri holds, may provoke or seem to provoke, such giving and taking of life is not something brute or something lack of articulation. Rather the meaning of it is embedded in a tradition. A tribe he says gets its particular integrity from its history, from its “moral-aesthetic-spiritual space”, from its own peculiar way of dealing with arguments about itself. He therefore says: “that ‘allegiance to the tribe’ would minimally mean allegiance to all these.”

Getting back to my main argument the question now would be: Would a change to a new religion preserve the history and the moral-aesthetic-spiritual space as Miri puts it?

Culture as well as religion are intricately anthropocentric in nature, carrying along with them many other related elements. Some of these elements like belief, worship, sacrifices are commonly available in almost every religion. For instance, the Khasis believe in God the creator and the immortality of the soul. These beliefs are common in many religions. Due to these factors, it becomes difficult or almost impossible to say that changing one’s religion is equivalent to losing one’s religion.

What is that which makes it possible to say that one has lost one’s religion? The teachings of many religions though different in some respects do have some common factors, common goals, more importantly common essence which is love. Besides these, the presence of God will be in almost every religion. The truth is the same but there are different ways of achieving it. The use of ‘symbolism’ as Gandhi holds is common to almost all religions. Therefore, it is very difficult to
say that changing from one religion to another amounts to the loss of culture. This is also true with culture where many elements or factors are commonly found in almost every culture.

Religion, as I have shown, is not merely having a belief or though it is more complex involving, for instance, what we call religious institutions which are often determined by social and political forces. Religion is a dynamic system of understanding. It is not a purely subjective understanding of any one, be it the sociologist or anthropologist or a student of comparative religion. It is not a phenomenon apart and distinct from mundane life, nor it is a philosophical enquiry. It is not merely a matter of belief but involves institutionalized patterns of behaviour.

Contrary to what I have said, one may raise the problem regarding the position of the man who has changed his whole life-styles but retained his or her ‘old’ religion. For instance, a man may change his way of dressing, food habits, language and so on but not his religion. Can in this case claims his cultural identity? One way of answering this is that these changes are only external or changes at the periphery and therefore do not affect the core of culture. Every culture has to undergo changes so as to cope with time in some respects.

If loss of religious identity amounts to the loss of cultural identity many tribals especially from North East India have lost their cultures because they have converted to Christianity. However, they still claim their own identity which in the strict sense is not acceptable. Retaining one’s identity in this context, is a matter of convention. For the sake of
identity people stick to old cultural habits in spite of having changed their religion, or for the sake of identity people claims that religion is not an important factor for determining identity; it is the traditions, the customs which determine the identity. But as I have said tradition without religion is without meaning, or it will be blind. We should not define religion as merely a matter of faith, or something related to the supernatural, which has nothing to do with the mundane life for if the definition of religion is too narrow it will exclude some important factors. At the same we should not make it too wide that it may include almost everything.

A culture which does not take religion as an important factor becomes secular and thereby will have a different world view altogether, and we have seen that scientific development has created modern communities which claim to live without religion. As a result, values and meanings of many cultural activities have lost their significance. Customs etc., have become either a mere show or a hobby or a mere entity to be stored and kept in the museum or something to be taught to the new generation in schools just for the sake of preservation. Cultural practices become a kind of curricula in teaching. Their meaning and significance is completely lost.

I also wish to stress that religion is the core of culture which is the motivator of culture as a whole. But the problem arises in this regard whether there should be at most only one religion or more than one religion in a culture. My submission to this problem is that each religion represents a form of life which comprises of different sets of
rules. These rules have to be understood in the context in which they are used. This form of life determines the way of life of the people and society as a whole. In this context, one form of life cannot be understood or grasped in the context of another. Therefore, in a culture there will be only one and only one form of life or religion to determine the way of life or behaviour etc.

Therefore, in a culture there will be at most one religion only, not more, for strictly speaking, one religious form of life amounts to only one culture. This follows that a culture which have more than one religion have problems in claiming one cultural identity. In the final analysis we can say that those who belong to the same religion share the same culture altogether.

In sharp contrast there are societies, who though have different religions, claim to belong to the same old culture. In this kind of situation, identity gets determined by ethnicity and not religion which in the true sense is not a true claim of identity. As I have said an identity claim is a claim for allegiance to certain values, and the home of values is religion. The loss of religion has created a kind of crisis in identity and value simultaneously.