INTRODUCTION

The present thesis is an attempt to examine the relation between culture and religion at the conceptual level. Basing on the various definitions of both culture and religion given by many social scientists - anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers etc., the thesis tries to establish the relation between the two. The thesis will not touch the other elements of culture but will deal more specifically with religion and other related factors. The thesis will not try to define or redefine culture or religion but will remain content with the 'ready-made' definitions available.

Today, the concept of culture seems to be so popular that everyone claims to understand it; and that almost everything seems to have some cultural connotations. The same is equally true with religion to some extent. My aim is to try to examine and arrive at some conclusions regarding these two concepts. The area is no doubt too vast and I will try therefore to limit it by touching some important aspects only. I shall therefore divide it into four chapters.

In Chapter I, an attempt will be made to examine the definitions of culture and religion respectively as given by many social scientists - anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers etc.

The concept of culture is such an intricate concept that it almost admits any definition about it as acceptable or true. The concept itself is full of ambiguities that often creates confusion in the minds of those who try to study it. There are thousands of books on culture and
hundreds of definitions. Yet none could claim to have fully succeeded in establishing everything about culture. Culture is a complex phenomenon. It includes everything that men do, have, think, say collectively in space and time, and more. Many disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and others have tried to define culture in their respective ways. But they could not arrive at any specific conclusion. Some would put more emphasis on the behaviour patterns, others may put more emphasis on the outward manifestations of belief, art, knowledge etc. Still others who put more stress on values, meanings, etc.

E. B. Tylor, an early anthropologist defines culture as:

That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.¹

William A. Haviland, a cultural anthropologist maintains:

Culture consists of the abstract values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world that lies behind people's behaviour and which that behaviour reflects. These are shared by the members of a society, and when acted upon, they produce behaviour considered acceptable within that society.²

Culture is also understood as:

---

a) A general state or habit of the mind with close idea of human perfection.

b) A general state of intellectual and moral development in society as a whole.

c) The general body of arts and intellectual works.

d) The whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual of a given society.

In *The Philosophy of Culture*, Devaraja defines culture as the sum total of the activities whereby a person relates himself to the significant though useless aspects of reality, actual or imagined. He goes on to explain the activity that relates men to such reality is 'cognition' or 'consciousness'. In order that consciousness should be valid it must, of necessity be universally sharable. He concludes that the 'cultured people' are engaged in activities that contribute to the expansion or enhancement and qualitative improvement or refinement of the self.

The Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches hold in 1991 defines culture as:

A system or framework of meaning, behaviour and symbols and the way in which we oriented our lives within it.


The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines culture as:

The sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.\(^5\)

What is evident from the above definitions is that culture is a 'way of life' of the people living in a society. Culture which comprises of many elements within it acts as a system or framework of meaning, behaviour and symbols and the way which we oriented our lives within it. It is the whole way of life, material intellectual and spiritual of a given society. It can still better be described as a way of life for achieving some goal, for instance, the refinement of the self. Culture implies perfection in all walks of life. It is, therefore, to be understood not merely as the sum total of manifestations. Rather it is a system or 'logical construct' which has to be constructed in order to give an adequate explanation of the activities (including mental) of particular human groups resulting sometimes in enduring achievements such as art, literature, music, etc., sometimes is enduring mores such as law, customs, it is that which renders intelligible thoughts and values of groups of people. It is the aspect of life of the community which signifies an ongoing quest for achieving the goal or aim of the society.

If culture is a way of life, then it appears to be all pervasive and touches the whole aspect of human life, nothing 'human' could be

---

totally alien to it. Therefore, there is on the face of it the possibility of discussing the exact status and role of religion vis-à-vis culture especially when religion is considered as an important factor in influencing the way of life of the people, at least those who adhere to it.

Religion like culture is equally vague and full of complexities. It has different connotations for different people. Whenever, we think of religion many things will come into our minds like the idea of God, worship, festivals, belief, rituals etc. But none of these constitute the essence of religion. Religion is generally understood as a practical system of belief in something which man considers to be beyond himself and which binds his fellow beings together so as to organize his life into some sort of socio-religious community. ‘Religion’ says William A. Haviland:

May be regarded as the beliefs and patterns of behaviour by which humans try to deal with what they view as important problem that cannot be solved through the application of known technology or technique of organization. To overcome these limitations people turn to the manipulation of supernatural being and process. 

Durkheim, on the other hand, defines religion as:

A unified system of belief and practices relative to the sacred things.

Michael C. Howard, another anthropologist holds:

(1) Religion is not merely a matter of belief. It also involves institutionalized pattern of behaviour.... (2) Religion is also concerned with power both sacred and secular. 

It is essentially a practical system of belief which means that we organize our life individually and communally according to the belief.

