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**Topic: Religion, Modernity and Social Change among the Rongmeis of Manipur:
A Comparative Study of Two Villages**

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ABSTRACT

Considering the centrality of religion for understanding the changes that are taking place in society, the present study explores the interaction between the traditional society, Christianity and various agents of modernity which produced radical changes in the Rongmei society (since the colonial period). Unlike the other forces of change, the arrival of Christianity (through the contribution of missionaries) in the early part of the twentieth century posed a threat to the traditional socio-economic, political and religious values and transforming their ethos compulsively placed the Rongmeis on the path of rationality and modernity. In order to derive the first-hand knowledge and gain an in-depth understanding of the Rongmeis, intensive study was carried out with the help of an *interview schedule*, focussing on a comparative analysis of two villages, one dominantly traditional and the other mainly modern, in terms of religion. Classical and contemporary theories of religion and social change were employed to find out whether they hold true for the Rongmeis as in the case of western societies, as there are no sociological studies done on this particular society. Comparison of the two Rongmei villages; an urban village holding on to the indigenous religion in opposition to the rural village, which represents Christianity, revealed their varying degrees of forces and impact of change. Economic deterioration, ethnic conflicts, and modern education have resulted in disenchantment to re-enchantment in Rongmei society. The interaction of Rongmeis with the new religion has bred a variety of positive results in terms of social change; nevertheless, these have come along with

various "ills" of modernity. The study, therefore, reflects the dual and complex nature of the interaction between religion and modernity in contemporary times.