
**REPRESENTATION OF MIZO ETHNO-NATIONALISM
IN LOCAL PRINT MEDIA**

Samuel L Chuaungo^{*}

Abstract

This paper is virtually divided into the following sections. Firstly, we establish the importance and impact of print media as a reflection of ethno-nationalism. Secondly, we see that print media in Mizoram (India) has faced its share of conflictual as well as intellectual rites of passage in its history. Thirdly, we distinguish the natures of the contemporary mutual distrust between the 'North East' and the mainland India, showing that Mizo ethno-nationalism is an everyday reality. Finally, we make qualitative analysis out of quantitative data to conclude that despite the weight of its historical and contemporary issues (both political and social), Mizoram print media showcases a uniqueness in the absence of beats concerning ethno-nationalism.

Keywords: Mizoram (India), Print Media, Ethno-nationalism, Popular Culture.

^{*} Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, India

Introduction: Print Media as Site of Ethno-nationalism

For John Hartley (2004), media is the site for not only the narration of unified national identity, but also the clashing of cultural and national identities due to its encouragement of diversification of cultural citizenship. Even within the media, there are reasons for the print medium to be more conducive site for the aforementioned dynamics. Media may be broadcasted either in analogue (newspaper, magazines etc.) or digital (social media, television etc.) formats; and in some cases both formats may be applicable for imparting of information (advertisements, news etc.). The analogue format, by virtue of its requirement of the physicality of printable material, can be considered a comparatively lasting arrangement due to its visibility even after the diminution of the relevancy of the carried information. For example, by gracing the walls of a barber shop, an article on the demerits of smoking would serve as a constant reminder to customers for as long as the whim of the owner persists. Print media, thus becomes a reliable source and medium of both invention and sustenance of doctrine, culture and identity. Majstorovic & Turjacanin (2013) apply the Habermasian concept of the public sphere and situate public discourse in the realm of print media where identity gets both constructed and represented. For them print media is essentially a '...mirror of everyday politics' (Majstorovic & Turjacanin 2013: 86). For Fernando (2007), it also serves as one of the main vehicles of nationalism; and in the case of Sri Lanka, it plays a decisive role in promoting ethno nationalism instead of civic nationalism. The site of print media is fraught with these aforementioned dynamics. However, the characteristics of the elements at play do not command clear cut locations. Brinks (2007) particularly finds it difficult to demarcate the lines between what constitutes as national identity and what constitutes as nationalism. However, what remains constant in works that link print media to phenomena like those of culture and nationalism, is the fact that one could analyse to a large extent, the nature of ethno-nationalism of a community based on representations accessible in the local print media. It is the purpose of this paper to analyse representations of Mizo ethno-nationalism in a similar fashion.

A Brief Overview of Print Media in Mizoram

The emergence of print media in Mizoram can be traced back to the late 1890's. Strom (1980) and Downs (1992) have documented that early missionaries, in a relatively short amount of time,

had managed to not only learn the Mizo language but also to translate certain gospels. The consciousness on communication through print media such as books, journal and newspapers began during this period with the composition of a Lushai-English Grammar and Dictionary, and the publication of Christian literatures. In these early days, printing machines were not available in the area, and most of the literatures were printed outside of the region, with local publications mostly being handwritten or done on a typewriter (Thirumal & Lalrozami 2010: 380).

The first Mizo dialect journal 'Mizo Chanchin Laishuih' came out in 1897 with Captain J. Shakespeare, the then Assistant Political Officer/Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, as the editor. Newspapers in the local dialect also started gaining popularity during the missionary period (Pachau, 2012). During the period ranging from 1900-1919, the missionaries published two very reflective and insightful monthly newspapers - 'Mizo Leh Vai Chanchinbu' and 'Kristian Tlangau'. The former was the first monthly journal to be consistently published in the Mizo dialect. Its first ever copy was printed by Dina Nath Press at Sylhet on November 1902, and the fourteen page set was priced at one anna. Makthanga, who served as the editor from 1911 to 1936, is widely credited as the first editor of Mizo newspapers.