What appears from the above definitions is the inclusion of belief system and practices in religion. In this context, religion determines the ways of life of the people to some extent. Almost every religious person aims at achieving some goals through religion, or religious activities. In actual life we are born into a socially organized religion, and in this perspective it is more appropriate to see it as a way of life.

Religion is not knowledge. It is rather a way of life. In this way of life there is much that is inspired by faith and not by positive knowledge ... it is deeply rooted in human nature. 

This immediately raises the question whether religion is the same as culture.

Some would say that religion is identical with culture, while others regard religion as only an important element of culture.

Still others are of the opinion that religion has nothing to do with culture and so on. I would like to argue here that religion is not identical with culture but it is one of the most important elements of culture which determines the way of life of the people to a great extent. For instance, it is that which binds people together and which give meaning and purpose to life. Religion is both a response to man’s total environment and an exploration into its frontiers. It is human life in its ultimate context struggling for meaning. However, religion does not exist separate from the other aspects of culture. Religious behaviour patterns influence and are influenced by what happens in the rest of culture. But religion does not play the same role in all societies.

We can bring about the relation between religion and culture from the functional point of view especially when they both provide their own moral code of conduct which tries to regulate the behaviour patterns of the people. In its invisible institutional aspect, religion may be viewed as a segment of culture along side others such as family, economic order, political order etc. On this level we have the church temple etc. existing along side the local governments, schools, museums etc. The second and more profound is a dimension of each of the other aspects of culture, whether or not this dimension is institutionally expressed or even acknowledged; e.g., marriage, festivals, governing a clan etc. These have got religious connotations and meanings. Any culture embodies norms and values, and religion is one of the value determinants. Dawson remarks:
Above all we are in a better position to appreciate the vital function of both religion as a principle or continuity and as a source of new spiritual life. In that age religion was the only power that remain unaffected by the collapse of civilization by the loss of faith in social institutions and cultural traditions made by the loss of hope in life.\(^{10}\)

But religion is not identical with culture. Though both religion and culture concentrate on value which guides the behaviour of individual groups and societies, the two are not the same. Since the meaning of culture is different from its constituent elements, or from what it manifests, it cannot be identified with anyone of its elements because the whole is not merely the sum total of its parts taken together nor is the part the whole. The two notions, ‘part’, and the ‘whole’ are different notions though related.\(^{11}\) Again, if culture and religion are identical those who advocate the same religion will also have the same culture.

The meaning of culture cannot merely be understood from either the physical or the biological standpoint. A cultural phenomenon is essentially an axiological phenomenon, and for man, it is nothing if it is not meaningful, i.e., if it does not signify a value. Fred Inglis in *Cultural Studies*\(^{12}\) maintains that cultural studies define the content of


the subject as the study of human values and describes form and method as these have taken shape from the history of the subject. That is why, a naturalistic explanation, however, scientific it may be is useless for the interpretation of culture. Culture comprises of the intrinsic values accepted by the group and religion is concerned with nothing if not with higher values.

This claim has been challenged by science and positivism as nonsensical. In Chapter II, I will try to elaborate some of the critiques of religion and in the meantime an attempt will be made to show that these critiques are not adequate in rejecting religion.

With the emergence of science all sorts of complaints were made against religion. This got its root right from the period of enlightenment and continues till today. Positivism with the scientific slogan tried to falsify religion as something meaningless and nonsensical. Positivism claims that scientific knowledge is the only genuine knowledge for it can be verified empirically. Therefore, any method which is devoid of empirical verification is bound to fail. Logical positivism claims that only scientific statements were open to verification by empirical procedures. Therefore, any claims made in the name of religion is spurious and meaningless because propositions about religion have no cognitive meaning.

Science claims to have been able to explain everything scientifically and we grant it the right to do so. Therefore, with the
influence of science man hardly feels the necessity of believing in a realm alien to the natural and the physical. This impact of science upon the thinking and belief of modern man often creates a kind of reaction against metaphysics and theology in the form of agnosticism, atheism, naturalism and scepticism. This, of course, has reached its climax with the emergence of logical positivism. In this way, the validity of religion has been shaken. In the ultimate analysis religion was allowed to operate only at the emotional sphere of life which refers to some sorts of faith and belief in some other spheres alien to nature. Religion thus, becomes only a sort of emotion which is private and subjective in nature. In the eyes of all those who see religion as unnecessary the world and everything else can be considered as secular.

I have argued in the same chapter that positivism runs the risk of attacking its own foundation. Verification in a strict sense is impossible since any statement of fact (sense experience) must presuppose a theoretical perspective it might seem to verify. Positivists themselves have expressed metaphysical convictions like the doctrine of physicalism. When science speaks of the world as having a continuous structure and uses the concept of nature, cause, law, it is making a metaphysical assumption.

