CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION
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The concluding chapter is a review of what has been put studied in the preceding chapters. The first chapter concerns with the introduction of the whole work in a very brief manner. Systematic and philosophical exposition of their culture and religion is the first and foremost requirement for any comprehensive understanding of any tribe/people's worldview. Exploration of some of the relevant definitions, theories and concepts for the understanding of cultures and religion from philosophical aspects unraveled many interesting elements engrained in Zeliangrong culture and religion. Culture and religion are expressions and ways of life. In one way it is the hermeneutics of life.

Philosophy of religion was at one time generally understood to mean religious philosophizing in the sense of the philosophical defense of religious convictions. As philosophy of religion need not be taken from a religious standpoint at all, the area is wide open for any exploration. The several approaches to the study of religion like anthropological, sociological, psychological, feminist and philosophical approach and so on contributes in widening one's understanding. After inquiring from Zeliangrong culture and religion of whether religion and culture should be understood from a pluralistic point of view or whether we can see a common root in all or in any religion or culture is unique and sui generis that it will have to be understood from its own context as it is held by the relativist, it is found that a water-tight compartment type of rigid study does not hold good. Rather, a broad, accommodative and open type of study is required. Rigid dogmatic study cannot be applied. So, the finding and contribution towards the area of religious and cultural study, is that it shows the needs for a new technique of study which is neither absolutism nor relativism. Trying to find and give conclusion for the common origin of culture and religion is a big issue. Because many different cultures and religions of the world differ in great
details if we dig into the in-depth. However, it is understood in terms of family resemblance (burrowing the term from Wittgenstein) otherwise a thing cannot be called a culture or religion.

The second chapter concerns with delving in to some of the definitions, conceptions and approaches for the understanding of culture. Culture in its broadest sense is that which is socially rather than genetically transmitted.\textsuperscript{213} It is that which children learn by virtue of their being brought up in one group rather than another, and, in its totality, it is that which distinguishes one human group from another. According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "culture" came to mean a general state or habit of the mind, with close relations to the idea of human perfection. It also came to mean a general state of intellectual and moral development in society as a whole. Thirdly, it came to mean the general body of the arts and intellectual work. Fourthly, it came to mean the whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual, of a given society.\textsuperscript{214} This complex development represents an attempt to think in new ways about man's social, moral, and intellectual life at a time of profound and many-sided change. In one important respect, reviving in stressing importance to culture was a part of a general reaction against the mechanistic philosophy and against what were regarded as its social consequences in the merging industrial civilization. Culture in a broader sense consists of ideas, literature, language, customs, beliefs, taboos, codes, tools, techniques, institutions, work of art, music, dances, religious rituals, ceremonies and other related components covering almost all aspects of the human life leaving behind literally nothing. In a narrow sense, culture is refinement in general and refinement of values in particular. This sense of culture is more humanistic and we are more concerned about.

Delving into the concept alone is not sufficient for any comprehensive understanding. Therefore, it necessitates critical evaluation looking into the

varieties of Critical Discourse about Culture from a historical and conceptual overview like the following:

i. The Liberal Humanism of the Enlightenment Era,
ii. The Romantic Reaction Against the Enlightenment: Hermeneutics,
iii. Demystifying Romantic Attitudes: Materialist Critique,
iv. From Society to Psyche: The New "Science" of Psychoanalysis,
v. Semiological and Structural Critique: The New Science of Signs in Society,
vi. Cultural Critique Between the World Wars: The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory,
vii. New Attacks on Liberal Humanism: Poststructuralist and Postmodernist Critiques,
h. Cultural Studies: Contemporary Anglo-American Cultural Critique.

Like continental poststructuralism, cultural studies does not refer to a single doctrinal position but to a more loosely related set of attitudes and approaches toward cultural criticism.

The third chapter attempts at defining religion from philosophical perspective though it is not an easy task because for most people, beliefs in God and in afterlife are the essential ingredients of religion because these are prominent elements in the many major religions of the world. But if we include these in a definition of religion, we shall find ourselves committed to excluding many primitive and some advanced religions like Buddhism, for instance. There is neither a personal god nor personal immortality in Buddhism. Gerald L. Berry is of the opinion that religion is found in the field of the supernormal and may be defined as a link between the finite and the infinite or as a grasping by man toward something beyond himself which gives him a reason for being. The crisis which early man had to face were the basic crisis of life-birth, puberty, marriage, hunger, sickness, pestilence, harvest, war, and
death- and around these crisis his religion was built. The philosophical investigation of the nature and grounds of religious beliefs is one of the oldest and most persistent areas of philosophical endeavor. The classic problems in the philosophy of religion center on the grounds for belief in God, the immortality of the soul, the nature of miracles, and the problem of evil, origin of life, man, world, including eschatology, sin and suffering, efficacy of prayer, salvation, myth and ritual, relation between religion and morality, between science and religion etc. Looking from hermeneutic aspects, the primitive religion and religion unveils so many interesting aspects and also makes their practices and thinking quite reasonable making into a meaningful whole.

