CHAPTER - 1.
CHAPTER - I

Religion has been variously defined. To define means to set a boundary or demarcation bringing out its essence. But in my opinion, it is not possible to bring out the essence of religion merely by providing definitions, because, 'Religion' is a general unprecise word. Its concept differs from society to society, man to man and even the same person changes conceptions of it from time to time, and so to express its essential characteristics in inherently difficult.

Various definitions of religion appear to be, on close examination, one sided, each with an element of truth in it. E.B.Tylor defines religion as "......the belief in spiritual beings". He concentrated more on religion as belief system rather than on the behavioural aspect of religion. He himself admits that mere belief in souls does not constitute religion. He maintains that transition from belief to action took place because early man recognised that the ghost-soul is superior to body. Tylor further attempted to explain religion as individual action rather than as a social phenomenon. Religious behaviour varifies religious beliefs. Beliefs cannot be understood nor expressed without its action.

exhibited in society. In pointing out the shortcomings of Tylor’s view, William Goode wrote in his book ‘Religion among Primitives’ as:

"The rationalistic approach, then, fails to take into account the emotional, obligatory character of these beliefs and practices. Tylor does not see religion as analytically necessary".\(^1\)

Then again,

"....simply to claim as a minimum definition of Religion, the belief in spiritual Beings......I propose under the name Animism to investigate the deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings, which embodies the very essence of Spiritualistic as opposed to materialistic philosophy".\(^2\)

A contemporary critic of Tylor writes 'The most significant of Tylor’s interpretation of religion in primitive culture is that he bases religions belief upon psychological delusion and mistaken logical inference. Primitive man is said to confuse subjective and objective reality ideal and real objects'.\(^3\).

Tylor’s view does not account for cases of direct worship of natural phenomena.


Another group of thinkers who define religion in terms of feeling may be represented by Schleirnacher. His approach to religion is through religious experiences. He defined religion as a "feeling of absolute dependence on God which had nothing to do with knowledge. He defined religion as:

"...a feeling of absolute dependence on God.... has nothing to do with knowledge.....Ideas and principles are foreign to religion".

Schleirnacher is right in emphasizing the element of feeling in religion, but it cannot be pure feeling to which ideas and principles are foreign. Religion is not mere feeling. There is no doubt, a predominant feeling element in religious consciousness, but it is distinct from any other kind of feeling which is more than a feeling of dependence. Feeling of mere dependence is a creaturely feeling. Hegel charged that Schleirnacher's dog may be more religious than its master in this sense. Miall Edwards maintains that feeling must have some idea content. Religious feelings are response to an object or they are connected with an intellectual content. Moreover, religious feelings are expressed in outward

---

1. Caldecot & Mackintosh (Eds) Selection from the literature of Theism pp 254-304.

behaviours. Thus behind religious feelings there are objects or intellectual contents and these feelings are expressed in different forms of rituals and ceremonies. Mere feeling of dependence are more prominent in domestic animals and children and because of that alone they cannot be labelled as more religious.

William James also stressed the element of feeling in religion. He adds acts and experience to feeling. He defines religion as:

".....the feelings, acts and experience of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine".

Though William James redressed Schleirmacher's 'Feeling' by adding acts and distinguishing it from non-religious feelings, he ignored the social aspect of religion. Moreover too much insistence on the psychological approach to religion may lead to the conclusion that religion is but a mere subjective state which would be erroneous. Because it may give rise to an unnecessary disintegrating element in religion resulting in social incoherence. No doubt, subjectivity in religious consciousness occupies the central place. Religion is said to be the constitutional

---

necessity of man. Every human being is religious in one way or other. One can be religious without necessarily committing to a particular religion or its views.¹

Different from all these approaches Solomon Rinaeh reduced all religions into a system of taboos that hinder the free exercise of our intellectual faculties. This view fails to see the positive aspect of religion which plays a great role in society. Even the lowest form of religious taboos have their positive effect.

Of religion, Harald Hoffding says:

"The conservation of value is the characteristic axiom of religion....in its innermost essence religion is concerned not with comprehension but with the valuation of existence....for the core of religion....consists in the conviction that no value perishes out of the world"².

