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## TRIBES AND VOLUNTARISM: A CASE OF THE RONGMEI TRIBE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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### Abstract

This paper explores and describes voluntarism and processes in the context of the Rongmei Tribe. In the present situation, there evolved two forms of volunteering in society. One is expressed through the traditional institution like domestic (family) groups, religion and village councils, and the second is the modern form of voluntarism expressed through Voluntary Organisations (VO) and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). The problem arises when one defines volunteering and what activities are included and accepted under voluntarism. What is meant by voluntarism to this tribal community, and how do they perceive it? The paper studied and explored the concept of voluntarism and its process within the tribal community of Rongmei in changing context.

**Keywords:** Tribe, Rongmei, Voluntarism, Northeast, India.

### Introduction

The Northeast region of India, comprising the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim (the last to be included in the region) and Tripura, constitutes a land surface of 262,230 square kilometres with a population of 38.9 million belonging to different ethnic and cultural groups inhabits. The region is home to numerous diverse ethnic groups. It is strategically located at the frontier and shares international borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. It has seen varied kinds of violence over the past few decades. These include insurgencies in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram. In addition, there are conflicts and confrontations over land use and control and issues of language, identity formation, demographic change and minority and majoritarian relations. Alienation, misgovernance, corruption, and underdevelopment are common regional frustrations. However, the region is gifted with rich natural and mineral resources and is one of the wealthiest bio-diversities in India.

Taher (1977) noted that some of the tribes in North East India are widely spread out while others are concentrated in relatively small territories. Every North Eastern state has their distinct history. The Bodos and Karbis in Assam, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin groups of tribes in Nagaland and Manipur are included in the sub-family of Tibeto-Burmans. There are also several other tribes like the Mizos of Mizoram and the Monpas, Daflas, Apatanis and the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. There have been ethnic mixtures between the Tibeto-Burman and the Tias (Siamese) whenever they lived together in either Brahmaputra valley or Manipur Valley. The Indo-Aryans who migrated from the West to North-East India established political supremacy over the Brahmaputra valley and hinduised the tribals whenever possible, ultimately forcing the tribes to continue in the interior region of the Brahmaputra valley and the surrounding hills. The process of migration and settlement were also a part of the struggle for economic and social survival and political domination (Jusho, 2004).

Spatially, many tribal communities cut across the administrative boundaries and are found in a contiguous tract spreading over two or more states. The numerous culturally or politically autonomous tribal groups live in a situation of contact and communication with their respective neighbouring populations. Myths and legends of various communities and history are replete with evidence of inter-group contacts and culture exchange. The state of Manipur has different ethnic groups that form a background of unity in diversity. Some ethnic groups are the Meiteis, who inhabit mainly the valley. The Nagas and Kukis live in most of the hilly areas. Racially and linguistically, these tri-ethnos groups belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of the southern Mongoloid, though they are sub-divided into different linguistic divisions (Kabui, 1991). The Rongmei tribes are found inhabiting not only in the state of Manipur but also in different parts of North Eastern States in Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Procter (1980) argued that voluntarism has traditionally been interpreted by referencing the common-sense meaning of voluntary action. A voluntaristic theory emphasises the purposive, reasoning, and self-conscious qualities of the action of concrete individuals. The analytical theory of causal elements, in contrast to positivism and idealism, incorporated the following ontological conception of the basic nature of human action: First, action is dualistic; it involves human beings living in a world of ideas, values and goals, the normative world, and a world of realistic constraints, the conditions of action which in the structure of social action are conceived in terms of the concepts "heredity and environment." Second, these two aspects of "the great dichotomy" stand in inevitable



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opposition; action is an eternal struggle to achieve normatively valued states in the face of stubborn and resistant conditions. However, third, the tension is routinely resolved through the exertion of "effort," which is likened to energy in physics.

