Findings of the Study

The study found that Rongmei society still follows and practiced their customary laws to great extent. Their customary laws are yet to be codified and within this uncodified customary laws gender insensitivity is clearly visible. Socialization process appreciates stereotypes. Socialization process starts from the very moment with the birth of the child in the Rongmei society. The Rongmei mother plays a mediator role to create stereotype. The Rongmei women and work relationship is very deep. Women are found to occupy a central position in the society as labour force. They are the main contributors to both family and society food productions systems. They are considered as the knowledge keeper by the society based on their traditional knowledge systems. Rongmei women carry out hunting and fishing activities by trapping small games. Food gathering is also carried out by women extensively. Women are allowed to carry out food gathering activities within the village territories.

It has been found that Rongmei give great reverence to their land and considered as most valuable assets. But of this only male members are given ownership rights. Rongmei women are denied from inheritance and ownership rights. Rongmei tribe practiced a collective ownership of land based on their customary laws and it is found that these laws and rules governing their land holding systems too differ from village to village. However, one common factor amongst all these studied areas is where women were not given the inheritance rights. In the areas under study it is learnt that in every activities be it religious, social political or economic women have to maintain their traditional status that is to remain subservient position to men. Being governed by the patrilineal ethics Rongmei women contribution are not acknowledge officially like that of men. Rongmei women through their indigenous knowledge systems helps society to fulfill their survival needs. They are the custodian of the society food security system. Women knowledge on soil fertility, climatic changes, natural calamities and water sources were found more advance compared to men. It is found these women acquired indigenous knowledge more than men as Rongmei women labour much in agriculture and other allied activities compared to their men. And this knowledge is acquired through one’s life experience and not through any other formal training or other sources. Rongmei carry out all their
activities seasonally by observing and studying the natural cycle and predicts seasonal changes based on their indigenous knowledge systems.

Multi-tasking job of Rongmei women includes all steps of work in agriculture cutting of trees, making fences, fishing, trapping small games, gathering seasonal food gatherings, collecting firewoods, assisting in the construction and maintenance of house, assisting in the construction of roads, working in kitchen garden, all caring jobs at home, including cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of old and new born, trading, weaving, brewing liquor. Most expected and appreciable of Rongmei women is that they will be talking less and not preferably in public place. The training of the Rongmei women starts at the age of before adolescent when small girls are expected to the job of baby sitting at home, washing, cleaning, fetching water and assisting mother in every work. Rongmei men’s work includes attending public meetings, ploughing, cutting timbers for selling, making foot path, constructing of houses, and collection of natural fibres to make rope, making baskets of cane and bamboo, hunting, fishing and trading. Rongmei women are mostly engaged in barter trade as a vendour. Rongmei men are engaged in the trades in which big investment are there. Rongmei women are mostly petty traders. Rongmei women are found more self- dependence and enjoy financial freedom with the introduction of various NGO’s and MNREGS scheme. However, despite of both men and women contributions to the society, men’s contributions are always perceived as major contribution. Women contributions are rather perceived as fulfilling daily normal routine.

Though Rongmei women participate equally with men in almost every social activities but still they are not given chance to empower themselves politically. The society stereotype customs do not allow women to take decision making positions. In Rongmei society women do not share same status with men be it in the family, lineage, or clan. Rongmei women though do not occupy equal space at public but when it comes to clan and family her access to decision making is slightly different. In the clan meeting women are not expected to share same space as their men are but their presences as viewer are not restricted. Women are allowed only to defend themselves if they are accused or victim. They are allowed to explain incidence/problems happen to their life.
Rongmei women though often experience discrimination in the society and despite of not counted as one valuable member but their participation in various ethnic identity movements are equally matter to be acknowledge.

Rongmei society since time immemorial pays great reverence to their customary laws and it is still continuing it even today. There are three tier structures within village social organisation n: kaikhun (family), kaikhuang (clan) and Pei (village council). The Kaikhun is where cases involving members of a single family or between two extended families are produced. The family head or the elder members preside over the case for the purpose of bringing justice to the individuals involving in the crime without involving outsiders or public. In this way the privacy of family are maintained in the best way. Kaikhuang Pei or clan organisation, probe cases involving clans. This organization handles crimes such as theft, fights, murder and other cases. Pei is the highest body of the Rongmei village organization. In this place cases are presides and settles by the village elders along with the village council members (village authorities). The villagers could bring any sort of cases to the Pei ranging from theft cases to murder, rape and other civil cases. In case of the Pei not able to come to conclusion of particular case then only case is reported to the nearby police station and later on to the modern courts. This village council pronounced judgment on the basis of customary law the proceeding of which is completely oral before but now it is written. All these organization are kinship organizations. The idea of crimes in this council are usually considered as breached of normal behaviours. Therefore society at must level (only men) participate in probing. Generally elderly persons are allowed to share their views but in the contemporary times younger generations also participate. The pronouncement of punishment usually may be against an individual or a group of individuals but their immediate kin group members are expected to respond to the execution of punishment. The punishment is made through paying compensation in kind or cash, animals (pig, cow, and buffalo). And at an extreme case culprit were excommunicated for certain period or for life. This judgment again also varies from village to village or Pei to Pei. These social organizations were and are still applicable and functioning even in contemporary Rongmei society. Decisions may be due to the decisions are collective level. Rongmei observes a crime as affecting the whole community and hence they give
punishment to the culprit to teach moral dimension of crime. Therefore in Rongmei society if one member of the family is committed crime then the whole family or the extended family of the offender is treated as the accused as well as the complainant. The social aspect of crime demonstrates the web of Rongmei relationships. Though the tribe also erased some of the old customs and traditions but they still follow customary practices to large extent. Customary practices like payment of fine as penalty in terms of animal or kinds have been hugely replaced by cash along with animal like cow, buffalo and pig. Cases are being pronounced in the Kaikhuang Peikai then if the matter would not solve then it is placed to the village Peikai, then to the Zeliangrong Peikai for the further considerations. But above all these mentions customary practices women are not free to exercise it without men’s intercession. In each and every case be it men or women it is men’s society who decides and conclude. During the general meeting of All Naga Women Union of Noney Area, It is found that Rongmei women were longing to have their customary laws to get codify so that justice is pronounced fair and systematic at all levels of traditional political institutions. The ADC, Tamenglong members were also in great support and give their opinion on the codification of Rongmei customary laws as need of the hour.

Every steps of life of the Rongmei for survival and to fulfill basic and derived needs they are based on customary practices. These practices are age old practices established their relationship with the nature and cultural boundaries. Age old oral traditions are on cross roads due to absence of personal law. People are demanding codification of personal law and urgent need of the hour is to engender customary practices and social structure and political institutions so that this age old pro democratic system ensure equal right to the weaker section of the society.