He defines religion in terms of value. Religion is not mere passive faith in the conservation of values that already exist. Hoffding maintains that religion is faith in the conservation of value. It is true that religious consciousness implies faith with value behind it, but religion is not merely contemplative, it is also

¹Sujata Miri, Religion and Society of North-East India. p.22 (Vikas Publishing House, Delhi) 1980
²Harald Hoffding, Philosophy of Religion. p.10 (N.Y. Tr. by B.E. Meyer) 1908.
creative. Moreover religion is an experimental search for new values. The analogy of conservation of value and conservation of energy is misleading. 

He ignores the personal intimate relationship with the Other which occupies a central position in religious consciousness, which is the source and standard of all values. Further, it may be objected that the value aspect of religion cannot be mere 'axiom', if so, it is an impersonal, philosophical and universal principle. The element of individual intimacy of the worshipper with the worshipped, which is an important part of religious experience is found to be lacking.

Émile Durkheim gives a sociological explanation of religion:

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single community".

Durkheim's view is that religion consists of two basic elements e.g. beliefs and rituals. Rituals are the implementation of beliefs. Belief is an individual matter and rituals are of both private and public, personal and group. Durkheim does not ignore the

---

distinction between religion as a social system and religion as a subjective state of mind. But we cannot say that the individual's belief or state of mind is not wholly the product of his social environment. It is true that religious ideas in general reflect habitate of individual and group but it does not mean that the social environment wholly conditions the individual mentality and belief. Durkheim interpretes religion as a way of binding a group. He maintains that when a primitive people worshipped a god, what they worshipped was really its own traditional morality or collective conscience. Sir James Frazer assembled a mass of evidence of magic, myth, taboo, festivals and so on, and brought all these phenomena in one argument that religion is derived from magic. In fact, magic is, rather a degradation of religion.

E. Caird holds that:

"A man's religion....is that consciousness in which he takes up a definite attitude to the world and gathers to a focus all meaning of his life".

Melville J. Horskvits defines religion as:

"In broadest terms, then religion may best be defined as belief in, and identification with a

\[^{1}\text{E. Caird, Evolution of Religion. p.31 (Glasgow,1894)}\]
greater force or power.

In Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics it is enumerated that all theories and definitions of religion "characteristically recognise a gulf between man and the divine while at the same time emphasizing feelings of a closest relationship with or most absolute dependence upon higher power". With Gustav Mensching in "Structure and Patterns of Religion" we may remark that religion is the existential encounter with the sacred and the responsive action on man affected by the sacred. "Religion has been identified with feelings, emotion and sentiment, instinct, cult and rituals, perception, behalf and faith, and these views are right in what they affirm though wrong in what they deny".

Every definition of religion implies theories of reality and indicate the place that religion should hold in the world of life and thought.

Social scientists failed to do justice to the so-called primitive religion because their study was to discover the historical origins of religion. They failed to bring out the essence of religion because they wished to see the essence of religion in these origins and thus

they were led to conclude that religion rests on an illusion.

Religion is a cultural system and so any study of religion must begin by observing and describing the belief systems along with the behavioural patterns. And these may be understood better when they are related to the social meanings and functions. Religion has a structural relationship with all social institutions. It presents a vast range of expression and implications, it is found in every human society in one form or another. A primitive man’s awareness of the forces around him, (as Tylor puts it) Russell’s free-man worship, Wortehword’s natural religion, Otto’s feeling in presence of the Holy—all imply a transcendental urge for harmony with an order. In the same vein, Swami Vivekananda, Tolstoy, William James and others voiced the essence of religion as the fundamental urge of human nature to harmonise itself with a Principle or an Order, which is immanent and transcendent as well. That Principle or Order is visualised as Reason, God, Absolute, Spirit, reality so on and so forth. This abstract Order is symbolised in objects, through which worshippers worship, involving rituals and rites.