All the major religions of the world hold religion to be the path or way of divinity. The first and foremost important part of the religion is metaphysics. Every religion has its own metaphysics. Religion unites man with divinity. Religion promises man to provide him something divine, something higher, something which man does not possess, something which man needs. It deals with righteousness of action and issues moral code of conduct. Religion also deals with divinity which is understood to be beyond the realm of general human understanding or intellectual knowledge. So, generally religious knowledge of divinity is based on religious experiences which are of the mystic characteristics. In this way, it may be said that religion is the way to lead a life which goes towards divinity as its goal. This spirit of religion is found in almost all the major religions of the world not leaving out Zeliangrong religion. Many may wish to call it a primitive religion. Primitive religion do contains all these features of religion and they are no less inferior to many popular major religions of the world in great way. Therefore, it is like a Wittgenstein's notion family resemblance yet, it does not mean equating all the religion but finding out the essential elements.


the Numinous (Otto), 5. Totemism (W. Robertson Smith, F.B. Jevons), 6. Manaism (Bishop Codrington), 7. Magic and Religion (Jevons and James Frazer), do help us to understand religion better.

The fourth chapter exposed some areas of Zeliangrong culture and religion which are of philosophical interest such as: Clan System, Absence of Caste System, Pronouncement of Judgment or Conflict Resolution, Democratic form of Government or polity of the Zeliangrong people, Inheritance, Marriage System, Adultery (Nou Soumei), Bride Price (Maan), Widow’s price (Maiguang maan), Bone price, Dormitory System (Morung), Head hunting, Festivals, Songs and Dances are connected with ritual, festivals or imitating nature and wild life and so on, Feasts of Merit, Construction of Individual House (Kaisu kadaimei), Joint Family (Inkouh kai), Position of Women, Costumes, Dress and Ornaments and other laws like Theft, Murder, Practice of Black Magic/Witchcraft etc. calls for further deeper study and analysis. This cultural system helps in the smooth running of the society. Though, that is not the lone aspect of their culture. Religious belief has great impact on their cultural lives’ practices. These are well of knowledge in which many will be able to dig for studies from different disciplines as well.

In the religion section, the following topics are studied to understand the concept of Zeliangrong Religion: main features of Zeliangrong religion, Creation Myth of The Zeliangrong Tribe; Creation of The Earth, Creation of Man Polytheism, No Animism, The Concept of Single Supreme God, Malevolent Spirit (Imbiuh Ra/Imbiuh Chagaimei) Benevolent Spirit (Ra Gai,); Tutelary Spirit (Bambu Ra), Stone Fetish (Asuang or Nsuang Ra), Divine Teachers, No Worship of Nature, Presiding Deities of Villages, No direct Ancestor Worship, Forms of Worship, other categories of worship, Rites and Ceremonies, Differences between Supreme God and Lesser Gods, Concept of God, Concept of Soul, Beliefs in Life After Dead and Land of the Dead, Concept of Sin, Concept of Heaven, No Concept of Hell, Code of Social and Moral Conduct, Genna or Neihmeih, Taboo or Nuhmei, How the God or gods are addressed at Ceremonies,
Agency of Religion, Priests (Muh), Shamanism, Festivals, Priests and Priestess, Rites, Rituals and Sacrifices including ceremonial rites and rituals, etc., shows that tribal religion are not inferior to any other so-called developed major religions of the work. It includes all the departmental activities of life though at times, some superstitious elements and ills are also not absent.

The critical analysis of the Zeliangrong culture and religion forms the fifth chapter which greatly helps in discovering the contributions and limitations of Zeliangrong culture and religion though the search doesn’t limit to contribution and limitations alone but also trying to understand as it is. Sub-topics or sub-headings include: Concept and Nature of God, Nature of Man, The Problem of Evil and how do they understand the presence of evil in this world in the light of their religion, Morality and Religion, Relation between Science and Religion, Immortality of the Soul, Efficacy of Prayer, Religious experience, Separation of Science and Religion, Comparison of the concept of God with reference to some major religions of the world, Equality and Democracy, Inheritance, Is Zeliangrong Culture Separable or inseparable from Religion?, Punishment, Conflict Resolution, Marriage System, Adultery (Nou Soumei), Bride Price, Widow’s Price, Widow’s Price, Dormitory System, Head Hunting, Festivals, Songs and Dance, Rites and Sign associated with burning the cleared forest, Feasts of Merits, Construction of Individual House, Joint Family, Position of Women, Costumes Dress and Ornaments, Theft, Murder, Practice of Black Magic/Witchcraft.

