CHAPTER IV
CRITIQUE OF ARISTOTLE AND THE ZELIANGRONG CONCEPT OF MEANING OF LIFE
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In the two preceding chapters, we have tried to explicate about the meaning of life from Aristotle and the Zeliangrong perspectives. In this chapter, first, we would highlight the main theme of their approach. Second, we would compare and contrast the similarities and differences between them. And finally, we would try to find the flaws and foibles, and their merits and strong points (If there is any) of both the views respectively and then, try to come out with a possible framework to argue that such and such life or approach may be favoured to live a meaningful life. Before we go into our critical appraisal of both the views, let us look in brief about their crucial points regarding the present concern for our easy reference.

Aristotle's approach to ethics is teleological; that is, he discusses ethics not in terms of moral absolutes but in terms of what is conducive to man's good. This approach leads him to examine various kinds of good and to arrive at the identification of the highest good with the attainment of happiness. After careful discussion of the problematic concept of happiness, Aristotle arrives at a definition of happiness as virtuous activity of the soul in accordance with reason.

Aristotle distinguishes moral virtues and intellectual virtues, which are determined, respectively, by the irrational and the rational powers of the soul. Man, however, does not possess these virtues at birth but comes endowed with the capacity, or disposition, for developing them in the course of time. For example, a child begins by following his parents' injunction to tell the truth without initially realizing the moral excellence of his action; yet eventually the habit of veracity becomes an ingrained part of his moral character. Aristotle then differentiates virtue from vice, arriving at the definition of virtue as a "mean," or middle disposition, between the vicious extremes of excess and
deficiency; courage, a virtue, for example, is the mean between cowardice and rashness.

Aristotle concludes his discussion by defining the highest happiness opens to man. Because happiness is an activity in accordance with virtue, it follows that the highest happiness should be in accordance with man's highest virtue. And that, according to Aristotle, is the activity which distinguishes man from the other animals, namely the activity of reason or activity in accordance with reason. Thus in its ideal form, happiness turns out to consist in a life of intellectual contemplation. Aristotle, on the other hand, also concedes that the political life (activity in accordance with moral virtue) can bring happiness, albeit in a secondary level.

The approach of Zeliangrong with regard to life is holistic and teleological as well. It encompasses the whole spheres of human activities. Though there are certain realms which stand out as determining factors to the present quest, the conduct of man is viewed from social, political, religious and moral perspectives. The significance of life does not end ‘here and now’ to them. They believe in ‘life after death’. So, in whatever they do this notion of afterlife bears as a highly guiding principle in their life.

The Zeliangrong considers life to be meaningful if a person possesses the virtues, hosts feast of merits, live a long life and died a natural death. To such life they called it as Tingpuimaruimei Panti – flourished and happy life. If one manage to live such type of life here on earth even the next life is assured of happy life- as a whole-meaningful life.

Now let us try to find the similarities and differences in features and characteristics between the two views side by side. We can see that both emphases on the welfare of the community, virtue occupies a central role in making a man a good man, actualization of the potentials through one’s effort and happiness as an ultimate end of life. Span of life is not significant in the context of happiness for Aristotle but for Zeliangrong it is significant dearly. Death does not affect the concept of happiness for Aristotle but for Zeliangrong it is a determining factor of the meaningfulness of life.
The two views stressed on the importance of the social welfare by being a good individual. Human being as an individual does not have any significance. There is no sense of life. Its essence and meaning of their life is derived from and by being a member of a particular community. The welfare of this community depends on its member. They demand an active participation in the social affairs from every citizen in building up the image of their society as a whole. At times, individual's interests are to be subdued in lieu of the community's interests. One derives the meaning of existence from a society. A person as an individual does not have an identity. The essence is realised in his active involvement in the social affairs. Both the views insist that if only the individuals are good the community as a whole would have a flourishing life. How hard one may try to uplift the social standard and its value, if the person concern is not good, all his labour would go in vain in the social picturesque. So the first thing that involve in building up a social norms and object, one has to be good person. Only then, good things would come to a society as a whole. They emphasize on this because according to Aristotle, one should love oneself more, the individual interest should be considered first (not in a negative sense). If only one is in a particular state, one can do things for a society. The Zeliangrong also speak on this in a different way. They have a saying that 'a mother crab crawling in sideways, yet asking her offspring to crawl in the front side is illogical'. So if one is to involve in social affairs, one should be in accordance with the social standards and norms. If not, one does not have a place in a society.

When it comes to personhood, virtue occupies and plays a vital and central role in life. Aristotle emphasizes on virtue in detail, its nature, its application, with what they are concerned, how they are discernible (mean) and most importantly that it is to be governed by human reason to become a virtuous act. His philosophy is well established. But when we look at the Zeliangrong philosophy of life, and particularly their notion of virtue, they do uphold certain values and revered their own practices but there are no written books as is found in Aristotle. However, this does not entail that they do not have the concept of virtue. They do not specify it as a mean which lies between
two extreme as found in Aristotle’s but it is more or less like Aristotle’s mean. It means to say that, the virtues which we find in Zeliangrong society are also the moderate ways of human conduct. They are the personality traits which are valued and constitute a determining factor for a man to become a good man.

Man, in a nature given state, may be laden with potentials. If the potentials lay condensed and dormant within man it makes no difference from any other objects. It is only through making these potentials explicitly in the form of activities their senses are manifested. According to Aristotle, our activities should be guided by our reason to be virtuous. It is only the actualized form of the potentials that becomes a crucial constituent leading the chief good-happiness. The Zeliangrong also gives importance to the actualization of the potentials. We may know many things but if those things are not put into practice it amounts to not knowing anything. There is one common phrase which goes like this “Aling mei khang thu ram guat puituang makge” which means people who are sincere and industrious lacks nothing. So even amongst the Zeliangrong, only those people who are sincere and actively perform their work become good citizens. It is the act of a person that would be counted in deciding whether life would be meaningful or not. Happiness is valued so much by people, but as Aristotle says, when we really ask what happiness is; the views given are different from each other. In this pursuit, we have two views who maintained happiness to be the ultimate, highest and chief good for mankind. For Aristotle this chief good- *Eudaimonia* can be attained first by being virtuous and then through contemplation of the truth whereas for the Zeliangrong by being virtuous and manage to achieve the two highest achievements would live a happy life- *Tingpuimaruimei Panti*. Here we see that the means that they employed were different but the ends is same- happiness.

There are two contrasting aspects where Aristotle and the Zeliangrong hold quite different notions. As far as the factors involves in meaningfulness of life is concerned, Aristotle opines that span of life has no role. But before we go further let us make sure that we are talking in the terms of the duration and not

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146 1095a. 15ff
in the context of maturity. So, for him even if someone dies without living a long life, if he had had a happy life, his life would still be meaningful. Whereas in the context of Zeliangrong if a person died an immature dead, his life would not fall within the scheme of Tingpuimaruimei Panti. Longevity is considered by them to be a blessing, so devoid of this, one's life may not be very meaningful though it does not amount to meaningless life.

As human beings, we know that death would come to us one or the other day. The fact is that we do not know when and how it will come to us. But this uncertainty and how it would come to us does not affect the Aristotle's concept of life. As a matter of fact the time and the condition of death cannot be as a yardstick to call someone happy or not happy. But when we look at the Zeliangrong perspective we find that it meant a lot to them particularly with death. The question of when and how a person died stands crucial in the context of life. If anyone happens to die an unnatural death through accident or sickness, they would not call as an accomplished life. One simple reason could be that they invoke god's blessing to have a long and prosperous life. There are certain cases where the dead bodies are not buried or even bring home, not to mention about the ceremonies conducted when a person dies.

Aristotle stresses more on 'here and now. Contemplation is on the top hierarchy of living. Other material things are just secondary. Whereas for the Zeliangrong 'here and now' and also 'here and after' constitutes a meaningful life. They give emphasis more on material achievement besides being a certain person possessing a state of moral characters.