Positivists try to limit the world of experience to sense experience only when there are other kinds of experience like aesthetic experience, experience of choice, experience of truth, religious experience and so on. Lastly, some propositions are not accessible to direct empirical verification.
I want to react here that science has made its claim too superficial, it does not take religion seriously. Both science and religion belong to different ‘forms’ of life. Science and religion are categorically different ‘games’ which will have different rules which have to be followed respectively. The meaning of the word is its role (use) in the various language games in which it figures, the kind of behaviour in which its use is embedded (Wittgenstein). In this manner, words in religious language itself, just like a game and their criteria of correctness are, therefore, to be found within it and the complexities of life in it. This means that we cannot understand the concept involved in such a claim. It has to be understood from the ‘religious forms of life’ itself. This is true with science as well.

My criticism against the negative approach towards religion led me to the justification of the Sacred by establishing the relationship between faith and knowledge. Chapter III is an attempt to justify the sacred vis-à-vis secular. I will try to show that faith itself consists in having some cognitive aspects rather than being a mere dogma or illusion. It is something which is essential for man as well as for scientific pursuit.

Philosophers like Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard and others regard religion as a matter of faith. Hume, for instance, rejected the knowledge about God as meaningless for it is neither a relation of ideas nor a matter of facts. Kant opines that the knowledge of God is beyond the reach of pure reason and is therefore, subjected to faith. For Kierkegaard, faith is a subjective submission to a person, to God, rather
than an assent to objective proposition. Many theologians also have considered religion as a matter of 'faith'. But faith for them is different from the ordinary notion of faith. Faith, according to them, is knowledge as well. In religious discourse faith has two meanings:

As a trusting and confident attitude towards God, faith (fiducia) may be compared with trust in one's fellow human being. As a cognitive act or state whereby men are said to know God or to have knowledge about him, faith (fides) may be compared with our perceptual awareness of our material environment, or our knowledge of the existence of other persons.¹³

John Hicks observes that faith:

Consists in believing strongly various propositions of theological nature which the believer does not and cannot know to be true.¹⁴

He argues that to know means either to observe directly or to be able to prove by strict demonstration. Keith Lehrer,¹⁵ in Knowledge, maintains that to know means (i) to have special form of competence, (ii) to be acquainted with, (iii) to be able to understand and control. Keith also holds that the conditions of knowledge are truth, belief and justification.

---

Therefore, if someone says that he knows P, it could mean any of the following:

(i) S knows that P then it is true that P.
(ii) If S knows that the sentence Q is true then Q is true.
(iii) If S knows that P then S believes that P.
(iv) If S knows that P then S is completely justified in believing that P.

In the case of man who has faith he is completely justified in believing that P because it implies, that if it applies to some theistic statement that it is revealed by God himself. How does S know that P in order to believe that P? A man of faith may say through faith comes the experience that these are truths or propositions.

As Paul Roubiczek\(^\text{16}\) has contended that behind all physical phenomenon there is still a mysterious and inexplicable region apparently making room for a quite different approach and even for freedom. He further observes that scientists (physicists) themselves cannot extricate from that region. He, therefore, argues that it would be disappointment if we expect physicists to provide the foundations for our religious faith for the investigation of external reality can neither add to nor detract from the knowledge which belong to the sphere of faith. The knowledge we acquire through faith is confirmed by experience (not just sense experience). Faith is essentially based on

believing. It refers to facts and events of which I can only have knowledge because they are revealed in one way or another. The tests applicable to external knowledge are not possible nor is complete proof ever available; I have to respond with an act of faith, of acceptance, with a constantly renewed willingness to belief.

In Chapter IV, I will try to show that culture and religion are systems of values. A value is a behavioural concept related to an individual or a group or society. In the determination of human behaviour the most important factor is a person's specific value awareness. One's choice of a course of action is dependent on value alternatives; we prefer one course of action to another on the assumption that our choice will help us to realize our inherent values at a comparatively high level. Both culture and religion cannot have significant meaning apart from value. Both refer to the ways of life for achieving some valuable ends. Culture especially is based on certain foundations like empirical, social and value foundations. Value foundation plays a vital role in the determination of culture. Culture is not just the sum total of artifacts, behaviour patterns which can be regarded as events of some sorts. Beyond the world of facts, there is the world of values. In fact, we have good evidence that value statements were discussed by mankind long before the dawn of science.