After considering the many sidedness aspect of Zeliangrong religion and culture it is hard to say that religion exist for social cohesion alone as many socialist would held. It is also not possible to say that religion arouse out of human psyche for wish-fulfillment for in their religion, religious rites, rituals were not practice simply out of selfish motives for material gain or simply because of the wish to go on living forever. For, in their belief whether good or bad, after dead all are going to the same world and live in the land of the death. Their religious practice is neither to free them from past karma or
for liberation because they have no concept of karma system in the strict sense of the term even if they believe that good man will always be rewarded while bad man will or sinners will have negative reward in this life or in the next life in the land of the dead. Marxist's ideas too don't go well with this religion because in this society, there is not much of economic disparity among this people. No one is landless and no one is extremely rich. There is no class distinction between the rich and the poor but the strong kinship system is applied to keep up love and respect amongst the various clans as marriage institution is based strongly on inter-clan and not intra clan. Intra clan marriage is a taboo from socio-religious point of view of the Zeliangrong tribe. There is no doubt that the people highly regard God as a morally perfect being who judge each one with his just scale. Then a question may be asked whether religion exist to keep up man's morality which is quite distinct from any other animal. But a counter question may be raised here again like "what is being so moral in offering annual offerings to the Supreme God acknowledging his supremacy as the Zeliangrong people use to do?" Here not all religious acts seem to fit into a moral category alone. Morality is just one aspect of religion. Their attitude towards religious practice is not always with the motive to gain something all the time. Religion is much beyond all these aspects. It is not being practiced for gain alone. It is expressed acknowledging the awesome supremacy of the Supreme God above everything. Therefore, it is concluded that religion is a spontaneous way of life of the people springing forth from within and without. Culture too is an expressions intellectual, social, moral aspect greatly influenced by religion.

Concept 'Chakhuang' is a term which is extremely difficult to directly translate into other languages with losing some of its essence but it may be understood in terms of kind gesture, modesty, politeness, gentleness, selflessness, reticence, thoughtfulness, quiet temperament, helpfulness, respectful behaviour, suffering oneself but not expressing it to others, reticence, not shirking from duty, considering for the gain of others even at one's own lost, letting others have the first or better share without thinking for oneself, not liking to trouble others, not responding rudely to others especially.
to people who are older to us, and much more of altruistic behaviour comes within this one concept *Chakhuang*. This is one of the most important elements of Zeliangrong cultural tradition. One who does not follow this will be look upon as socially uncouth and mannerless person or one who have no sense of regards for others. Without the application of *chakhuang*, the whole cultural traditional application system is unthinkable and it will not be able to operate instead the society will face chaotic atmosphere. This is one of the most important things for a Zeliangrong tribal culture for its sustenance.

Zeliangrong cosmogonic myth fits in a myth of creation by a Supreme Being as the nucleus of all creation is centred on the Supreme Being’s creation though it may lack a philosophical schema yet it is not devoid of philosophical significance. It is still functioning among this people. It gives a sense of direction showing from where the earth or the universe and all living beings originated and where the creations are heading to once they show disrespect to the natural creation or the environment around. The people find it hard to simply reduce it to psychological phenomena of a kind of norms imparted by the grandmothers to the grandchildren which deeply get imprinted in their mind. This provides them the knowledge of God, human being and all beings and also the relation they have with the surrounding or the universe. God is existent from eternity and created the universe and everything in it. He is all wise, self-existent, uncreated but a creative being while humans and other creatures are the created limited beings. The earth is created for man and animals to live. It is with a purpose. The myth also says that the earth was round and the King Earthworm was coiling itself and chasing after its own tail ceaselessly. In modern vocabulary this could mean the cosmic power of the Creator God in the rotation of the earth. The Zeliangrong even believed that the gods lived very close to them and taught them so many things: songs, dance, handicraft, even combination of colours while making clothes, how to prepare foods and drink, make friends with them and taught so many things. It could be possible that God or gods must have taught them few things about the earth and its origin and about mankind. Man is taken to be composed of both matter (clay) and breathe of God (soul/spirit).
The Zeliangrong religion believes that when man dies, the clayey body returns to the clay or dust and the soul (bu or bumang) returns to God.

The Zeliangrong creation myth reflects their belief in supernatural being, and his work. The creation is to be revered or venerated as it is God's creation and not originated from its own like what the agnostic purely mechanistic physical scientist thought.

Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief: it safeguards and enforces morality. Many rites, rituals, ceremonies are also closely reflected in their mythical beliefs. There is a strong element of guidance which is functional in one's culture according to one's mythical belief.

The structural functionalism is likely to go better with the study of tribal culture. So we can see few features about it, apply it to tribal culture and analyze it to see how it works. Structural functionalism is a sociological paradigm which addresses what social functions various elements of the social system perform in regard to the entire system. Social structures are stressed and placed at the center of analysis, and social functions are deduced from these structures. Functionalism is most often associated with sociology and socio-cultural anthropology. A 'functionalist' approach, taken from Durkheim meant that it was now possible to look at the rituals, taboos, and mores of primitive societies without trying seeing them judgmentally. Instead it was possible to look at such institutions from the standpoint of their functionality to those societies. Levi-Strauss realized that de Saussure's approach meant that it was possible to go further than Durkheim's functionalism. Not just language, but culture itself could be looked upon as a code of meaning in de Saussure's sense. The functionalist approach meant isolating particular institutions and trying to find parallels between those and modern institutions. But this meant that other cultures were still seen simply as version of our own.