Virtues common to both are liberality (kadatkariatthaimei), truthful man (Latlingsamei), Tactful man (Tamjanthaimei), justice (Minammakmei), friendship (Manguipuimei). The common virtues listed are not exhaustive. The virtues we find in Zeliangrong are in one or the other ways related to those held by Aristotle.

When we translate the literal meaning of the term, which is used by the Zeliangrong to compare with what Aristotle had to say regarding virtues, we may not get the equivalent term. But there are some terms, as noted above,
which are more or less, refer to the same quality by both views. Now let us look at the terms liberality and kadatkaria thaimei (Translated as Judicious, Balance-limit). The context which Aristotle discusses about liberality is in terms of the uses of one’s wealth. He says that liberal men are those who know the limit of giving and taking. They make sure that the wealth is not misused. One should not crave too much and give too much as well. There is a limit in both the circumstances. So the ideal man of Aristotle would follow the liberal path that there is equilibrium in a society. Likewise even in the context of Zeliangrong a person who possesses the virtue of kadatkariathaimei knows the limit and extent of the given situation.

If we look closely we can see that there is a difference between these two terms. The term Kadatkariathaimei is a wider concept than that of Aristotle’s liberality. By this we do not mean to say that liberality cannot be used in different context. But as far as Nicomachean Ethics is concerned it is used in the context of wealth. But the term kadatkariathaimei is applicable to all the human affairs. A person who possesses this quality would not create any problem through his words and deeds. He controls his mouth and action. Never would such a person harm others intentionally. All that he does would be fair. He knows his duty well, does things on time, and most importantly well respected and honoured.

The virtues which Aristotle discussed in Nicomachean Ethics are almost all common even in the Zeliangrong context; though certain variation prevails. The difference between them is that Aristotle talked in terms of a mean between two extremes and how they are determined whereas the Zeliangrong upholds those virtues as a quality of a good man, without further reference to any limit as excess or deficiency. But this does not imply there is no concept of excess or deficiency among the Zeliangrong. All that we want to say is that there is no proper formulation of the mean, deficiency and excess. So, for instance like, courage, good temper, truthful, tactful, just, friendship, etc, which were explicated by Aristotle systematically, are very much considered by the
Zeliangrong as a virtue with which human beings are concern for a meaningful existence.

We have seen that there are several common features between them, though with some differences, but particularly with regard to continence, we can see that they altogether have a different concept. In *Nicomachean Ethics* we find that, man should know how to control one's appetites and desires, especially in the matter of pleasure and pain (Sex). The continence man is highly acclaimed by Aristotle. Whereas in the context of Zeliangrong, they do not have any concept of continence as propounded by Aristotle, rather they encourage people to engage in it. If we refer back to the prayer, starting from the day of a child’s birth they invoke god’s blessing so that he/she may successful in that very activity. Amongst the Zeliangrong involving in such activity does not make a person morally reprobate. As a matter of fact it is considered as an achievement. It is a matter of status. Being qualified in this game has certain role entitled to him in a society which is not enjoyed by other people. In regard to this, particularly there is one house (*Tariangpengbian*), which is built only by those people who were successful in this game.

The term *Tariang* means ‘spinning machine for thread’ and *Pengbian* means ‘an elevated platform’. It is constructed entirely with one piece of log. Wealth is not only a yardstick that qualifies a person to construct this house. In order to construct this house a person must have slept with the mother and daughter, two sisters and two girls who share the same bed. There might be a person who has slept with the equal or even more number of girls but if they have not fulfilled the criteria as stated, they are not entitled to construct the said house. It is said that if they do it will be strike by lightning. This house is considered as the top and highest achievement by the Zeliangrong. As far as history is concern only *Haipou Jadonang* has manage to construct this house.

So in this context, there is a wide gap between the two ideologies. But we should know that the Zeliangrong profess such practices because it is a question of one’s pride not only here and now, but even in the next life.
The concept of right and wrong in the Zeliangrong tribe solely depends on the socially accepted norms and conditions. We do not find codified theories to judge an act of a person. Though there are no rules and regulations, laws and orders, and theories from the perspective of ethics, they have traditional way of judging an act of a person. An act of a person, either be it moral, social, and religious, it is judged to be right or wrong in the local court of justice known as Shungbam. In this court if anyone is found guilty, he or she is punished. The standard of judgment is usually the already accepted laws and orders. These laws and orders are the agreement passed by the elders. It has been handed down from the ancestors. Up till not now the customary laws are being practiced by them. So depending upon the severity of the crime, punishments are awarded as per the laws by the court of justice. So the notion of right and wrong derives its sense from the culturally and traditionally accepted norms.

When we talk about the notion of good and bad of an action, from an ethical point of view, it is mainly based on lamchat and kheiliak of a man. But now there is something which we need to clarify through cross examination. The point is, the notion of good, good man, and what makes a man good as a whole or from the whole perspective should be explicated. And before we do that we need to know the basis and the ground rule on which notions rest.

We have already discussed in chapter three that life of the Zeliangrong are highly dictated by the concept of religion. It is extremely hard to bifurcate an act of this people that has no religious significances. The essence of their act seems to be heavily dependent on their religious belief. So we can see that their concept of good and bad and even right and wrong are deeply rooted in both their religious belief and notion of morality. These two concepts interlace and overlap each other depending upon the subject concern. So when we say good, good man, and what makes a man good, there is no classification such as he is morally or religiously good, when we use the three terms in the context of a man in respect of his action that concerns his activity with his fellow men. He or she is good from both perspectives in a sense. There is still further thing to take note. Though the act of a person may be good, it does not necessarily
make that person good. Likewise a person may be good but it is not the case that he would be religious. His act may pertain to that of religious person, by being good does not necessary makes a person religious. All that we are trying to say is that both the elements of morality and religion are always found intertwined when we talk about the goodness of man.

So when we say that he/she is good, the goodness does not stand independently on either religion or morality but on both. But depending upon the context the expression of both may vary. In principle there are different functions assigned to regulate social, religion and judiciary but in practice all these functions are closely connected and executed in line with each other.

Now we will concentrate on what the critics have to say about the two views. We will first delve on Aristotle separately and then on Zelianrong.

**Aristotle**

Many critics have put forth their objection to Aristotle’s view concerning his dialectical approach to the quest for meaning of life. According to him, contemplation is the best activity that we can perform. It exercises the best thing in us, “our rationality” and is the most self-sufficient of any activity we might perform. We don’t need knee-security or other people in order to contemplate; we can do it by ourselves, any time anywhere.

According to Aristotle there is a unique function of man which is entirely distinct from all the other living beings. He calls this unique function to be reason. This function argument has been challenged by many critics on several grounds. According to them Aristotle assumes that whatever capacity distinguishes humans from other beings is, for that very reason, the highest and best of their capacities. Perhaps the ability to reason is the best of our capacities, but we cannot be compelled to draw this conclusion from the fact that it is what is most distinctive of the human species.\(^\text{147}\)

With regard to Aristotle's function argument critics are of the view that Aristotle presupposed, about the nature of man, in particular the purpose of existence, that human beings are pre-designed by God. With this notion W. F. R. Hardie writes "the obvious answer is that one may not, unless one is prepared to say that a man is an instrument designed for some use".\textsuperscript{148} Hardie's view is that function (distinct) can be ascribed to human beings only on the ground of religious or metaphysical assumptions or if only being designed for a purpose.