However, despite the steady growth in the number of newspapers, magazine, and journals in Mizoram, the local dialect versions didn't become popular till the 1990's. Lack of reliable and efficient printing press and shortage of funding and work force are common reasons cited for this late entry. Moreover, for the pioneering indigenous journalists, the profession was limited to being a part time vocation, as rewards were yet not sufficient enough for a full time pursuit. Under these circumstances, many newspapers were unable to withstand the test of time, incurring financial shortage due to general lack of professionalism.

Nevertheless, journalism has had a steady growth in Mizoram, and publications today aim to impart information as well as to provide entertainment. A good number of personnel continue to enter the field of journalism with the aspiration of addressing social, economic, cultural and political issues; and political parties have, in recent times, shown keen interest as well.

During the early newspaper boom, all the daily newspapers followed a foolscap or Newsletter size format. A standardized daily newspaper layout and format is a recent trend in Mizoram. At present, 'Vanglaini' which began publication in 1978, is the biggest daily newspaper in terms of

copies circulated. The presence and well-organised functioning of Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA) may be attributed to the growth of print journalism in Mizoram. In the present scenario, more than 200 full time journalists are covering events and incidences taking place in and outside of Mizoram. There are approximately 100 Mizo dialect daily newspapers published within the state. 'Newslink', 'Mizoram post' and 'Highlander' are the three prominent English dailies published in the state. Besides Mizo dialect newspapers and journals, Mizo sub-tribes of Hmar, Lai, Mara and others have their own dialect newspapers and periodicals either as an organ of Churches or NGOs. Moreover, many government departments and state wide organisations also publish journals targeting their own community or the public as a whole - such as 'Hriselna' (an organ of Directorate of Health Services), 'Thu Leh Hla' (a mouthpiece of the Mizo Academy of Letters), and 'Meichher' (a publication of Mizo Adult Education Wing).

Although print media in Mizoram has situated itself as major channel of mass media, there does exist an area of concern i.e. an increasing coverage of entertainment oriented stories and contents. One local journalist quoted, 'entertainment stories involving celebrities and socialites need to occupy huge pie of newspaper space, otherwise, how will we lure the young readers and sell our papers?' Such is the circumstance whirling many weekly magazines where a touch of sensationalism is required to entice readers. Also, typically, a majority of personnel engaged in the media industry are not trained professionals but those who learn on the job. On a positive note, enthusiasm as well as the general growth of mass communication and journalism in the country as a whole steadily negates this problem and continues to raise the professional approach to the field. The print media has also opened up job opportunities for many young educated Mizos which, to a great extent, helps solve the employment problem in the state.

A Brief History of Mizo Insurgency

The term 'Mizos' denotes the indigenous population of the collection of tribes that reside in the North Eastern hills of India, mostly in the state of Mizoram. It is also the term for the common language of the state.

Nirmal Nibedon (1980) accounts the struggle of the Mizos, first with the British and later with the forces of the Indian administration. He traces the essence of the Mizo pride and the resultant agitations with the government of India to the 'Z legend' – how 'Z', the quintessential Mizo

warrior of yore, lived a life of honour and valor and whose adventures were told and retold in unwritten historyⁱ. The silent tradition of history was ended by the advent of the British and the consequent clash against the foreign invaders. Nibedon feels that the legend of the heroes of yore has been a platform for falling back upon by those who felt dissatisfied with any institution that made them feel insignificant and without a voice. In a way akin to dramatic storytelling, he highlights the famine of 1959, Operation Jericho (28 February, 1966), its counterstrike - Operation Security (early 1967), Mizo leaders evading the manhunts, incidents of brutality from both the warring sides, official documents of militants that claimed cultural ties with South East Asian nations etc., as important points of reference that helps in getting an overall picture of the nature of the insurgencies.