216 S.S. Chib, Castes, Tribes and Culture of India, North-Eastern India, vol. 8 Ess Esss Publication, New Delhi 1984, pp. 102-103
Herbert Spencer, a British sociologist, was in many ways the first true sociological functionalist\textsuperscript{217}. Spencer recognized three functional needs or requisites that produced selection pressures: regulatory, operative (production), and distributive. He argued that all societies needed to solve problems of control and coordination, production of goods, services, and ideas, and finally, find ways to distribute these resources. Initially, in tribal societies, all three of these needs are inseparable, and the kinship system is the dominant structure satisfying them. \textsuperscript{218} As many scholars have noted, all institutions were subsumed under kinship organization. \textsuperscript{219} However, with increasing population, both in terms of sheer numbers and density, problems emerged in regards to feeding individuals, creating new forms of organization (i.e., the emergent division of labor), coordinating and controlling various differentiated social units, and developing systems of resource distribution. The solution, as Spencer sees it, would be to differentiate structures to fulfill more specialized functions. Thus, a chief or "big man" emerges, followed soon by a group of lieutenants, and later kings and administrators. In fact, while Durkheim is widely considered the most important functionalist of the positivist theorists, it is well-known that much of his analysis was culled from reading Spencer's work; especially his Principles of Sociology.

Functionalism emphasizes the central role that agreement (consensus) between members of a society on morals plays in maintaining social order. This moral consensus creates an equilibrium, the normal state of society. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time.

Durkheim proposed that most stateless "primitive" societies that lack strong centralized institutions are based on an association of such corporate descent groups. Structural-functionalism also took on Malinowski's argument

that the basic building block of society is the nuclear family, and that clans are therefore an outgrowth of families, not vice versa.

The central concern of structural-functionalism was a continuation of the Durkheimian task of explaining the apparent stability and internal cohesion needed by societies to endure over time. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs, that function like organisms, with their various parts (social institutions) serving together. Values provide general guidelines for behavior in terms of roles and norms. These institutions of society such as the family, religion, the economy, the educational and political systems, are major aspects of the social structure. Institutions are made up of interconnected roles or inter-related norms. For example, inter-connected roles in the institution of the family are of wife, mother, husband, father, son, brother, sister and daughter. The theory is based around a number of key concepts. First, society is viewed as a system, a collection of interdependent parts, with a tendency toward equilibrium. Second, there are functional requirements that must be met in a society for its survival (such as reproduction of the population). Third, phenomena are seen to exist because they serve a function.^^°

Talcott Parsons was heavily influenced by Durkheim and Max Weber, synthesizing much of their work into his theory. Parsons' developed an action-theory based on system-theoretical concept and on the methodological principle of voluntary action. He stated that "the social system is made up of the actions of individuals".^^¹ His starting point was the interaction between two individuals. Those individuals were faced with a variety of choices about how they might act. However, those choices are influenced and

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Parsons determined that each individual has expectations of the other's action and reaction to their own behaviour, and that these expectations would be "derived" from the accepted norms and values of the society which they inhabit.

Parsons then developed the idea of roles into collectivities of roles that complemented each other in fulfilling functions for society. Some of the roles are bound up in institutions and social structures, such as economic, educational, legal, and even gender structures. These structures are functional in the sense they assist society to operate and fulfill its functional needs so that the society runs smoothly. A society where there is no conflict, where everyone knows what is expected of them, and where these expectations are constantly being met, is in a perfect state of equilibrium. Perfect socialization occurs when these norms and values are completely internalized, that is they become part of the individual's personality.

Parsons states, "this point, it should be made clear, is independent of the sense in which individual is concretely autonomous or creative rather than 'passive' or 'conforming', for individuality and creativity, are to a considerable extent, phenomena of the institutionalization of expectations", that is they are culturally constructed characteristics. Socialization is supported by the positive and negative sanctioning of role behaviours which do or do not meet these expectations. A punishment could be informal, such as a snigger or gossip, or more formalized through institutions such as prisons and mental institutions. If these two processes were perfect then society would become static and unchanging, and in reality this is unlikely to occur for long.