A broader and still more pervasive fallacy underlies Aristotle's ethics. It is the idea that an investigation of human nature can reveal what we ought to do. For Aristotle, an examination of a knife would reveal that its distinctive quality is to cut, and from this we could conclude that a good knife would be a knife that cuts well. In the same way, an examination of human nature should reveal the distinctive quality of human beings, and from this we should be able to conclude what it is to be a good human being. This line of thought makes sense if we think, as Aristotle did, that the universe as a whole has a purpose and that we exist as part of such a goal-directed scheme of things, but its error becomes glaring once we reject this view and come to see our existence as the result of a blind process of evolution. Then we know that the standards of quality for knives are a result of the fact that knives are made with a specific purpose in mind and that a good knife is one that fills this purpose well. Human beings, however, were not made with any particular purpose in mind. Their nature is the result of random forces of natural selection and thus cannot, without further moral premises, determine how they ought to live.\textsuperscript{149}

Robert Nozick asks "If man turned out to be unique only in having a sense of humor, would it follow that he should concentrate his energies on inventing and telling jokes?"\textsuperscript{150} Even if we suppose that for some reason the human function must be one of the three kinds of life among which Aristotle

\textsuperscript{148} W. F. R. Hardie, \textit{Aristotle's Ethical Theory}, Oxford University Press 1968 p. 23
makes his selection the question is why only one. He goes on to say that even if the function of man is to exercise the valuable characteristics why do we have to focus only on this aspect and neglect, if there is, any other valuable characteristics of human beings. But he did mention that other valuable characteristics should be exercised only if it is not a hinder to the most valuable one. The point that he wants to drive home is, instead of exercising only the so-called single distinct feature of man if other valuable characteristics are also exercised the overall result would be better off.

Thomas Nagel\textsuperscript{151} also shares a common view with Nozick. He says it may be more plausible to argue that human flourishing involves the well-functioning of all of our essential capacities, and not just one. Finally, even if we do manage to isolate a unique and characteristic human capacity that seems to be a plausible candidate for the human function, won't it turn out to be a capacity that can be used either for good or for evil?

Williams' writing also reflects the same kind of objection given by Nozick and Nagel. He comments "what Aristotle does not, however – and granted his system, cannot do- is to provide any account of how the intellectual activities, the highest expression (in his view) of man’s nature, are to be brought into relation into citizenly activities which are regulated by the virtues of character". He says even practical wisdom failed to impose a mean between philosophizing or doing science on the one hand and being a good citizen, father, etc., on the other. These highest potentialities (practical and theoretical wisdom) of a man stand in need of a logical explanation on how it would fair-well to compete even with the mundane kind of activities of man.

He suggests the possibility that there is no absolute kind of imperative that man would employ this unique and distinct feature only for the good cause. Man has a freedom to choose any form of life. He is trying to draw the line that even though reason might be the highest and best in man but this very feature could also be exercised in otherwise.

\textsuperscript{151} Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, pp. 7–14
He writes "For if it is a mark of a man to employ intelligence and tools in modifying his environment, it is equally a mark of him to employ intelligence and tools in destroying others. If it is a mark of a man to have a conceptualized and fully conscious awareness of himself as one among others, aware that others have feelings like himself, this is a preconception not only of benevolence but . . . of cruelty as well".\footnote{Bernard Williams, Morality: An Introduction to Ethics, Cambridge University Press Canto edition 1993. pp. 59-60.}

Ian Johnston also states that social roles (artisans, musicians, soldier, housewives) have functions, but how do we speak of a human function? If we had recourse to divine revelation we might understand something about a uniquely human function, but Aristotle makes no such appeal. Just because a certain activity is particularly human, that does not mean we have an obligation to engage in it. Human beings, for example, are the only creatures, who can with words, tell lies to each other. That does not mean we are obliged to carry out that activity in order to be fully human.

He further suggests that these doubts about the function argument have led some interpreters to suggest that the main emphasis in the Ethics is not strictly on what we might consider ethics and more on success: "the immediate aim of the Ethics is to make us 'good men'—not morally good men, but expert or successful human beings". On this reading, the Ethics "is not directly telling us how to be morally good men, or even how to be humanly happy: it is telling us how to live successful lives, how to fulfill ourselves as men".\footnote{http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/introser/aristot.htm}

Christine M. Korsgaard tried to rescue the Aristotle's function argument from the critics. First of all, does the claim that human being has a function amount to, or implies, the claim that a human being has a purpose? And if so does it depend upon an unacceptable teleological metaphysics? Those who object to the function argument on the grounds of its alleged dependence on an illicit teleological principle or method of reasoning are usually interpreting function as being more or less equivalent to "purpose." A number of Aristotle's
defenders have pointed out that function or *ergon* has a wider range of meanings than just “purpose.” It can be used to mean work or workings or product or characteristic activity. She says function can refer to the way a thing functions or how it works, to its function-ing. If we use “function” in this sense—“how a thing does what it does”—it will diverge from “purpose,” which is simply “what it does.” She cited an example of a complicated machine which might have a multipurpose. But if function has to be taken in the sense of how a thing does what it does, this machine will have only one function—one way of functioning.

She says, the two notions are closely related. The notion of purpose is embedded in the notion of function, the “what it does” in the “how it does what it does.” And there will be cases in which the two are virtually identical. Think for example of a very simple device like a fork or a shelf; in these cases to say what the thing does and to say how it does what it does is pretty much the same thing. (What is the function of a shelf? To put things on. How does it work? Well, you put things on it.) Another, very different sort of case where function and purpose coincide is where the function itself is the thing’s purpose or end. So, function in the sense of “how a thing does what it does,” of structure as tending to purpose, is from the point of view of knowledge the best candidate for form.

So when Aristotle says that the function of a human being is the activity of the rational part of the soul, he means that rational activity is how we human beings do what we do, and in particular, how we lead our specific form of life. Reason is the function of a human being, because it is how we do what we do, which is to lead a specifically human form of life. Aristotle looks for what is unique or peculiar to us not because he values uniqueness for its own sake but because he already supposes (which William calls it as a preconceived characteristics) that this particular kind of “goodness of life” is distinctive of human beings. If there were other beings capable of rational choice, this would not undermine Aristotle’s argument, for they too would lead the kind of life that can be *eudaimon* or not.
She gave a response to Nagel’s question—why only one of the three kinds of life should be identified as our function—she says Aristotle could say that reason is the function relevant to eudaimonia because of the way that it transforms our manner of performing those activities and tasks that we share with plants and the other animals.  

J.L. Mackie contends that Aristotle’s work as a guidance to help man to become good is too circular. Aristotle’s work contains an elaborated detail of many of the virtues, moral and intellectual, the air of indeterminacy persists. He mentioned about vices and virtues, but very little about where or how to draw the dividing lines, where or how to fix the mean. Aristotle only specifies that these are the virtues but left the reader without proper insight about it.

Robert Louden holds that Aristotle tells us that right acts are those which are means between extremes, but it is almost impossible to determine how to apply this conception in actual situations. He says that virtue-oriented approach has a very limited advice to solve in moral dilemmas. According to him, even the best person can make the wrong choices. Even if choices are grounded on authentic information it is possible that things may not work out as planned. He further says that no one can be so sure of who really is virtuous or vicious. So an ethical system like that of Aristotle lies in the domain of moral skepticism.

Martha Nussbaum contends that Aristotelian dialectic may be powerless to help where help is most urgently needed, powerless to criticize where the need for philosophical critique is greatest. A philosophy that stops here is not only impotent but also callous: a tool of exploitation, an accomplice of misery. She challenged that Aristotle’s argument would not stand a chance

to meet the depth of social ills and intricacy of human mind. She also maintains that Aristotle concerns too much about self sufficiency and rational control.

Anscombe is one who was inspired by the work of Aristotle’s way of doing philosophy. She drew her inspiration from Aristotle and so called for a return to concepts such as character, virtue and flourishing. She also emphasized the importance of the emotions and understanding moral psychology. With the exception of this emphasis on moral psychology, Anscombe's recommendations that we place virtue more centrally in our understanding of morality were taken up by a number of philosophers. The resulting body of theories and ideas has come to be known as virtue ethics. 158

Williams takes a wider concept, ethics, and rejects the narrow and restricting concept of morality. Ethics encompasses many emotions that are rejected by morality as irrelevant. Ethical concerns are wider, encompassing friends, family and society and make room for ideals such as social justice. This view of ethics is compatible with the Ancient Greek interpretation of the good life as found in Aristotle and Plato. 159

According to Jonathan Lear due to the teleological weak spots Aristotle did not provides a sufficient guide to living or to thinking about life. Aristotle, he argues, skirts around the explicit idea of happiness. Aristotle attempts to base his theories on a single, all encompassing principle that gives life a teleological meaning.