Scholars of medieval philosophy have argued that medieval accounts of free action shifted their emphasis during the thirteenth century. Throughout much of the Middle Ages, beginning with Au in the fifth century and continuing into the early thirteenth century, philosophers discussed human freedom under the topic of liberum arbitrium. This term, often translated as "free choice" or "free decision," refers to the power or powers which enable human beings to act freely (Mccluskey, 2001).

The study's main aim is to understand the concept of voluntarism and its process within the tribal community of Rongmei in changing context. The study's objectives are to understand the concept of voluntarism as perceived by the Tribal community and to conceptualise the changing trends of voluntarism in the Tribal community. A qualitative study approach was chosen for the study. Purposive sampling was chosen to know the concept of voluntarism and its process as perceived by the identified and selected respondents. The respondents include tribal leaders, elders, women and people working in a registered voluntary organisation presently. The study universe was in Tamenglong District, Manipur, where most of the population is dominated by the Rongmei tribe.

In this context, the study becomes essential, leading to qualitative processes of unravelling experiences and perceptions of Tribal communities concerning the meaning, the process and adaptation of local Tribal systems in changing contexts. Change in social reality is taking place at an alarming pace, and the breaking down of community systems is a condition that is observed. The study looks at the term voluntarism as perceived by the community and whether there is a changing trend in the concept of voluntarism within the fast-changing context, especially with the emergence of professional organisations like Voluntary Organisations (VO) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). It focuses on what makes individual community members volunteer and whether they expect anything from volunteering. It will also try to understand whether the community accepts the concept of voluntarism in a professional organisation and how they view/perceive the same.

### Brief Background of Rongmei Tribe

Rongmei is one of the sub-tribe within the Naga community. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of southern Mongolia and are indo-mongoloid in appearance. In geographical classification, they are the tribes from the northern-north, north-eastern zone. In linguistic classification, they belong to the Tibet-Chinese group. Occupationally they belong to the group of hunting, fishing and also cultivation. The Rongmei, which covers a compact and contiguous area, includes, even during the colonial days, the North-West Sub-division of Manipur state (now Tamenglong district of Manipur) and Sub-division of Cachar District of Assam (now paren sub-division of Nagaland State). The Rongmei belong to a cognate tribe organisation called Zeliangrong. The nomenclature 'Zeliangrong' was formed by the combination name of kindred tribes of Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei and Npuimei. This nomenclature tribes organisation came into being with the formation of the Zeliangrong Naga Council for the first time on the 15th February 1947 at Keishamthong Imphal with the objective of closer affinity and more substantial unity of Naga and for furthering the economic, socio-cultural, educational and political achievement of their tribes. Historically the Zeliangrong territory covered the whole mountain tract from the Dhaneswa river in the north to the confluence of Chin Hills of Burma in the south, from the Bhuvan Hills, eastern Cacher plains of Barak valley and Jaintia hills of eastern Meghalaya in the West, to the Koubru Laimaton range overlooking the beautiful Imphal valley to the Mao Maram hills in the east (Rongmei & Kapoor, 2005, pp. 2).

In social organisations, religious and economic activities and organisations, the Rongmei have very strong common features. The Rongmei is a patrilineal society with two major clans divided into many sub-clans. The Rongmei community lives in villages. The site of the village is selected originally on the high spurs of hills. The village was founded with strict and rigid rules of the customary laws passed on by forefathers from one generation to the next. They have a solid attachment to their village and lands, except under extraordinary circumstances, they will not think of leaving their homes. Leaving is regarded as an act of degrading themselves and their ancestors. This tribe only lived in the hill areas in the early times, but some populations had also started shifting to the plain areas. Music and dance are very popular and deeply embedded in every community member's life.

The Rongmei Nagas' social life is grounded in the family, village and morung (social organisation). The value of public social life is more substantial than individual life within the society. The Rongmei Nagas' follows a joint family system traditionally. The father is the head of the family, and obedience to him is expected from each member. The Rongmei Nagas were initially head hunters about one hundred years ago, and the village council governs the whole village. The governing system is purely democratic though Nampou (village founder).