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223 Craib, I., Modern Social Theory: From Parsons to Habermas, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992 p.40
The extent of god's functionality deserves our close attention. Even after man has obtained a deeper insight into the regularity of nature by way of knowledge of its laws, the twilight of the god(s) does not appear. For man's helplessness continues; and, along with it, his longing for a protecting father. Thus Freud thinks the need for protection and longing for a father are identical. Hence, his god(s) are assigned with it, his longing for a father are identical. Hence his gods are assigned with the function not only of overcoming for man the terrorism of nature but also of reconciling him with the inevitable fate and death, and above all, of compensating in future for the present suffering and privation, which necessarily ensure from the need for exertion and for sacrificing his instinctual life in society. Therefore, even when nature gods disappear with the advent of science and technology, the moral gods continue to rule over human consciousness. Indeed, the latter provide man with a higher purpose in life; life itself is stretched beyond its terrestrial dimensions; (the earthly) life and death are now seen only as phases of an ongoing project in the external divine scheme. In spite of all these explanations given by him, Freud concludes his study of religion on a note of optimism. He envisages the scientific and the critical spirit of enquiry to dissolve soon religions everywhere. But, unlike Marx, he does not advocate the abolition of religion by force. For this, he fears, maybe counterproductive, as the history of religious persecutions bears witness to. Moreover, to the uneducated and the oppressed, religion has been a source of morality. Hence, without providing them with a critical and a scientific source of morality, their only moral prop must not be pulled down. In the process what is required of people is an education of reality. But after studying Zeliangrong culture and religion, this kind of Freud's narrowing down of religion is not applicable because it is not for moral reason alone that there is culture and religion among the people. Morality is just a small part of religion.

From the critical analysis, it is found that their culture and religion though it had been a way of life and had contributed so much for the proper

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functioning of social, political and religious life, yet, there are so many flaws both from theoretical and practical point of view as well as inexplicable element. It is also found that if the citizen or member of the community or society does not respect and keep the rules, laws, practices and tradition, then the whole system will collapse. This is an important feature of a Structural-functionalism theory (Talcott Parson, Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe Brown, Durkheim, Weber, Herbert Spencer and so on). It has more to do with the sense of civic, etiquette, tradition, morality, and responsibility toward one another and respect for the people and the law and so many of their cultural practices cannot be coerced. If few members disrespect it, then the whole society will be in a chaotic state. Their culture and religion greatly depend on how the people adhere to it. Many of their religious practices are quite reasonable but some are based on superstitions. It is obvious that their religious and cultural practices sometimes were propounded by few people so as to guide people and do things on time and not sanctioned by god or religious priests or prophet. As for instance, soon after the priests throw away the hoe or implements signifying tools for planting or sowing, no one is supposed to sow anything again or else they believe they will get hurt or wounded while working. This is purely a superstition and human make-up obligation so that people will do things on time like sowing seeds in the field in olden days. People are now planting and sowing different varieties of plants and by supplying the essentials for the plant so that people are getting to eat fresh things the year round in season and in out of season without getting hurt or wounded.

The Zeliangrong people whose religion and culture dies hard even if they encounter many religions and ethnic group. Their culture and religion are closely intertwined with religion and even many activities cannot proceed without religious initiation. Religion has great impact on their culture. Their cultural and religious tradition is as refined as the present major religions and accepted cultural norms and values of the world. Their culture and religion are worthy of respect yet at the same time many issues remain unsolved as is with other culture and religions of the world in relation to modern empirical science.
Social scientists were occupied with the attention to enquire into the relation between religion and culture which is a fascinating enquiry. They have adopted in their study, here mostly the perspective of culture without caring much to take note of their perspective, assigned a cultural function to religion; and the function has been to them both conservative and dynamic. Religion is seen as a legitimizer of the tradition of the culture. They also acknowledge that, to some extent, religion is also a synthesizing factor of the different social elements within a culture in that way their perspective is one-sided. But after considering the many sided aspects of Zeliangrong religion and culture, it is hard to say that religion exist for social cohesion alone as many socialist would held. Many of their cultural activities originate from religious element. Cultures are not purely man-made orders. They are also founded on religious law of life. So, it is a reverse of what the social scientists held, to say nothing of their inadequacy. The study of religion is a hermeneutics of the sacred and broadly speaking, culture is an organized way of life based on a common tradition and a common environment and culture represents a spiritual community in so far as it involves common beliefs and common ways of thought. Hence it is inevitable that religion and culture should at every level mutually interpenetrate.

From the study of Zeliangrong culture and religion, it is also not possible to say that religion arouse out of human psyche for wish-fulfillment as is found in Freud's philosophy of the origin of religion. Because in their religion, religious rites, rituals were not practiced simply out of selfish motives for material gain or simply because of the wish to go on living forever or because of fear psychosis. For, in their belief whether good or bad, all are going to the same world where the dead will go and live in the land of the death. They have no doubt about the existence of the soul and life after dead is taken as the practical continuation of life as Mircea Eliade pointed out about the tribal people's belief.