There is an unnecessary tendency among the social scientists of distinguishing religion into two types.
(1) Practical and Social religion as springing out from intelligence and (2) Mystical and Spiritual religion as springing out from intuition. These two types of religion are rather analytic and synthetic aspect of one and the same religion. Because intelligence cannot be devoid of series of intuition (as in mathematics), and intuition is, no doubt, supported by argument. Thus intelligence and intuition are seen to be the two tendencies of the one and the same Hegel's Reason, Bergson's Vital Impetus, Spinoza's God, etc.

In organised religions there appears to be two kinds or levels of religion — e.g. religion for a few exceptional people and religion for the common people making a gap within the same religious group. The former represents the mystical or spiritual group and the latter the intellectual or Social group. When either or both go into extremes, then unessential distinction sets in. The religion of the common people should be the outward expression of the religion of the few, expressing in social, cultural and other spheres of daily human life. All religions are seen to be spiritual in essence and speculative in character. Denial of the spiritual element in religion may result in secularization of religion. Again too much insistence on the spiritual aspect of religion may result in mystification of religion. Secularization of
Religion may be harmful and mystification of religion may be more harmful. Then it will result in inefficacy of religion as Radhakrishnan states; "Religion is more world fleeting than world seeking or world penetrating". A transcendental kingdom of God without building the same here in this present world will have no meaning.

Religion involves thought and activity as well as values and belief. It is not only worship and rituals but a mode of life, a code of conduct that regulates man's activities to reach the goal of human existence. As M. Miri has pointed out:

"Religion it seems to me, must necessarily have a social dimension...that it must contain prescriptions for man's life and role in the society......this has to do with man's relation to fellow human being".

Religion is an instrument of emotional satisfaction and solace for the individual. Therefore, the value of religion lies not in what it teaches but in what it does. Religious acts are significant not the religious doctrines. It is religious behaviour that counts not the religious creeds. One, of course, cannot overlook the importance of the teachings and doctrines of a religion.

---


but at the same time it may be remarked that undue insistence on the importance of the speculative aspect of religion create unwanted distinctions and divisions for the sake of religion amongst the people.

In the proceeding pages, I have tried to bring the different views and approaches to the study of religion into consideration. Social Scientists, I feel, take up one aspect of religion and identify religion with that single aspect. Religion occupies a central position in man and thus religious life of a person has cognitive, conative and volitional aspects. The 'Total' or 'Whole' being of/person comes under the purview of religion. It will be erroneous to consider only the emotional or spiritual part of a man to be religious. One's concepts and values are moulded and conditioned by religious ideals and views. Religion possesses ideas and values that guide one's behaviour. Religion of a person expresses consciously or unconsciously through one's actions and reactions. The role of religion in an individual life is the prototype of the role of religion in the socio-cultural system of a people. Their religious philosophy guides and controls their various activities and decides their future. Religious ideals, views and values are expressed through culture in society; and the socio-cultural system decides the kind of political patterns that a people unmistakably decide to
follow. Therefore, all social institutions are based on religion. Some may debate the relation and distinction between religion and culture. But, to my mind, religion is but a cultural system wherein lies the world view of a people. Social, political and cultural issues cannot be considered in isolation from religion. Keeping this view and approach, I have tried to enquire into the religious system of the Ao Nagas as I am of the firm opinion that it is only when religion is so considered that the Ao Naga religion can be properly understood. On the other hand if religious life is identified with only one or another aspect emotional, spiritual or sociological then distortions about the Ao Nagas are bound to appear.

Religions without any written doctrines persisted for ages in India, because they existed in their essence as deep-rooted cultures of the people. In this context it may be said that religion represents cultural system. Here I would like to refer to the Ao Naga religion that in spite of pressures from various sides it has retained its identity. This also explains why material culture easily yields to the waves of foreign cultural inundations, religious culture resists changes. By this I do not mean that social changes do not at all bring changes to religion. In the process of growth and progress, aculturation is inevitable where old meanings should ascribe to new
elements. It should be a process by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms. The operation of such changes in the process of progress should be internal without any external repressive elements. A religious culture also has to introduce and cater to new political, environmental, economic and other factors by adding to its belief, ritual or emotional aspect. But the strength it derives from its tradition remains unshaken, in which it has its roots.