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Agriculture is the main occupation, but cultivation remains primitive. The community adopts the jhum system or shifting cultivation. They go to hills, clear the jungle, burn the patch, and plant paddy and other vegetables. The rice beer is the essential ingredient of their everyday drink. The women are efficient with handloom. The men folks are skilful in cane and bamboo works. Hunting animals for food is also one of the essential economic life of the tribe. The economic life of the Zeliangrong depends on their labour and resources (Panmei, 1996)

In the present situation, there evolved two forms of volunteering in society, one is expressed through the traditional institution like domestic (family) groups, religion, and village councils, and the second is the modern forms of voluntarism expressed through voluntary organisation and NGOs. The problem arises when one defines volunteering and what activities are included and accepted under voluntarism. What is meant by voluntarism to this community, and how do they perceive it? Is the community accepting the concept of voluntarism as understood in a registered or unregistered professional organisation like VO's and NGOs where people are given salaries?

In this context, the study becomes essential, leading to qualitative processes of unravelling experiences and perceptions of Tribal communities concerning the meaning, process and adaptation of local Tribal systems in changing contexts.

### Defining Voluntarism

Many definitions of volunteering exclude activities that may benefit the volunteer's family or friends. However, it is unclear how this volunteer work differs from the work performed for a stranger. Is helping one's sick neighbour with yard work or errands to the grocery store different from performing those tasks for a shut-in member of one's church? He further states that '...the definition of volunteering has become so confusing by scholars and the public that it can include compulsory participation and remuneration (Carson, 1999). Gaskin and Smith (1997) defined voluntarism as "Activities or work done of a person's free will for the benefit of others (beyond the immediate family) for no payment other than, in some cases, a small honorarium and/or expenses". Salamon and Anheier (1992) defined voluntarism as the structural/operational definition of the voluntary sector used to shape the focus of this review. In this definition, the third sector is defined as a collection of organisations that are: formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing and voluntary. Salamon and Anheier specifically focus on volunteering that takes place within voluntary social service organisations.

The term voluntarism is derived from the Latin word 'voluntas', meaning 'will' or 'freedom'. One's own volition initiates voluntary action, which is the expression of the human will to work for the needy and destitute. A voluntary organisation is a group of individuals organised based on voluntary membership for the pursuit of one interest or several interests in common. The term VO has been understood, defined and used in various ways. The people's knowledge often weakens their self-help potential and curbs the growth of voluntarism among the people. The institution-building process in society suffers when outside volunteers do not plan for their redundancy by developing local leadership. In another meeting of voluntary organisations held at the Institute of Rural Meeting, it was acknowledged that building people's organisations to that eventually they would not need outside professional help was a distant dream (Jain, 1989).

In the context of draining out the history of the voluntary sector, Smith (1994) said that voluntarism, as the introduction of contracts in the voluntary sector, has initiated the evolution of a professional culture within many voluntary organisations. Several studies suggest that the increased professionalisation associated with contracting has, in some circumstances, added to the motivation and commitment of volunteers. There is also evidence, however, that not all volunteers have adapted or warmed to the new culture and that some organisations have experienced difficulties recruiting volunteers in a more formal, controlled environment.

Suggate (1995) noted that a critical change in the past decade had been the government's increasing reliance on the voluntary sector to deliver social assistance to communities. Alongside this has been the move by most departments from grant funding to contracting, which has dramatically affected Government/voluntary sector relationships. Munford and Sanders (1999) also allude to the change in the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state and stated that the change in state funding from grants-in-aid to contract-based payments signifies a key change in the nature of the relationships between the state and the not-for-profit sector. In particular, the development has changed not-for-profit organisations from an independent sector to a vehicle for the delivery and implementation of state policy.