Lear first elucidates a critical, unresolved tension in Aristotle’s ethics. Aristotle spends most of the Nicomachean Ethics focusing on the satisfaction to be gained from living an active life of the traditional ethical virtues informed by practical wisdom. But at the end of the Nicomachean Ethics, according to Lear, Aristotle switches course and now posits the contemplative life as the exemplary, though ultimately never fully achievable, life. It is this sudden switch that Lear focuses on and argues that this switch occurs because Aristotle

158 Anscombe G.E. M., "Modern Moral Philosophy", Philosophy, 33 The original call for a return to Aristotelian ethics, 1958
159 Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy, London: Fontana, 1985, chap. 10
realizes that there is something incomplete in the premise on which he built the majority of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Lear provides a wonderful teasing out of weaknesses in Aristotle. As for Lear's own resolution of the issues that he feels are unresolved by Aristotle. They are less than complete and satisfying. Lear finds fault with any complete, teleological resolution of what it means to "live a good life." The result is a disappointing "non-answer" which Lear would probably argue is the best we can do. *Nicomachean Ethics* is worth buying, worth reading, but not a book that will change your life.

Lear has pointed out that, if this is happiness, then Aristotle's system is nearly self-defeating. For if what would make us really happy is something that only the gods are really good at doing, then no human (or only a few mystics living in caves) will ever be really happy.\(^{160}\)

In fact, all of Aristotle's ethical teachings upheld contemporary society and values. This in itself has been criticized because it offers no reasons for rebellion or adherence to society's values.

Bertrand Russell even said that "He shows no sign of having had any of those experiences which make it difficult to preserve sanity; all the more profound aspects of the moral life are apparently unknown to him. He leaves out, one may say, the whole sphere of human experience with which religion is concerned. What he has to say is what will be useful to comfortable men of weak passions; but he has nothing to say to those who are possessed by a god or a devil, or whom outward misfortune drives to despair." \(^{161}\)

His doctrine of finding the Golden Mean through phronesis has also been criticized: "Knowing how to act, the possession of practical wisdom, means having an 'eye' for solutions; and that can only be developed through a combination of training in the right habits and direct acquaintance with practical situations." But this is not enough because "The world is full of problems--about

\(^{160}\) Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*, Chapter 1

\(^{161}\) Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 1945, p184
forms of war, about war itself, life and death, sex, race and religion— to which
Aristotle’s bland assurance, ‘Maturity will bring an answer’, scarcely seems an
adequate response.”

Aristotle has been criticized on several grounds. Since he was perhaps
the philosopher most respected by European thinkers during and after the
Renaissance, these thinkers often took Aristotle’s erroneous positions as given,
which held back science in this epoch.

Aristotle’s ethical theory is often seen as instructing agents in the
prudent pursuit of their own well-being, and therefore labeled egoistic. Yet it is
also subject to the opposing charge of failing to direct agents to their well-being,
directing them instead to perfection.

It seems that Aristotle considered happiness as a quality of intellectual
beings. Aristotle is much more consistent than us by suggesting an intellectual
definition to that quality. An intellectual being likes “virtue” and dislikes “evil,” or
prefers virtue to the lack of it. Thus, an intellectual being can be happy only if
he acts virtuous. The problem with this theory lays in a universal definition of
virtue and evil.

Another difference between the modern and ancient conception of
happiness is its permanency. Ancients used only three integers to measure
happiness. Unhappy (-1), neither happy nor unhappy (0), happy (+1).
However, we use infinite number of fractions to measure the degree of
happiness or unhappiness.

I consider this difference less important than the ones regarding the
components of happiness, since the disagreement on the chemical structure of
happiness is more important than the disagreement on whether its atom can be
divided or not.

In mathematics you can find the mean of two numbers by dividing their sum by
two. In other words, you find the mean by the means of both ends. But, you

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1 Christopher Rowe, “Ethics in Ancient Greece”, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A
Companion to Ethics, ed. Peter Singer, 1991, pp. 128-129
can't find the both ends from the mean. On the contrary, according to Aristotle's formula of virtue, you can't find the mean (virtue) by taking the means of two extreme ends. There are two reasons for this non-mathematical character:

i. Ethical extremes and deficiencies cannot be expressed quantitatively.

ii. Extremes and deficiencies are usually open ends extending to infinity. It is difficult to set a limit for cowardliness or for rashness.

iii. 3. The extremes and deficiencies are based on the previously existing concept of mean; not the other way around. If you don't have the concept of mean you can't imagine excessiveness.

According to Aristotle there is a criterion that we can recognize the extremes and deficiencies: Both are self-destructive actions. Aristotle's theory of virtue as a mean is not a good account of virtue for at least two reasons.

First, the opposite excessive ends vary according to situations, cultures, individuals and context. There are endless possible situation for each action. An excessive behavior, sometimes, can become virtuous or even deficient. Thus, this theory of virtue is virtually useless.

Second, there are some virtuous actions that can be placed on one of the extreme ends, instead of intermediary place. Let's assume that we issued seventeen rules to be obeyed by consensus. Obviously, obeying all these rules should be considered as virtue. However, "obeying all the rules" is not the mean of excessive ends. In fact, "Obeying some of the rules" is the mean of "obeying all the rules" and "disobeying all the rules." Let us give a better example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Deficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy (complete)</td>
<td>Neither happy nor unhappy</td>
<td>Unhappy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If virtuous actions and feelings are the means of both extreme ends, then to be happy --which according to Aristotle's definition it is 'complete'-- is an
extreme end, and thus, according to Aristotle's own theory, it is not virtuous to be happy! This is Aristotle's ethical paradox. (Can Aristotle avoid this paradox by playing with words? Can he claim that happiness is neither virtuous action nor feeling, it is a state?)

The main problem we see in Aristotle's insightful attempt to answer this question is that his solution is somewhat circular. In order to live well, we need to live virtuously and spend time on self-reflection and study, but how do we know what criteria to use in selecting the virtues or in choosing what to study? We basically have to find people that seem to be living well and flourishing — or in Aristotle's time, it was suggested that we might also strive to emulate the gods, since they certainly seemed to be doing well. This isn't unlike certain religions today that provide a model of virtue to attempt to emulate. Aristotle doesn't answer one key question though: What is the best life one could possibly live? Eudaimonia suggests a way to go about finding the answer to this question, but it still leaves some gaping holes.

For Aristotle the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. According to Aristotle men excel only on those things which they enjoy doing them. In saying this he has a certain point that is we definitely do things better that thing which interest us but nevertheless it does not always turn out to be the best. One may be really interested in certain thing but that does not mean that we will be good at it. There will be certain factors which do not comply with our interest like lack of knowledge, skills, situation etc., One's interest or enjoyment does not necessarily entail the ability to do well in the interested things.

He further talked of just and liberal by saying that even if a person does those acts, if they do not enjoy they will not be known as just or liberal man. Now the question is why? For instance, a person may not be interested in

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163 http://www.yuksel.org/e/philosophy/happiness.htm
164 Nicomachean Ethics, 1099a. 15-28ff
singing but that does not mean that he cannot sing or be a good singer. To be more practical, men do not always do that thing which they always enjoy doing them. Even so the possibility of being good at it is not ruled out by the lack of enjoyment or interest in doing them. Likewise, another person may enjoy singing yet may not even be as good as the one who does not enjoy. If then, though singing may not be enjoyable activity, if a person is good at it why can he be known/ called as a good singer. The point which we are trying to draw home here is that one's liking or interest does not necessarily entail the ability to do well and at the same time we do not find a reason not to call a person just or liberal on account of their lack of enjoyment in doing those acts.