Zeliangrong religious practice is neither to free them from past karma nor for liberation as is held in many Eastern religions like Hinduism, Jainism

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228 Cassian R. Agera, Religious Critic of Culture, p. xi
or Buddhism because they have no concept of karma system or belief in rebirth in the strict sense of the term even if they believe that good man will always be rewarded while bad man or sinners will have negative reward in this life or in the next life in the land of the dead. Very negligible few people believe in rebirth as is found in Hinduism but that idea must have come from the influence of Hinduism when the people were in contact with the Hindus of Assam and Manipur valley because of barter system in the market. Marxist ideas too don't go well with this religion because in this society, there is not much of economic disparity among this people. No one is landless and no one is extremely rich. There is no class distinction between the rich and the poor but the strong kinship system is applied to keep up love and respect amongst the various clans as marriage institution is based strongly on inter-clan and not intra clan. Intra-clan marriage is considered incest and so it is taken as taboo from socio-religious point of view of the Zeliangrong tribe. So, there Marxist idea of the alienation between the producer and the produced, the capitalists and the labourers which ultimately led to the idea of alienating which is also very close to the idea of Feuerbach on religion of alienating oneself into two natures; the weak and the strong, the unholy and holy projecting from imagination and epitomizing the positive aspects of oneself and calling God while the negative aspects were ascribed to man. This idea does not apply well to the Zeliangrong culture and religion. There's no doubt that the people highly regard God as a morally perfect being who judge each one with his just scale. Then a question may be asked whether religion exist to keep up man's morality which is quite distinct from any other animal. But a counter question may be raised here again "what is being so moral in offering annual offerings to the Supreme God acknowledging his supremacy as the Zeliangrong people use to do?" Here not all religious acts seem to fit into a moral category alone. Though the argument may not be as strong as what Kierkegaard holds about the teleological suspension of ethics when man goes to the religious stage of life citing the example of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. Sacrificing one's son's life is wrong from moral point of view but it is considered a higher stage of life by Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{229} when man goes to the

religious stage taking a stand in the leap of faith. Morality which is a part of human culture is just one aspect of religion. Their attitude towards religious practice is not always with the motive to gain something all the time. Religion is much beyond all these aspects. It is not being practiced for gain alone. It is expressed acknowledging the awesome supremacy of the Supreme God above everything. Therefore, it should be said that religion is a spontaneous way of life of the people springing forth from within and without influencing every aspect of life of the people in a society.

One of the things that have been puzzling the western people for centuries about the Indian culture is that religion and culture are well integrated\(^\text{230}\). When Christianity was first embraced by the Zeliangrong, their culture and religion was almost fully discarded. This could be the difference between consistently following one’s religion like Indian culture and religion and embracing another religion like the Western people or the Zeliangrong embracing Christianity. But as their religion is very close to the teaching and practices of many Judeo-Christian traditions beginning from the creation account to many issued code of conducts, it is going well again now when people begin to understand any religion better.

Olden days’ people believed in calling spade a spade and would not practice any partiality among them? It can also be questioned as from where were all those cultural practices relating to socio-politics, economics or religious practices derived its authentic authority? Why were such norms, values and etiquette considered with such reverence even if they never had in olden days an organized kind of military or army to enforce it? It is found that it is more to do with the belief that influences their everyday act of life. Ethnologists witnessed the fact that religious practices were being practiced even in the old days when there were no grain-based agriculture been developed\(^\text{231}\).

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Therefore, from all the above critical analysis it is found that their culture and religion though had been a way of life and had contributed so much for the proper functioning of social, political and religious life yet, their culture and religion is found to have so many ambiguity and irregularities as well. The types of morality they are following are sometimes confusing. One cannot vividly make out whether they are prescribing absolutism in which right is right everywhere and for all time to come or situational ethics looking into the situation and changing one's stand at times for the seemingly better results. At times, though seen reasonable yet it happen to be inconsistent in pressing towards the end. One prominent example is that chastity of both young man and young girls were thought highly off and regarded and therefore for certain rituals when choosing site for agricultural side for the whole village, young bachelors who were virgin were chosen and even in many occasion they choose only young girls who were virgin for carrying out certain religious duties. As chastity was prized high that the bride prize for the Zeliangrong girl is highest for the virgin, cheaper for the earlier married ones but when the girl after marriage is found to be barren, the husband can remarry another wife not looking into the emotion of the first wife. Then the question arises whether chastity and faithfulness is more important or fertility is more important in marriage.

It is also found that if the citizen or member of the community or society does not respect and keep the rules, laws, practices and tradition then the whole system will collapse. This is what has been opined by the structural functionalists like Talcott Parsons, Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe Brown, Max Weber, Durkheim and likeminded thinkers. It has more to do with the sense of civic, etiquette, tradition, morality, and responsibility toward one another and respect for the people and the law and so many of their cultural practices cannot be coerced. Structural-functionalism emphasizes the central role that agreement (consensus) between members of a society on morals plays in maintaining social order. This moral consensus creates equilibrium, the normal state of society. If few members disrespect it then the whole society will be in a chaotic state. Their culture and religion greatly depend on how the people who follow it. Many of their religious practices are quite reasonable but
some are based on superstitions. It will be appropriate to say that some of their beliefs or religious and cultural practices sometimes were propounded by few people so as to guide people and do things on time and not truly sanctioned by god or religious priests or prophet but were the collective build up system and practices. As for instance like, soon after the priests throw away the hoe (phu) or implements signifying tools for planting or sowing no is supposed to sow anything again or else they believe they will get hurt or wounded while working. This is purely a superstition and human make-up obligation so that people will do things on time like sowing in the field. In modern time, people are now planting and sowing different varieties of plants by supplying the essentials for the plant so that people get to eat fresh things the year round in season and in out of season. Their culture and religion are closely intertwined and even many normal activities could not proceed without religious initiation.