Voluntary Action Network in India (2001), in the study of "Voluntarism and Government", has stated that India has a long history and tradition of voluntary action, providing services to the sick, needy and destitute. Rather it is a part of our cultural heritage



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and way of life. Voluntarism in India is as old as the emergence of organised society itself. It originated as pure philanthropy of charity, and this motivation sustained the voluntary efforts throughout history in the ancient and medieval periods. The voluntary efforts in the process of welfare and development have undergone evolutionary changes with changing emphasis on various experimental development programmes in India. The history of voluntary action is integral to studying evolution and changes in Indian society. Voluntary Action Network India (2001) points out that the history of voluntarism in India may be broadly divided into the following phases:

1. Voluntarism in the early phase up to the nineteenth century
2. Voluntary efforts during the Pre-Independence era since the beginning of the nineteenth century
  - a. the first half of the nineteenth century in the era of Social Reform Movements
  - b. The second half of the nineteenth century
  - c. The first half of the twentieth century and the Gandhian era.
3. Voluntarism during the post-Independence era:
  - a. Voluntary efforts up to the mid-Sixties
  - b. Efforts during the mid-Sixties to mid-Seventies
  - c. Efforts in an integrated development phase in the 1970s and 1980s
4. Contemporary voluntary action since the early 1990s

However, private voluntary association for publicly beneficial purposes is usually the product of other motivations and human characteristics- individualism, self-reliance, distrust of government, or simply impatience with public authority and eagerness to get on with the job. The spirit of voluntary association for the common good, though not peculiar to the United States, has always been a prominent feature of the American ethos, so prominent as to have almost infallibly occasioned comment by foreign visitors to our shores (Pifer, 1987).

Tomeh (1981) noted that voluntarism is still in an early stage of development. Most theoretical analysis in this area is at the level of developing a conceptual framework and speculating about possible theoretical propositions. The world of voluntarism involves three identifiable theoretical approaches:

- (1) The focus on the nature and structure of industrial society. The emphasis is on an organisation or community agency's functions and pervasiveness. On this level, such groups (i.e., cultural, religious, economic, political, welfare, public safety, mass media, and health) are seen as contributing to society by supporting the normative order or seeking to change it and implement important values.
- (2) The social-psychological approach. In this context, voluntarism is viewed as integrative for the personality systems of members. Thus, the function of voluntarism on the personal level is to provide the individual with effectual support and other satisfactions formerly available to him/her in primary groups.
- (3) The focus on the organisation as a unit is to be studied. This approach emphasises the different processes of operation, the impact of the social setting upon the volunteers, the pattern of relationships within the organisation and the various interrelationships between the worker volunteers and the work tasks to be performed.

Beveridge (1979) defined a voluntary organisation as an organisation where its workers are paid or unpaid and are initiated and governed by its members without external control. Volunteerism is a form of prosocial behaviour that involves a freely chosen decision to commit a sustained amount of time and effort to help another person, group or cause, typically through a non-profit organisation. We thoroughly review social psychological theory and research on volunteering by examining its antecedents, experiences, and consequences, both personal and situational. In doing so, we address questions such as: who volunteers and why, what organisational practices lead to committed and satisfied volunteers, and what are the benefits of volunteerism for volunteers, the recipients of their services, and society at large (Stukas, 2014).

Lindsay (1918) analysed rationalism and voluntarism that a voluntary act includes, among other things, a volition or determination to bring about a particular result. It holds an idea of the result to be brought about as an essential factor in voluntary action. In volition, there is always an idea seeking realisation. Volition is sufficiently complex to require both presentation and feel. However, the transition from idea to realisation is not affected so simply as might be supposed or without extraneous considerations and connections. Moreover, again, in the case of cognition, no combination of ideating processes and no theory of ideas will suffice to yield cognition.