The means may not be determinable universally. His doctrine of mean seems to be quite impressive on the surface level. But from a general point of view though it might help many to choose the right proportion of an action in a particular moment and context it does not rule out the logical possibility of clashes of means. How do we determine the mean between two extremes? No wonder our conscience would tell us of what and which is, at a given situation but as people do not have the same sense of moral disposition that may depend on some factors like norms and practices followed in one's own society. For instance, in a decision making among certain groups of people regarding say X, too less would be one and too much would be ten. Here then the mean would certainly be either five, five half or even six. Now the question is, if an ethical issue be like a mathematical equation, we definitely would have no problem at all. He himself has clarified that it not the same as mathematical equation. But it is a different concept. Apart from the difference that would arise between and among different culture even within the individuals of the same society would certainly have a different concept of ethical issues so also of the virtues the mean which is said to be the intermediate between two extremes. There is no universal consensus or limit as to what is too little or too much. What is moderate for one may be too harsh for the others. As far as a decision on one's own affairs is concerned the problem of clashes of means might not occur. However, since we live in a society, which has differences, what one thinks and that of others is bound to clash. What is virtuous in one society may
even be despised or vice. So to decide a means that can be acceptable universally might not be possible.

For a person to be in the state of contemplation-eudaimonia seems to be impracticable. Even if we could provide a sound argument for the superiority of contemplation (or, for that matter, meditation), Aristotle’s sense of what makes contemplation so great belies the hope that happiness is possible for most of us. For Aristotle claims that contemplation is essentially a godly activity; the gods, who have no material needs, spend their days in endless contemplation of the cosmos, and thus, when we contemplate, we become like gods. But humans, unlike gods, have material needs, too, and since we must spend a considerable amount of our time eating, grooming, and working, we can only spend so much of our time in contemplation. It would be best if we were independently wealthy and had servants to take care of the mundane household duties so that we can spend our time locked in our study-contemplating. Additionally, in order to contemplate the right kinds of things—the eternal nature of the cosmos—it would help if we had a long, intense education in mathematics, philosophy, and the sciences (especially physics). When viewed in this manner, it begins to appear that most people won’t have the time or the resources (material or intellectual) needed in order to participate in Aristotle’s happiest activity. And this means that most of us, in a sense, will fail to be completely happy.

How do we contemplate? About what? (Form of good and virtue). When will it be an ideal time for contemplation? What will be the outcome of contemplation-(happiness)? Does the contemplation about the form of good or virtue necessarily lead to happiness? Even if the answer is yes, it concerns about the state of mind only and not the whole being. One may be mentally at ease but how about the practical problems like health, wealth, name, fame, etc, which one cannot do away with as far as life is concerned. He does maintain that even the external goods are required. But viewing from the perspective of contemplation the room to acquire the external goods seems to be left out.
The next question is, can the activity of contemplation go along with the daily course of life? To be more practical, won't one's struggle for survival impede the activity of contemplation? For, as a matter of fact, we are faced with so many problems though varying in its degrees and intensities. Since contemplation is said to be concerned with only good thing in order to attain happiness, in one's struggle for survival failure in some cases are bound to occur. So during such situation can we still carry on with the activity of contemplation say getting the intended outcome?

If we talk in the Indian context the chief concern in Hinduism is the discovery of spiritual enlightenment or Brahman. In order to reach and understand Brahman you have to understand the "self". In Brahman the body is just a shell, something to house your spirit. Through self-discipline and the stopping of your natural desires you may reach Brahman. Only by complete annihilation of the ego could the individual gain Nirvana. Even Kant has a view that the ideal state is one free of desire and inclination. To be in state of apathy is a particular excellent. To be free from these desire and inclination for him is both itself a virtue and presupposed by other virtues. Now the question is, though the act of contemplation itself is considered to be an end in itself-happiness for Aristotle, can we contemplate without having any desire of anything but only that of good things.

As Hobbes has pointed out for an utmost end, in which the ancient philosophers have placed felicity, and disputed much concerning the way thereto, there is no such thing in this world, nor way to it, more than to utopia; for while we live, we have desires, and desire presupposed a further end. Even less mystical philosophies point out that contemplation is apt to decay into emptiness without the continual stimulus of desires, fresh action, and fresh problems.

165 Gerald L. Berry, Religions of the world, New York/London: Barnes and Noble Books, 1956, p. 41
167 Ibid, "Summon Bonum" p. 367
168 Ibid, p. 79
Now what we can see is, to contemplate of the good thing and at the same time if we are to have the desire of the external goods, even the act of contemplation itself might not be able to carry on the parlance of the intended outcome. Therefore contemplation minus desire of any external goods may not be as fruitful as Aristotle thought of. Even so from a practical point of view if one has to follow his notion of contemplation- which is supposed to be a meaningful activity-life, there is a possibility that many lay men might not be able to live a virtuous life. We may say that it’s too idealistic.

Is he positing contemplation-eudaimonia as related to the activities of gods just for a consistency of his argument? According to Aristotle god is unmoved mover (cause-effect) substance, thinking being. The activity of god is thinking about his thought. To assume that god must be thinking about something else-object would be to pre suppose that there exists an object greater than a god.

To say that god must be thinking about his thought would amount to self defeating assertion/argument/tautologous. What good is there in god to think of his own thought? What would be there in his thought? To think is to think of something. He might say that god was thinking about the truth, good, best. In the likeness of his notion of god he wants man to contemplate about the truth. If only then man would have a meaningful life. There is a possibility that god must be thinking about his thought- which constitutes say about the whole of universe. But this is only an assumption for there is no way through which we can ascertain about what he means by asserting that god thinks of his thought. Likewise in the context of men what he contends is to contemplate about the truth. But now the question is truth of what.

As far as contemplation is concerned the only way to live a meaningful life is to emulate the activities of god. But from a practical point of view to devote oneself in the act of contemplation, it seems ridiculous; for, to attain the truest sense of his contention, daily chores of life has to be aborted without which contemplation would be impeded. Now there is something which he claims that only a matured person can posses the quality of practical wisdom.
which is an essential trait for a man to become virtuous. The kind of person that fits his description according to him is the philosopher. Now the question is who are the philosophers according to him?

From another perspective, there might be a possibility of living a meaningful life, if his view on contemplation may be applied to only the aged people where the manual work for survival, wants and desires of any kinds be given up and concentrate only on contemplation. For instance, in the Varna system of Hinduism a person after reaching the age of 75 years is said to give up the desire of this worldly things and devote their entire life in prayer. In such kind of context Aristotle's notion of contemplation might be applicable to a certain limit. The reason why it may be applicable only to a certain limit is that though the person might have given up the entire desire for these worldly things he is still dependent on his kin for his survival to undergo this act of contemplation. From a sociological point of view when we talk about the dependency on his kin we may say that it is the duty of the kin to look after them so the question of dependency may lapse in favour of the responsibility on the part of the kin.

To accept this kind of restricted sense or scope of contemplation in the stages of human life may lead us to a serious kind of criticism. If one is to accept this kind of contention, we are denying to ascribe any meaningful life to the younger generation. The point which we are trying to say is that not all men lived long enough to reach that particular stage where we can dedicate ourselves to contemplate the truth for a meaningful life. But just because we could/do not live up to that particular stage of life we cannot say that our lives were meaningless. If we are to follow Aristotle's assertion about the maturity of men in its strict sense many would fall short of a meaningful life. But this cannot be the case. For if it is, men's lives that do not reach that particular age/stage would be devoid of any meaning at all. But this is ridiculous because age or maturity cannot be the entire determining factor of a meaningful life.

Now the next question is that, if that is the case what is/are the determining factor/s that constitutes the meaningful life.
The theory of the mean is open to several objections, but before considering them, we should recognize that in fact there are two distinct theses each of which might be called a doctrine of the mean. First, there is the thesis that every virtue is a state that lies between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency. Second, there is the idea that whenever a virtuous person chooses to perform a virtuous act, he can be described as aiming at an act that is in some way or other intermediate between alternatives that he rejects. It is this second thesis that is most likely to be found objectionable. A critic might concede that in some cases virtuous acts can be described in Aristotle’s terms. If, for example, one is trying to decide how much to spend on a wedding present, one is looking for an amount that is neither excessive nor deficient. But surely many other problems that confront a virtuous agent are not susceptible to this quantitative analysis. If one must decide whether to attend a wedding or respect a competing obligation instead, it would not be illuminating to describe this as a search for a mean between extremes—unless “aiming at the mean” simply becomes another phrase for trying to make the right decision. The objection then, is that Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, taken as a doctrine about what the ethical agent does when he deliberates, is in many cases inapplicable or unilluminating.