Ray (1982) continues from where Nibedon stopped and further traces the series of events that would finally end in the settlement of the insurgency. He assures that the changes that resulted out of the expeditions on the culture are basically that of changes in the politics of the hills. Ray sketches the beginning of discontent from the time the British started tea plantations in the hills. There were repercussions on this move of theirs with the Mizos retaliating with arms. The Mizos however could not stand too long and gave in to the British. With the dilemma of protecting their tea plantations but also the high net cost of running the administration, the British set up a minimalist form of administration for the whole of the hilly region they had come across. Both Ray and Nibedon state that this move, followed by the Inner Line systemⁱⁱ, Act of 1935ⁱⁱⁱ, advent of Christianity through the missionaries, and change in the form of local jurisprudence had shown aftermaths in independent India as the Mizos felt a sense of neglect from the mainland. Matters became worse as the government made Assamese the official language and set up more administrative centers in the area. However, a single phenomenon can be attributed as the spark that started the insurgency movement in Mizoram i.e. the 1959 famine.

In 1959, the Mizo Hills was devastated by a great famine known as 'Mautam'. In March 1960, the Mizo Cultural Society with Laldenga as its secretary, changed its name to 'Mautam Front', and took the lead in relief and awareness management. In September 1960, the Society having gained considerable popularity, adopted the name of Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) (Patnaik 2008). Later, on 22 October 1961, the Mizo National Famine Front dropped the word 'famine' and a new political organization - the Mizo National Front (MNF) was born under the

leadership of Laldenga with the specified goal of achieving sovereign independence of Greater Mizoram.

By 1966, the new political party had resorted to armed insurrection against the Government. By 1967, the MNF was branded as outlaw as well. However, the demand for statehood continued, and in July 1971 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi converted the Mizo Hills into a Union Territory and promised statehood at a later time (Baruah, 2007). The MNF and the Union Government finally came to an agreement on 30th June 1986 and the formalisation of the state of Mizoram took place on 20 February 1987.

Brief History of Politics and Print Media in Mizoram

According to Nibedon, the Mizos are one ethnic group in South Asia which took the path of 'little nationalism' (Nibedon 1979: preface). This new found sense of nationalism gave rise to political consciousness particularly among educated Mizos. The first political party - Mizo Union, was inaugurated on April 1946 at Aizawl by a group of educated Mizos after the ban on political activities was scrapped amidst uncertain future of the tribe. A contradictory view among people inhabiting the Lushai hills was inescapably prompted by the unsettling political landscape. On one side, there was Mizo Union backed by 'the wealthy and educated elite in Aizawl' who 'were all for joining the great Union of India. On the other side there was those who opted for Crown Colony and eventually, formed a new political party on July 5, 1947 called United Mizo Freedom Party, also called 'Zalen Pawl' (Nibedon, 1980: 26-28).^{iv} While two contradicting views persisted on, the 1950's witnessed an increasing passion and desire to become educated which in turn promoted political consciousness and a sense of Mizo nationalism. The pioneering political leaders took on print media to assist dissemination of their agenda among the people.

To validate this point, a number of daily newspapers and weekly magazines which still survive today were incepted by people who later on became political leaders in Mizoram. To reach out to the public, they perceived publication of newspapers as the best option aligned with the growing literacy rate. Indeed, the effectiveness of media in mobilising the public and forming public opinion has been identified by politicians early on. As a point of delineation, 'Mizo Arsi' daily newspaper was started by the Mizo Union party in 1946 with HK Bawichhuaka as editor mainly

to disseminate the party's manifesto and agendas. In the early years, each succeeding general secretary of the party automatically became the editor. The newspaper was taken over by J Lalthangliana on February, 1979, and is in publication till today. The rival political party of the Mizo Union, the United Mizo Freedom Organization also began publication of a weekly newsletter - Zoram Thupuan on 6th December, 1947. The president of the party, a Mizo pioneer politician Lalmawia, was the first editor.