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As for the future of voluntarism in an industrial society, using a conflict perspective, it seems safe to predict the separation and polarisation of social, economic and political groups. As a result, competition between the different social segments in society is likely to continue and increase depersonalisation. The cohesion of the peer culture may widen the generation gap, where youths' faith in the ability of the older group to give guidance may diminish. Female confrontation with the male-dominated social structure may intensify, as will the attack on the double standard in sex role norms. A coalition of the various racial and ethnic minorities is likely to confront the majority. Moreover, the poor are developing a potency in their growing conflict with the affluent. The division between the radicals and the rightists in political life, or consumer and producer groups in the economy, is continuing, as well as other national and international conflicts (Tomch, 1981, pp.95)

Change in social reality is taking place at an alarming pace, and the breaking down of community systems is a condition that is observed. This study tries to define the term voluntarism as perceived by the community and whether there is a changing trend in the concept of voluntarism within this fast-changing context now that professional organisations like VO and NGOs have started emerging. It focuses on what makes individual community members volunteer and whether they expect anything from volunteering. It will also try to understand whether the community accepts the concept of voluntarism in a professional organisation and how they view/perceive the same.

Voluntarism in India has gained momentum with the advancement of society. The growth of voluntary organisations over the past four decades has given them an increasingly important role and led them to form a specific sector within civil society. They have emerged as a viable institutional framework and a well-defined 'third sector'-next for government and private enterprises to catalyse development and change. VOs have recently undergone a considerable transformation with the changing nature of society and its problems. The VOs in India today vary widely in terms of size, form, objective, methodology, vision and characteristic.

### Tribes and Voluntarism

The Latin root word tribe has many definitions from different perspectives and studies points of view. Anthropologically, a tribe is a social group, members of which live in a common territory, have a common dialect, uniform social organisation and possess cultural homogeneity, having a common ancestor, political organisation and religious patterns. It would be challenging to find many tribal groups in India who possess all these characteristics. However, since all the tribal and analogous social formations are not considered scheduled tribes when the tribal population is considered, it always refers to a scheduled tribal population recognised by the government (Chaudhuri,1992).

In a study by Nongkynrih (2003) on understanding volunteering in the context of Khasi-Jaintia society in Meghalaya, it stated that volunteering is not something new that has been adopted or imposed from outside. It has been part of the life of society. The people care, help, support and share with each other in different circumstances. In the case of the death of a member in a domestic group, sharing one free labour for a day to help construct a house and so on. The idea may be common, but there are differences in how volunteering is practised and the medium through which it is expressed. Two distinct forms of volunteering emerged in the course of the study. One type of volunteering is expressed through traditional institutions, and the second is expressed through modern organisations. Within the traditional institutions, there are three ways in which volunteering is expressed: the domestic group, the clan, and the village councils.

The common factor that influences the spirit and action of volunteering comes from one source. The source is the process of socialisation that each and every member has undergone in one's life cycle. During the process of socialisation, members of the domestic group, clan, and village are inculcated with the values, norms, and spirit of collective well-being as handed down over generations. Therefore, volunteering seems to be a form of collective responsibility, collective action, and mutual reciprocation in society. Over time, it has become an intrinsic part of it. However, there is a difference in how volunteering operates in the case of the domestic group, the clan and the village councils. Volunteering at the level of the domestic group is restricted only to a small circle of friends and neighbours, and the restriction applies in the case of the clan because its circle is only amongst clan members. Only in the case of the village councils we find that it includes all residents (Nongkynrih, 2003, pp. 14).

Critically examining the forms of volunteering and how it is overtly expressed through traditional institutions or registered or unregistered organisations, we could locate some interesting dimensions on the issues of exclusion and inclusion. Let us take the traditional forms of volunteering. They are a product of cultural construction over generations and institutionalised in society's traditional customs and practices. This form of volunteering has elements of restrictive exclusion and inclusion because the members of the society, in the case of domestic groups or clans or the village, apply it differently. The way of volunteering in each of the three



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varies accordingly. Therefore, one can conclude that traditional forms of volunteering are culturally specific. The same is found in the case of modern forms of volunteering. Even though they are registered or unregistered, organisations have their values and norms governing them, and their actions are expressed through voluntary initiatives. We observed that this volunteering excludes others based on membership qualification, religion, or ethnic affiliation. Both forms of volunteering have their limits. The issue of inclusion and exclusion is not only a cultural construct but also a construct based on religion, profession, ethnicity and secular values.