A defense of Aristotle would have to say that the virtuous person does after all aim at a mean, if we allow for a broad enough notion of what sort of aiming is involved. For example, consider a juror who must determine whether a defendant is guilty as charged. He does not have before his mind a quantitative question; he is trying to decide whether the accused committed the crime, and is not looking for some quantity of action intermediate between extremes. Nonetheless, an excellent juror can be described as someone who, in trying to arrive at the correct decision, seeks to express the right degree of concern for all relevant considerations. He searches for the verdict that results from a deliberative process that is neither overly credulous or unduly skeptical. Similarly, in facing situations that arouse anger, a virtuous agent must determine what action (if any) to take in response to an insult, and although this is not itself a quantitative question, his attempt to answer it properly requires
him to have the right degree of concern for his standing as a member of the community. He aims at a mean in the sense that he looks for a response that avoids too much or too little attention to factors that must be taken into account in making a wise decision.

Perhaps a greater difficulty can be raised if we ask how Aristotle determines which emotions are governed by the doctrine of the mean. Consider someone who loves to wrestle, as an example. Is this passion something that must be felt by every human being at appropriate times and to the right degree? Surely someone who never felt this emotion to any degree could still live a perfectly happy life. Why then should we not say the same about at least some of the emotions that Aristotle builds into his analysis of the ethically virtuous agent? Why should we experience anger at all, or fear, or the degree of concern for wealth and honor that Aristotle commends? These are precisely the questions that were asked in antiquity by the Stoics, and they came to the conclusion that such common emotions as anger and fear are always inappropriate. Aristotle assumes, on the contrary, not simply that these common passions are sometimes appropriate, but that it is essential that every human being learns how to master them and experience them in the right way at the right times. A defense of his position would have to show that the emotions that figure in his account of the virtues are valuable components of any well-lived human life, when they are experienced properly. Perhaps such a project could be carried out, but Aristotle himself does not attempt to do so.

According to Krishnamurti, though he is not targeting Aristotle’s view, happiness is not something to be pursued. For him it is a kind of happenings, it comes. When it is pursued it amounts to self defeating. He says the moment one is conscious of his humbleness one is not humble any more. It is also so with happiness.169

Zeliangrong

As far as the Zeliangrong concept of meaning of life is concerned no one has written an article about it in any form, either books or papers. Some authors have mentioned about their culture from a historical point of view and some from a social, political and religious aspect. Since enough written documents, articles and books are not available up to this day. So it is not an easy task to find or comprehend what according to them is the meaning of life. Nevertheless it is desirable to put an effort to find the meaning of life according to the Zeliangrong. However, in spite of all the labours and findings of what is the meaning of life according to them, people may find it difficult to appreciate and accept the values and belief system. As there are various understandings of meaning of life, this is one such understanding which is deeply rooted in their culture and religion.

Religion

We have already stated in chapter three that religion occupies a prominent place within the community of the Zeliangrong. It dictates their way of life. Ceremony is normally performed as a social and religious duty in any event. They are said to be very religious but they seem to live in a constant fear of the happenings of nature. They were scared, wondered and amazed of the nature's forces in the form of earthquakes, storms, thunders, epidemics etc. They believe in benevolent god and at the same time they hold that the evil spirit exists. These evil spirits are projected as the sources of troubles and sicknesses. So in order to appease these evil spirits they have to offer a sacrifice every now and then. If only then, they will be free from the intervention of these evil spirits.

It may not be possible for anyone to trace how religion originated amongst the Zeliangrong. Whatever we know now about their religion is mostly through the oral tradition that has been handed down from one generation to the other in the form of myth, folklore, story, song, etc. So, how the concept of religion has its inception among the Zeliangrong may not be determinable.
However, we do know that they believed in the existence of god (Traditional religion), in other words, their religion is a historically evolved indigenous religion as stated by G. Kamei. But what we are trying to say here is that irrespective of their myth of creation or their concept of god it seems that religion originated not merely because of the divine intervention but rather due to the engulfed fear of the Mother Nature’s fury. The forces of nature might have triggered their minds to conceive that there is something out there who takes control of all the happenings. So out of this fear, wonder and amazement toward nature’s fury they might have started worshiping the Mother Nature or the so call god/s whom they thought must be controlling the nature.

There are several authors who have put forth their views in support of their religion as not an animist or cult, but it is not impossible to say that the evil spirit or the demon which they believe to exist might have been the sources that intervene in their affairs. This view is based on the practice of a black magic, sorcery or witchcraft. So, what we are trying to say here is that if those people can perform extra ordinary things, which a normal person cannot do, with the help of their spell, which is said to have acquired from a spirit (unknown to layman), such spirit might have been worshipped by the Zeliangrong. We have one good reason to support this notion. Many writers say that they are conservative, and dogmatic, and that they uphold their own belief to be the best. But in spite of such deep rooted concept about their values they readily accepted the Christian faith.

Genna and Taboo

It may not be wrong to say that in almost all the religious practices of the world the elements of genna and taboo or something related to prohibition and restriction from the religious point of view may be practiced or exercised. It may be said that this kind of practice in many religion might have been authenticated

by the sacred books or the religious text. But as far as the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, the authenticity of this practice may be doubted or it is doubtable. In the context of Zeliangrong we can say that as their belief in performing the rites, rituals and ceremonies are deeply rooted so were these practices observed strictly.172

They do observe these genna and taboo with certain belief that any bad thing that may befall on them through natural calamities and divine intervention will be ward off. As has been stated in chapter three, during this period of Neihmei depending on the occasion people abstain from taking a good food, work and any social kind of gathering. It is a kind of penance. To put it another way they observed these so as to be blessed by gods and that no harm would come to them from the unforeseen things. With such kind of intense belief in it they practiced these two elements. But as a matter of fact it would not be wrong to say that beneath their intense belief in it lies a superstition. The driving force behind their practice has a certain aspect of ignorance of what it is out there. Being failed to know of what it is, they might have induced that if we do this it may be like this. Through such kind of assumption it might have turned out to be a strong element of their religion. In fact we may say that they were blinded by their superstitious beliefs. The reason why we come to this extreme contention is that if we make a list of Neihmei all throughout the year which are usual apart from any other occasional Neihmei number of days may go up to an astonishing figure. So judging from the way how they practiced and analyzing it through the eye of reason it does not seem to have a good reason to say that it was a noble practice. It is rather detrimental to an economic prosperity and a socially healthy life. It may be said that they were blinded by the fear of the fury of evil spirits or the natural calamities or their intense belief in god that they will be blessed by doing it. In taking this position we are not denying the authenticity of oral tradition. But with regard to genna and taboo they might have practiced due to the demand made by the divine being what so ever through the priests or the prophets. It might have been evolving since then and

started observing in any and every occasion even without the intervention of
the divine being.

There is another interesting aspect about taboo which is related to
women folk. We will be dealing with only one specific area where women folk
become a symbol of bad omen or an impediment to their pursuit. They forbid
people to touch women or even all their clothes and weaving tools before they
go for a war. One reason they give is that the women folk are the weaker
section in a society. Touching them would make them weak or inefficient in the
battle field. Another reason is that women are dirty. The biological period of
menstruation in women might have been something which they could not
understand. They say that the main reason why they do not or are forbidden to
touch the women folk before they go to war is because of this factor. So
touching a woman would mean defiling themselves. They say that it brings bad
luck to them. For these reasons, those people who are supposed to take part
specially in the war, go and stay in morung even if they are aged to abstain
themselves from touching or being touched. So in this context we can safely
say that it was so because of their ignorance about the biological clock of the
women folk which in fact has let them to place a women folk as a symbol of
weakness and bad omen.