In any scientific method to derive any factual conclusion, one must have some factual content in the premises, similarly to derive conclusion on any one subject matter there must be premises that deal with the subject matter. Therefore, we cannot derive a conclusion about
‘question’ of value by purely logical means unless the premises furnish values. Therefore, scientific statements in themselves cannot serve as a source of value judgement. “Value judgements” says Kemeny:

enable us to choose among ends. On the other hand, science tells us which ends are feasible and how we can achieve these ends. 17

There is a gap of differences between the so called Sciences of man and physical or natural Sciences. In sciences of man or social science man is both the subject and object of enquiry, subject matters of human science is man himself who is self-explaining and self-conscious living being whereas the object of physical sciences are facts of nature. A social scientist does not remain a scientist-observer, but a participant observer. Behind every conscious human action there is a meaning embedded in it. The study of man, therefore, requires a face-to-face relation. As Rickman admits that ‘understanding’ is the only way we can extract meaning and purpose of every human action. Behind every action there is something intrinsic in the human nature itself like the wish, intention, idea, feeling etc. Understanding these elements are important. Social sciences, therefore, as Kai Nielsen argues, are not and cannot become normatively central or value neutral.

In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein presents a critique of culture, a culture which is predominantly scientific in nature. He comes to the conclusion that the scientific culture fails to locate and sustain the human values that pertain to the human spirit and it must be overcome and transcended by what may be called the culture of ‘spirit’. In this context, he makes a distinction between the culture of ‘progress’ and the culture of ‘liberation’, or a culture of material development and the culture of spiritual life respectively. The culture of progress is the scientific culture that aims at the material development of the sensate life of man. The spirit of the culture of liberation lies in striving after ‘clarity and perspicuity’ in no matter what structures. This typically brings the idea of seeking liberation from the web of intellectual structures that are imposed on our understanding. Here the idea of liberation stands for the clarity of understanding and the consequent sense of standing above the scientific culture. It tries to transcend the scientific world view and its attendant value system.

The culture of liberation is the culture of value seeking and self-realization. Wittgenstein is of the opinion that the value of life is something that is manifested in culture but is not amenable to causal and anthropological explanation.

Social life is not, indeed cannot be independent of the way in which man’s culture formulates his vision of what he is seeing; there

are only cultural constructions of reality. The facts of life are always a special case of the cultural definition of things. They have no independent existence apart from how they are defined by culture. Activities of man and their explanations are witnessed and expressed in this culture. As a result, therefore, culture necessarily cannot be normatively value-neutral. This is true where every meaningful activity aims of achieving some purposes. To understand it one has to enter into what is known as 'participatory attitude' because every meaningful behaviour is characterized as presupposing a principle (maxim), and on the other hand, the very idea of a maxim of behaviour presupposed actual behaviour, i.e., the form of life.

In conclusion, if culture is understood from the point of view of value, the role of religion will come into prominence. Religion as I have mentioned is also a way of life; it is an interpretation of life and faith and hope of life. These are the most important areas of the individual’s personal belief system which controls his actions and, consequently, the process of social change. Religion is considered as the way of life when religious precepts and practices become part of living itself. Religion influences every aspect of the individual’s life for every aspect of human behaviour – though in many cases ‘nominally receives religious tinge’. When we encounter religion as a way of life we may come across at the social, individual and transcendental levels. Religion at the social level refers to its various aspects which affect and control group behaviour and an individual’s relation to other individuals. It is religion which gives meanings to our traditions, conventions, customs etc. and control human social interaction. Religion as Gandhi saw it expresses
Religion as I have said, is the core of culture which gives meaning to tradition, customs etc., and most importantly to culture itself. What will follow, therefore, is that if religion changes, it will be followed by changes in the culture. Religion's identity thereby determines cultural identity. If religion is the core of culture, changing the core amounts to drastic change in culture. Ultimately losing one's religion amounts to losing one's cultural identity.

One may claim to retain one's own cultural identity in spite of the fact that one has lost one's religion. For instance, a Christian Khasi may still claim to retain his identity as a Khasi when his religion is Christianity. Strictly speaking, this is impossible. Rather it would be inconsistent to retain one's own cultural identity when the core (i.e., religion) is lost. Being with new religion will therefore be the same as acquiring a different culture altogether. Retaining one's cultural identity is a matter of convention, or for the sake of claiming one's identity. It is an impossibility therefore to claim to be a genuine Khasi by culture, and Christian by religion, or a Hindu. Religion which is important in determining the way of life of the people individually or collectively, still plays a vital role in every society. Losing a religion gives rise to many crises, social evils and so on. This is true with the present society. In short, culture without religion will lose its significance and meaning; where there should be at most one religion in a culture. It is religion which determines the way of life of the people in a culture, for man is
endowed with a higher level of self-consciousness than is manifested in culture. Man is more superior than culture; his aim is to realize his true nature or self-perfection. Culture is the way of life for self-realization, self-perfection or for achieving the goal of life.