Thakur and Thakur (1997) stated that it could not be conceded that the state can absolve itself of the responsibility of providing the needed support to the people even for their mobilisation of providing the needed support to the people even for their mobilisation against adverse forces, even though they may be emanating from the processes of development or the state's actions. The state is duty-bound to do so, for example, in the case of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes, particularly the latter. Moreover, this is feasible, though, within reasonable limitations. The most promising area in this respect will channelise the ferment amongst the educated youth, some of whom are keen to participate in constructive programmes.

The utilisation of minority persons in the world of voluntarism involves a set of interacting factors: first, people being informed of opportunities and motivated to volunteer; second, available and attractive positions; and third, linkages and support systems between people and positions. More specifically, there must be a work environment where minority volunteers can be productive and comfortable. Such persons must receive clear messages that their work is needed and valued and is important in reaching the organisation's goals. We must underscore the fact that minority volunteers in a setting dominated by other high socioeconomic volunteers and paid personnel are also likely to be marginal and peripheral in the communication network system. Thus, if minority volunteers find a work environment in which they can produce effectively alongside majority volunteers and younger paid personnel, attention must be given to organisational policy and management issues that now tend to separate minority volunteers from other personnel in the organisation (Tomeh, 1981, pp. 94).

Rajan (1988), while analysing rehabilitation and voluntarism, observed four distinct styles: (1) intervening organisation took on the provision of relief and rehabilitation as its primary task, became dependent on the government, and with the diminution in the government's commitment to the cause, soon collapsed; (2) volunteers served as "conscience keepers," pursuing change through systematic research reports; (3) trade union activists demanded charge of the industrial plant to provide employment through alternative use of plant and machinery; and (4) perhaps the most effective strategy by volunteers was to reject the idea of voluntarism as propounded by the state. Somewhat, voluntarism was redefined to include sustained mobilisation, the struggle for better relief, access to medical data, questioning the secretiveness of the part of the government, legal activism, and questioning the right of the government to give such a low priority to the life of the poor. The voluntarism of this nature is difficult to mobilise in backward rural areas given the dispersed nature of settlements and weak social articulation, low media attention, and poor networking among interventionists.

Voluntarism in India has gained momentum with the advancement of society. The growth of voluntary organisations over the past four decades has given them an increasingly important role and led them to form a distinctive sector within civil society. They have emerged as a viable institutional framework and a well-defined 'third sector'-next for government and private enterprises to catalyse development and change. VOs have recently undergone a considerable transformation with the changing nature of society and its problems. The VOs in India today vary widely in terms of size, form, objective, methodology, vision and characteristic.

### Voluntarism and the Rongmei

The research was conducted by using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Interview Guide (IG) with the three villages' elders in the Tamenglong District of Manipur where most of the inhabitants are from the Rongmei Tribe. Three FGD and twenty interviews were conducted over the period from October to December 2022.

The Rongmei tribe has many customs and traditional practices like Mandu (the bone price of the wife), where on the wife's death, the wife's father demands money from the husband or relatives. Nasitheimei where, when women have died during childbirth, the child is not permitted to live but buried with the dead mother. Malunmei is a social institution and Morung (club) where there is a separate club for boys and girls. In this, tribal education and discipline, the art of warfare, handicrafts, music and dance, and moral and social education are taught. There are many types of marriage systems that they practised like Noumang-mei-Nou-Kao (marriage by service), Chamemei (here a girl is given in marriage even against her consent to a family to whom the girl's parents are in debt or some obligation) and Naokakhaomei (marriage to the husband's brother in case of death or accident). They also perform many festivals and dances. Like Gudui-Ngai, Rih Ngai (war festival), victory dance, war dance, crab dance and others. All of this plays a significant part



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in the social life of Rongmei and has a great value and meaning to them (Miri, 20024).