Head Hunting

Any kind of practice when it has become popular or fashionable, it
necessarily stimulates the minds of the people within that system. Some will be
easily carried away by the limelight and be overshadowed by the trend of the
practice within the system. It is possible that some will be born when that
particular trend is still being practiced or during its highest peak. For such kind
of people there is a very little room to pose a question regarding the ongoing
societal practices from the perspective of general view of what it is to be a man.
The question of right or wrong and good or bad is to posed only within that
system. No norms, criteria, or standard can be employed and labeled their
values from without. If anyone uses a different measuring rod not used in the
system the picture of his measurement will be in a distorted form. But before we
go any further we should take note that even though things may be like a hot
cake in the market, it is not impossible to assume that there might be some who
are not with the wave of the popular trend. So, what we are trying to say here
is, perhaps it must be because of such people that the practice of head hunting
amongst the Zeliangrong stopped. Of course one should not neglect to
acknowledge the fact that one of the main reasons why people stopped head
hunting was due to the interference of the government. The Britishers as well
as the government of India imposed a restriction on them and gradually the
practice of head hunting cease to exist.¹⁷³

But during those years before they come under the control of
government when they were living on their own, the practice of head hunting
was one of the games that was honoured and respected. In fact they were
doing so because of their belief as stated in the previous chapter. But any
reasonable man of this present day whose mind and body are sound and
healthy would not agree that such a practice is respectable and honourable
from any point of view. It was indeed barbaric and to put it bluntly they were not
very far from any other ferocious animals. Killing one’s own species to be
recognized by the community do not seem to be logical and ethical. Had it been
any other game where one’s own skill and strength could be exposed and be
recognized by the community it would have been an acclaimed game. But since
head hunting does not fall on that kind of game from the ethical perspective it is
unethical.

Since head hunting is one form of killings from another angle let us
compare the then and now of the Zeliangrong in particular and the rest of the
men kind in general. During those days, people hunt for each other’s head,
which resulted in killing one or the other and take the head home. As of now
people may not be hunting for the head with the same kind of belief like the
Zeliangrong. But nevertheless, though the act or the form and the motive and
intention may differ but the consequence amounts to almost the same i.e.

¹⁷³ Gangmumei Kamei: A History of Zeliangrong Nagas, From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu,
someone is killed. In this context, if we follow the theory of consequentialism, some aspects of such practices may be allowed or rather even appreciated; for it so happen that through such act, the community concerned is protected from mass massacre by few warriors. Again, the ethical relativists would still have their own way of saying. Any judgment alien to the concern value systems cannot be used as a yardstick to say that such and such is right or wrong. They may say that, since such practice was approved by the Zeliangrong, we cannot term it as wrong or unethical. Nevertheless, in the present context, from the perspective of the value of life, the purpose or reason for killing may be there but as far as the consequence is concerned of the then and now it is unethical. So we may say that the then was blinded by their false belief or ignorance and the now is blinded by the thirst and hunger for power.

*Nathit Theimei*

Death is something which is inevitable to any living thing on earth. It is just a matter of time that is different to each one of them. We have to accept the fact that it would come to us one or the other day. Depending upon one's own belief system the concept of death is bound to vary. The Zeliangrong believe that it is the end of this worldly life. But apart from that general view, how dead comes to a person matters a lot to them. Death through old age and sickness is considered as normal. If a person dies from other factors, their death bodies are buried according to the cause how they die. So when a woman and a child is dead while giving birth (*Nathit theimei*) both are buried or just left to decay in that very house itself. As discussed in the earlier chapter they are not even touched again. It is said that even the other child born to her are buried alive. The reason that they give for this act is that such thing happens to a person whose blood line is bad. They do not touch again with the fear that it might be infected with such blood line. Such a practice is unthinkable and unethical. Like in any other cases this was so because of their ignorance and superstition. One good reason that we can give is that during those days the medical facilities and the knowledge about child birth might have been very rudimental. In many cases lack of knowledge might have caused a number of lives. Instead of
blaming or accusing the woman regarding the blood line we can say that it was their lack of knowledge and blind faith that has let them to engage in such practice.

**Malaanmei**

Food is a basic need for every mankind. As people say 'health is wealth' so the Zeliangrong undertake *Malaanmei* to nourish the body for a certain period of time. This event is allowed only for the male members of a society, that too, only those parents who are well off. In this context they might have a different reason as stated in the earlier chapter but the point which we want to draw attention is that thought there is no class system in the Zeliangrong community this kind of practice might have something that points toward haves and have-nots. Thereby a kind of status or class, thought it may not be in its radical form, might have existed in their society. Another point which we may need to take note of it is that though male members might be responsible to take care of the women folk or the affairs of the whole community, even female members too could have been included in this event if they give so much important to health. But they have been neglected. If they were given equal opportunity even the death rate of child birth might have reduced to a large extent and even the babies could have been healthier than any normal baby.

**Blessing the Child**

After the child is born, a priest would perform a birth ceremony and offer a prayer. Here, let us delve on the words used in the prayer to bless the child. The prayer has been mentioned and discussed in the previous chapter. During those days the ideal kind of life might have inspired them so much that even in blessing the child they do offer a prayer in line with that concept so that the child may live to achieve that type of life. But if we go through the literal meaning of the words used in the prayer we will see that some are obnoxious and unthinkable. It does not give an impression that, if the child grows up and could fulfill all the blessings bestowed upon him, there would be peace and harmony in the society. The prayer shows that people are encouraged to
involve in head hunting, fornication and adultery. It is said that people who
manage to live like that are honoured and respected. It might have been the
case at that time but at the same time those practices might have been the
cause that led them to have conflicts and wars.

In this context, let us pin point about one particular culture that existed
among the Zeliangrong. A person is encouraged to engage in extra-marital
affairs. The act is considered as an achievement and the person as the mighty
one. The interesting part is that though they are encouraged to do so, if they
are caught, punishment is imposed on the culprit. So the act of blessing the
child and the punishment seems to be contradictory or say the blessing is
meaningless. But according to them it does not contradict with each other. They
say, in this context, punishment is just a formality and not to be taken literally.
The punishment includes a slap or two and front porch of the roof will be pull-
down. But the next day, those who pulled down the front porch of the roof
would come and it fix again. So it is only in theory that the punishment was
imposed but in practical, the strict sense of the term is not applied. At the same
time, there is a law that no one should involve in such affairs. But, irrespective
of the law, if one can commit such act, the person concern is considered as the
mighty one and above the law. He is so powerful that even the law of the
community is under him. As explicated, such act might have been acclaimed in
those days, but we can say that it cannot fall within the purview of morality.

Pre-Marital Sex

There are several forms of marriages.174 We can see it in very brief points.

1. Khaamthan (marriage by Engagement). In this form of marriage, apart
   from the formalities of engagement. The partners are said to be virgins.
   This form is most honoured and favoured by the community.

2. Saam tuanmei (Elopement). People follow this form under several
   reasons like disagreement from the parent's sides, fear of being

174 Gangmumei Kamei: A History of Zeliangrong Nagas, From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu,
engaged to someone other than their lover, social restriction imposed on the relation, etc.


4. *Nou Mhanmei* (Marriage by servitude at matri-local residence).

5. *Chami* (Marriage by defray debt).


Since the form of marriage was not discussed in the main chapter, it is highlighted in a very brief manner because the next criticism has something to do with the marriage as well. As mentioned, the first form of marriage is the most ideal form, but at the same time young people were encouraged to have their lovers or say have a sexual relation at the same time. As a matter of fact, they were encouraged to avoid being harassed by *Zaobuangpu* on their way to the land of dead. But at the same time we can see the inconsistency in their moral concept. Even with regard to the notion of *Zaobuangpu*, we can argue that it might have been concocted by someone for his personal gain and in due course of time it became a kind of belief to them. Another point we can say is that, in a society where pre-marital sex is encouraged, the morality will be very low and even early marriage will prevail. So from a biological point of view, even a child cannot be healthy.