We find that almost all the festivals are marked with association of some important events, occasions, offering sacrifices, oblations, prayer, performances of rites, rituals and taking of omens. They are not simply celebrated for entertainment and recreation but with important even and deep meanings. Each and every activity is preceded by religious act.

Besides the regular festivals, during the off seasons, the Zeliangrong organize various festivals occasionally, depending on the year's plentiful harvest. The important festivals of them are Merimei, Matuimei, Malaanmei and Banruhmei.\textsuperscript{232} So far many people are speaking only about the positive aspect of Malaanmei but we can have a critical analysis and find out the negative points too. This kind of status show creates a platform for people who want to show off their riches. It is obvious that a distinction between the poor and the rich children is made public. It may encourage self-indulgence as well when one is encouraged to simply eat, drink and sleep doing nothing creative especially for longer times like three to six months. We also find a gender bias again here when only sons are made to rest and refresh leaving

\textsuperscript{232} Norbert Disinang Kamei (ed.), \textit{From the Shadows to Light}, Imphal: North-East India Zeliangrong Festival-Cum-Seminar Publication, 1995. p.96-100
aside the daughters of the same parents. Olden day’s people think that fatness or putting of heavy weight is a sign of good health but with the present day’s scientific knowledge, we may say they are at higher health risk.

The Zeliangrong practices are so much engrained with religious element. They also observe too many gennas. It means not allowing the whole people of the village that ultimately slowed down the pace of development to a very great extent.

It is observed that there were too many taboos which we find unnecessary in modern context. It unnecessarily gives extra trouble to the people. Observance of taboo unnecessarily suppresses people’s freedom to work, move around, enjoyment, relaxation. It did involve a lot of superstitious belief. But as taboo is essentially bound up with religious belief, people dread to go against it. They believe that violation of taboos will bring undesirable consequences to the whole community. I that way, instead of culture giving shape to religion (for social cohesion), it is their religious belief going the other way round, giving shape to their cultural practices.

Some difficulties are associated with shamanism because since they believe in the existence and workings of spirits, how do they clearly know the causes of the sickness or spirits causing sicknesses to the individual. At times, it is possible that malevolent spirit may also communicate lies to the shaman or priest. Then, it becomes extremely dangerous to follow such guidance.

Customs of men often turn out to be the expression of their beliefs about gods(Eliade in Myth and Reality) It is clear from the study of Zeliangrong culture and religion that religion comes first and then morality or cultural values and practices. This culture is developed from religion. Religion always comes first and then culture follows or evolves or develops out of it. Many socio-anthropologists or philosophical anthropologists are of the opinion that man coming in contact with the forces of nature superior to human control began to develop myths attempting to explain things. But from Zeliangrong culture and religion it is found that myth is not seen as man’s
attempt rather it is understood in terms of something unknowable by reasoning capacity alone. It is given to man by god through the divine communication like priests, prophets or religious experience or encounter. In that way, scholars like Eliade and Otto believe that myth is to be understood as a religious phenomena and cannot fully, or cannot at, be explained in terms of non-religious categories (e.g., literary).

Right from the simplest like communication, agricultural practices, hunting, festivals, village governance system, conflict resolution, warfare, code of conduct in society to the most complex cultural practices and custom, value system and almost everything is preceded by religious belief practice first. So, religion is not man's construct to give structure and function to society as is highly held by the structural-functionalists like Talcott Parsons, Malinowski, Durkheim, Max Weber, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and likeminded thinkers, rather, it is their religion that give shape to their mindset. However, one major problem that we cannot overlook here is unlike full-fledged prophetic religion in which written Scripture speaks of divine authority and sanction because scripture is taken to be the inspired word of God which has the same theme down through the ages. Even the creation account, man's place in the universe, code of conduct, man's relation to God and other beings and all about the future life are all well-written but when it comes to primitive tribal religion like Zeliangrong religion, it is hard to clearly express that all their religious practices are sanctioned by divine authority. Though they claim to have prophets, which received divine messages yet it is not clearly given which prophet, priest or individual receives which account, sanction, command, guidance and at what time and where in a clear cut specific acceptable form. So, no matter how well developed philosophically and theologically and how extensively their religion covers almost every area of life or influence was to their every department of life, yet the authentic root base of their religion is not clear and strong. As the historicity of its foundation is not that sound, when stronger forces of other religion with strong historical foundation comes in contact it is obvious that they will not be able to withstand and so will embrace which is more sound and more convincing.
The Zeliangrong religious answer to the presence of the appalling depth of human suffering like natural evil, moral and injustice is due to sin (nuan) or by the works of the devil or evil spirit. But it gives no strong reason for the sufferings of other beings like animals. The Jains, Buddhists and Hindus gave reason for suffering of both man and lower animals or animals with lesser sense organs like the bee, ants, earthworm etc., basing on the karmas of oneself entangling the chain of birth and rebirth cycle. If these two are the only reasons for suffering then there is nothing good about suffering. And it is not fair to give such a judgment alone. Then the Epicurean question posed in the form of dilemma still holds for this religion too. It denies the existence of all loving and all powerful God. Christianity too goes beyond these two reasons (sins and malicious work of the devil) given by the Zeliangrong religion. Looking at the untold sufferings of Job, the faithful man of God, it was for the testing of his faithfulness to God that he suffers. And Christianity brings out the positive aspect of sufferings in many ways. Many great Biblical heroes suffered unspeakable sufferings not sparing Jesus Christ, the son of God. Endurance of sufferings for others' sake is a virtue.