The chief rules every Rongmei village with the assistance of the village council members and the village elders. Each village has a chief whom they consider the village's highest authority according to their tradition and customary law. Each event is discussed in the house of the Chief, which they consider the village court. They also have inter-village, district and interstate courts where all complicated problems are discussed strictly based on their customary law. Succession through a hereditary system was strictly observed in the past. The Chief is the sole authority for each of the village affairs. According to their tradition and customs, the village's founder was bound to become the Chief, even when there was a doubt concerning his eligibility, potentiality and efficiency to be the Chief of the village. However, today, in some villages, the Chief is elected based on the majority. The Chief is the sole authority for each of the village affairs. It is found quite contradictory among the Christian and non-Christians that the Chief serves only secular functions among the Christians. In contrast, religious functions are served by the pastor of the village. Nevertheless, among the non-Christians, the village chief looks after both the secular and religious functions (Kamei & Satwanti 2005, pp.2).

The Rongmei learn and practice how to take care of the need of others. Begging is unknown, and they know nothing of locks and keys and indeed have no need of either since that habit of stealing from each other is relatively unheard of among these simple people. Whether rich or poor, they share in need. However poor they may be, they practice good hospitality. The home is open to everyone. If a stranger guest is found or known staying in the village, he will be invited by many families to eat with them. Thus, the guest will have to go round to many homes and eat in many homes in the morning and evening (Panmei, 1996).

The discussion below tries to elucidate the overall understanding and linkages of various concepts established in the field study. Following are the identified issues and concepts that explain the phenomena of voluntarism in the context of the Rongmei tribe. In the context of 'conceptualisation of voluntarism within tribal society', most respondents opined that voluntarism is deeply connected to the concept of 'free will' and 'willingness'. It shows that most of the respondents agreed with the concept of voluntarism being intertwined with 'willingness' within the scope of the study. Further, it reveals that most of the workers under remuneration are NGO-based volunteers. In regards to 'Voluntarism, Religion and Culture', the majority of the respondents firmly believed that voluntarism has no relationship whatsoever with religion. It shows that the majority of the respondents in the study did not perceive any linkages between voluntarism and religion. It becomes vital in the light of the fact that voluntarism tends to identify itself with spirituality and transcendentalism. Further, the common sense understanding purported by a religious group in India that to serve one's religion is voluntarism is proven false in this case study.

Furthermore, most respondents did not perceive any linkages between voluntarism and culture. It shows that most of the respondents in this study disagreed that voluntarism is related to culture. On the other hand, most respondents agreed with voluntarism and its deep connections with 'free will'. It reflects that majority of the respondents in the study easily related voluntarism with 'free will' rather than its linkages with 'religion' or 'culture'.

Coming to 'Perception of Voluntarism in voluntary organisation', the majority of the respondents were firm in their perception that working in a registered voluntary organisation and getting drawing salary in the same 'is not an act of voluntarism'. It becomes relevant in the context that the accepted definition of voluntarism in larger discourse was counter by this finding. As identified in the current context, the form of organisation manifested through registered NGOs, where financial remuneration is intrinsic, does not align with how tribal communities perceive the same. The individuals within the community or its stakeholders did not consider receiving remuneration as displaying the act of voluntarism. Regarding 'past experience of volunteering and gender', it shows that the number of female respondents concerning past volunteering experiences is higher than male respondents. This finding elucidates that female participation is more in volunteering activities in various forms than the male population. Further, based on the above findings and observed by the researcher, one could argue that women were more active and made their presence felt through various women's organisations. The participation rate is higher than the men folks in the community.

In this context, defining voluntarism that represented the relationship between 'voluntarism and gender' provided the data that the majority of the female respondents accepted that 'working with willingness' constitutes the core of the concept of voluntarism. On the other hand majority of the male respondents identified the concept of 'helping others' as forming the core of voluntarism. To expound further, the concept of voluntarism was perceived differently by both men folk and women folk in the study. All-female respondents in the study viewed the concept of 'free will without seeking any returns' as intrinsic.



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It is important to note that majority of the respondents belonging to the age group of 20-40 years agreed with working with willingness as voluntarism. However, giving, sharing, willingness and helping others without reward were agreed upon by most respondents in the age group of 40-60 years. It implies that the younger people relate voluntarism with working willingly or without reward. In contrast, older people relate voluntarism with giving, helping and willingness but without any rewards.