**Feasts of merit**

According to them, Feasts of merit is something which is thrown by someone who has a successful harvest in terms of paddy and also wealth. But if we look closely to the whole process of ceremony, we will see that instead of a whole lot acclaim of its achievement the spin-off of it seems to run deep all throughout the affairs of the community. A single family bears all the expenditures of the feast. All the accumulated wealth, which is gathered through the sweat of one's own brow, is to be blown away to the promised sweet memory of the people. Well, the whole villagers are engaged and responsible that the feast goes well. All in the name of one single family to be
cherished by them as the one who has managed to host such a feast, they give up their work and surrender themselves for the service.

Fine, there are elements of giving support, co-operation, and willingness to serve his fellow men. It is even said that there are some families who do not get to eat meat for days and months also get to dine on such occasion. Looking from another angle, we may say that the wish and desire to host such feast might have been the driving force to work hard. But, what about their personal work, family and other responsibilities. Another point worth noting is that, when such person dies, the whole villagers would dine with all that is left behind by the deceased. So when we look at the essence of such feast, or try to make sense out of it, what we can see is only the surface level of its glamour and lavish kind of indulgence in merry making and eating. By saying this we are not neglecting the religious aspect involved in it. How authentic or realistic that aspect could be but from a practical point of view, we can say that such a feast is just a waste of wealth and time which could have been utilized in more productive and meaningful ways rather than just pushing it down to the stomach for the glory of the one who has hosted.

Now, it appears to us that the whole name, fame, status and a promising life in the land of dead would tumble and crumble to nothingness. To put it bluntly and mercilessly, we can say that all their toils and labours go in vain. If such a feast would redeem the whole community, we may say that it is worth the pain and the labour but sadly it is not so.

**Sacrifices**

In any ceremony, sacrifices are offered to different types of gods, depending upon the occasion, ranging from a piece of ginger to as big as mithun (Buffalo). There are many ceremonies that were practised by the Zelangrong. In every ceremony one or the other item is used as a sacrifice. It would not be possible for us to know when and why this practice came in to existence within this community. Even though we could not trace back the origin, it may be possible for us to know why they had to offer sacrifices. It is
said that even for a simple fever or headache people would go to a priest with sacrificial item for a ceremony. It might be mentioned that there is no hard and fast rule that sacrifice for such and such has to be this or that. How much or how little depends on the part of the individuals who approach the priest for sacrifice. In theory it was like that but they say (Example: in sickness) by offering a chick-let if the sickness is not cured they would offer a full grown rooster and so on. As a matter of fact there is no limit. So from the economic point of view, these sacrifices must have cost a lot. One very simple consequence of such practices is that they believe in it so they invested so much but at the same time there is no guarantee that the sickness would be cured but at times they are left with empty-handed. To be more practical and logical, instead of going to a priest for a ceremony relying on medicine looks more rational than blindly offering sacrifices.

From another perspective we can say that it must be due to this kind of offerings and sacrifices that their religion were discarded so easily by them. It may be mentioned that there are still people who profess themselves as following the traditional form of religion (Tingkao Raguang and Heraka). These two traditional forms of religion are said to have reduced the major kind of sacrifices and some are banned. The reasons that they give is that people cannot afford and this could be one reason why they remain poor. Looking at such kind of sudden changes or shifts from once a revered kind of practices, even the authenticity of their religion stand at stake.

We have tried to explicate the similar features, differences, and point out the weakness and the criticisms of both the views. Now let us try to sort out the distinctive nature of their presentation and the norms respectively and try to blend them to see if they could withstand the others' views (Particularly to those who contend life to be meaningless).

The approach of Aristotle is, using the modern terminology, virtue ethics based. The notion of virtue runs through the whole books of *Nicomachean Ethics*. If man lives virtuously man will have a happy life. He has explicated about what virtue is, with what it is concern, and how they are concern with
virtue. He discussed about the mundane social activities whereby the individual as a moral agent would encounter with his/her counterpart without resorting to any form of extremity. He contends that a moral being with all the potentials to discern the pros and cons of a particular situation would not act against his will. He is guided by his reason to undertake a decision that would contribute to the welfare not only of the agent but to the agent's community as a whole- where his acts are executed, valued and reflected. He stresses on how an agent, living in a society, could manage the social interaction in such a way that both the agent as an individual and the society as a whole would live a happy life. To give a final analysis of his view, in the later part of his discussions, he brings in the presumed notion of god and asks the agent to emulate in the like of god in the form of contemplation. If man could (which he is positive) involve in this activity -guided by reason- the extent of happiness reaches its acme-eudaimonia.

Putting together, then, his notion of goal-directed, teleological striving as the basis for all life, the notion of happiness (*eudaimonia*), and of the excellence of human life (*arete*) linked to a distinctively human function (*ergon*), Aristotle can offer as his fundamental moral principle the following words.

If we take the proper function of man to be a certain kind of life, and if this kind of life is an activity of soul and consists in actions performed in conjunction with the rational element, and if a man of high standards is he who performs these actions well and properly, and if a function is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the excellence appropriate to it; we reach the conclusion that the good of man is an activity of soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete.\(^{175}\)

The approach of the Zeliangrong, with regard to meaning of life, encompasses the whole perspective of the nature of man from birth to dead and after. The qualities of virtuous man, which we have discussed, emerge as determining factors besides being favoured by fortune-achievement. The

\(^{175}\) *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a
whole spans of life’s activities are equally important to them. So, only if one live in the described life pattern the ‘meaningfulness’ of life can be ascribed to it. This kind of description may be tempted to the reader to think that, apart from such life pattern, life would be devoid of meaning. The logical implication of such conditional statement may give us that life out of that pattern entails as meaningless. Though it looks contradictory from a logical point of view, the question that stands crucial and concern in this context is that, we are not asking whether life has meaning or not, but rather which pattern of life is meaningful. So, here the question of contradiction does not arise. The Zeliangrong do not profess life to be meaningless under whatsoever terms.

In the initial part of our discussions, we have already stated that meaning of life in this pursuit is taken in the sense of a ‘purpose of life’. We have raised several related questions which people commonly asked on the subject matter. In the discussions about Aristotle and the Zeliangrong, we have tried to explain their views in relation to the title of this work. We have also delved on what others had to say about their (Aristotle and the Zeliangrong) views, and how their views stand as a challenge to some of the popular views concerning the title and the means tending as to how the end could be achieved. Now we can say that, keeping the criticisms for a while, the means to pursue the end are different in nature, though some similarities cannot be denied—virtues, but the ultimate end amounts to the same—happiness.

We have two ideologies that approach the notion of meaning of life from the perspective of the nature of men but employed two different processes to reach the same destiny. One contrasting phenomena between the two which one cannot neglect is the boundary and extent of the concept. Though Aristotle brings in the notion of god within the framework of his argument, he did not concede or endorse to ‘afterlife’ in explicating the notion of the meaning of life. Whereas the Zeliangrong, rely fervently to the ‘afterlife’ in the quest of the meaning of life. The determining factors in Aristotle view is more on how we relate to this world but the Zeliangrong go beyond the realm of human experiences.
The two views admit the transcendent and metaphysical elements, which some of the scholars supposed the claims (meaning) to depend on it. And, it is this dependency, which the other scholars out rightly objected. Now we would try to blend both the views to form the basis of our contention. The determining factors in both the camps stress equal importance on virtue, agent’s active participation, community’s interest base, and teleological in nature. Together with all these Aristotle would say contemplate where your appetites and desires are under the perfect control of reason and you will be happy. For the Zeliangrong along with those, external goods and long life and natural dead would give you happy life.

The two views are inclusive, holistic and optimistic in nature. The room is open for everyone. It encompasses the whole spheres of human conduct and the belief systems. What they espouse is not something impossible for a mankind. There is an implicit underlying principle which leaves room for even those who claim that there is no pre-designed purpose by external entity/ies of life. If we follow strictly to such kind of claims and try to find the locus in the two views under consideration, we must admit that, it would fall under the secondary level of meaning- but not meaningless. Now the blended and synthesized framework, if it could be followed, to say that ‘life is not devoid of meaning’ becomes meaningful.