Clan and kinship system is the basis and matrix of the Zeliangrong identity. It helps in organizing the society. This is a wonderful way in which each and every member of the society is a relative of everyone and no one is left out when one follows the clan system accordingly in all works of life. As there are two major clans and their marriage system is exogamy or inter-clan marriage, one belongs to one particular clan (father's clan for patrilineal society) and the other clan is one's mother clan that everyone is a relative in one way or the other. Besides the beautiful sights, there are ugly sights as well. Clan transcends the villages. Inter clan rivalry was also there at times which was responsible for the slow growth of the tribal community. Clan is still a strong factor and kinship is the basis of the Zeliangrong identity. This system too have demerits when one goes to the extreme of identifying oneself with only one's clan that results in serious inter-clan dispute or rivalry in relation to land ownership system. Many precious lives had been lost in such a dispute.
There's an absence of caste system among the Zeliangrong as is understood in Hindu religion. There is no inherent castes or colour distinction. No one is looked down or look up in terms of occupation or material wealth. People enjoy equal status in society. Jadonnang who died in the hands of the British on false allegation said; "The White man and we are human beings. Why should we be afraid of them? All are one."\textsuperscript{233} There is no king among them. The head of the village council is elected by the people for certain tenure. It is not hereditary too. Even children born of incest or illegitimate children do find a secure place in Zeliangrong society. The child is not frowned upon but accepted in society unlike other Naga strict community and the child is generally looked after by the mother or mother's family. There is even indirect share of wealth as a social and religious obligation that the richest man of the village should share and not hoard or store for himself alone but feed the entire villagers by throwing the feast of merit. In returns he receives praise and satisfaction but his hard earned fruit of his sweat and labour is indirectly made to share.

With all these beautiful and human treatment they cannot be said to have a society of equality. No doubt, there is no caste, colour discrimination but gender discrimination is very prominent. So when half of the population of the land is discriminated, it is not a classless society.

No doubt, the court of justice (village council or Pei) pronounce fair judgment to everyone for most of the time but in critical times, when people are extremely unsatisfied or have serious disagreement, the people invoked the nature like water or animal (tiger) or even spear to be their witness. Such kind of judgment is extremely dangerous. It involves a lot of religious belief for interference in an empirical manner that the supernatural forces may really intervene for such things or not is a debatable issue. If such

\textsuperscript{233} Hiabe (ed.), *A Glimpse of the Zeliangrongs*, In Commemoration of the 19th General Conference of the Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) at Lodiram, Haflong by All Zeliangrong Students’ Union, 2001 (A section from *Jadonnang’s Concept of Naga Raj* by Prof. Gangmumei Kamei). Kohima: Kohima Printing Press p.20
procedures were given by their scripture or religious sanction then, we cannot, in a sense, question as that has to do with their scripture and religion but nowhere have we found such kind of given instructions by the gods to the Zeliangrong. These are kinds of expressions of human helplessness and wishes addressed to the supernatural forces for interference but it does not seem to be sanctioned by the supernatural forces. It could also be the case that one is more skillful than the other in throwing spear or diving and dipping in the water. Another reason could also be the case since the erring ones knows and believe that even if he can hide his error before man he cannot do so before God or the supernatural forces. So it could also be the case that because of that fear psychosis he is being afraid to dip inside the water and must be preventing by himself.

This primitive system of democratic form of government is very up-to-date and well cultured that it is not that different from modern day’s democratic form of government in which people elect their leader with the freedom of expression of opinion and choice through simple voting. The consensus opinion of the majority forms the final decision on any matter. It becomes the authority. Yet the decision of the leader or head (chairman of the village council) alone is not above the wishes and desires of the village council. But like other cultures of the world in ancient time, where women were suppressed at various level, this Zeliangrong society did not include women in the voting system or included in the decision making body. When half of the community’s population are not treated equally and are underestimated by saying ‘ntu-pang no lad de’ meaning those are only the words of women and children, it is not a truly democratic society.