Regarding the 'relationship between free will, voluntarism and education', the study expounds that majority of the respondents in the study who were graduates and post graduates by qualification agreed with volunteering being a process of 'free will without seeking returns'. It implies that educational qualifications did not change or influence the concept of voluntarism. However, those respondents in class 10<sup>th</sup> and 10+2 passed did not agree that volunteering is a process of 'free will without seeking returns'. When further explained, this field data shows that people with lower educational qualifications disagreed with the concept of voluntarism being free will without seeking returns compared to people with higher education qualifications in the study.

Based on the findings of the study, listed below are some significant findings of the study in regards to Tribes and Voluntarism in the context of the Rongmei tribe:

1. Most respondents agreed that the concept of voluntarism within the tribal society constitutes 'working with willingness.'
2. The majority of the respondents firmly believed that voluntarism has no relationship whatsoever with religion and also no linkages between voluntarism and religion.
3. Most respondents opined that working in a voluntary organisation and getting remuneration is not an act of voluntarism. This finding becomes essential in that voluntarism, as identified in modern forms manifested through NGOs who are given remuneration, is not considered an act of voluntarism by the respondents in the study.
4. As regards 'voluntarism as a social duty,' the study found out that the said concept emanates from within the 'self' and is intrinsic and embedded in every tribal society.
5. The study found that most respondents agreed with the concept of voluntarism as 'one's willingness to participate and contribute' and 'working without expecting anything in return.'
6. Most of the respondents with higher educational qualifications agreed with the concept of voluntarism being 'willingness to work.'
7. The study found that younger people relate voluntarism with 'working willingly with or without reward'. In contrast, older people relate voluntarism with 'giving, helping and willingness but without any rewards only.'
8. The majority of the respondents in the study agree that volunteerism should be of one's free will to render services to others and without seeking anything in return for a particular service.
9. In the relationship between 'voluntarism and gender,' the study found that most female respondents accepted that 'working with willingness' constitutes the core of the concept of voluntarism. No definition of voluntarism would be complete without the said concept. On the other hand majority of the male respondents identified the concept of 'helping others' as forming the core of voluntarism.
10. It was found from the study that among those who are currently working with registered NGOs, there is an acceptance that the concept of voluntarism is related to giving, sharing and doing something for others without expecting anything in return, plus a few respondents who also viewed the above as voluntarism related to free-will, helping others (other than family or relatives) with reward or without reward.

## Conclusion

The study contributes to information and data in the less studied area of voluntarism within a Tribal context. This study has brought out salient features in the context of changing perception and understanding in tribal society about the concept of voluntarism. Further, it has been able to identify newer areas, especially in understanding the ability of tribal governance systems and their ability or inability to adapt to the new and dynamic changing external reality.

Confrontation and conflict between the community system and the individual have become crucial while framing social interventions. The question is, should working with tribal intervention adapt itself to tribal systems of voluntarism or should the intervention impose itself over and above tribal systems. As understood within social circles, the voluntary sector needs to be broader to accommodate concepts emanating from tribal societies. The more considerable debate around the issue of the community concept and 'civil society' concept needs to be accommodative of each other.

The emanation of tribal-centred concepts concerning the practice of working with tribals needs recognition by a more significant social sciences discipline. It is so because the possibility of social interventions conceptualised differently in tribal societies



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is highly possible. The concept of working within the perspectives of the tribe should be the reality. It is pertinent to note that the notion and practice of voluntarism changes and continues over time especially with the emergence of other forms of volunteering like the NGOs workers, the role Church and religious institutions over the period of time. Though the traditionally embedded practices of voluntarism have gone through certain changes with the changes in the society and religious institutions like churches and developmental organisations, nevertheless the spirits and quintessence of voluntarism especially in times of certain calamities, demises, disaster and cultural events still remain strong till today.

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