Before insurgency broke out in Mizoram, 'Mizo Aw' or the 'Voice of the Mizos' was also started by the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) through which it demanded relief from the famine. The MNF founder President Laldenga also served as the first Editor of the paper. When insurgency broke out, the publication ceased for a while until it was renewed by Lalthanhawla in 1970. The management of the newspaper was later taken over by his brother Lalthanzuala. Upon the death of Lalthanzuala in 1984, DR Zirliana took over as the editor till date. The newspaper which began with a cyclostyled 500 copies began to grow in number of circulation. Since 1996, the production has been upgraded to offset press and the number of circulation is over 5000 at present.

During the height of the Mizoram insurgency, the UMFO produced 'Zoram Thupuan' and the Mizo Union's 'Mizo Arsi' served as forums for debate and discussion on the topic of 'which would be more favourable - to join the Indian Union or Burma?' A good number of politicians like HK Bawichhuaka, Laldenga, C Vulluaia, J Lalthangliana, Lalhmingliana, and Lalthanhawla who started off as media persons, eventually shifted to politics.

Given the role played by local indigenous newspapers, an in-depth study on its contents along with responses of readers becomes imperative to answer pertaining queries - Which content dominates the indigenous newspapers? What themes do newspapers emphasise on? What is the driving force of these newspapers as revealed by its contents? Do local dialect newspapers cater to the information need of its readers? These questions will help to unravel repercussions that newspapers bequeathed on indigenous readers. Before we answer these questions, we have to first understand the particular nature of Mizo ethno-nationalism and the nature of its origin.

Mutual Distrust - Image of the North East

The term 'North East' is an easy reference to a region – the seven states in the North East of India (sometimes adding the state of Sikkim for political purposes), and conceivably denotes a region stronger than any other term designating a region in India. In recent times, awareness towards the North East has raised substantially as compared to the times when LK Advani supposedly had queried 'what is Mizoram?' - a trivia popular among the Mizos during his active days. Notably, the media has had a lot to do with such rising of awareness in the face of the targeting of North Easterners as rape victims and random racial violence across the country and especially in the capital. The term 'North East' is always highlighted regardless of the state that the victim originates from. The term 'North East' now denotes more than a regional classification and rather of the clumping together of cultures, just like the orientalism critiqued by Said.

Even decades after peaceful resolutions between Mizoram and the Centre, the former, along with the entirety of the North East is still viewed as a conflict zone by the general populace of the mainland. Today, the negative stereotypes of the North East include eating of dog meat, women being morally loose, generally being harmful to the Indian culture due to the choice of westernisation, outstation students choosing debauchery over studying, insurgency mentality, etc. The North East is the 'other' to mainland India's 'us'. North-East India Image Managers ("People", 2012) conducted a study among working professionals in the communication and service industry based in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Presumably the respondents' access to media as well as educational background is much more than that of the average Indian. Though there were some positive points like 90% wanting to know more about the North East, with 42.7% advocating changes in educational curriculum for the same; there were some alarming statistics:

1. 87% cannot name all the states of the North East;
2. 52% have a highly negative perception in terms of insurgency and general safety;
3. 76% have no idea about any peace talks;
4. 91% have no knowledge about Northeast Industrial Policy;
5. 70% won't believe that three North East states have higher PCI than the national average;
6. 30% of professionals will never go and work in the North East.

Today, there are instances of the media's coverage of atrocities committed against North Easterners in metropolitan cities. Whether the coverage is sufficient/accurate enough or not depends upon the observer's level of cynicism. But what is objective are two things - firstly, regardless of the statehood of the victim, the headlines always mention the term 'North East', and secondly, there are direct or indirect calls for more safeguards from the government. The success of the latter is again, subjective to individual cynicism. Till recently, even public service offices have had the insensitivity to refer to North Easterners as outsiders who are need of basic lifestyle guidance. In 2007, Delhi Police issued a booklet of 'instructions' for North East students which, among others, consisted of 'tips' such as 'girls should not wear revealing dresses', and that the outstation students shouldn't cook 'smelly' food as it would cause 'ruckus' in the neighbourhood. Khiren Rijiju, a Lok Sabha MP from Arunachal Pradesh promised to have a meeting with Home Minister Shivraj Patil and address the 'cultural imposition' (Nena News, 2007). Awareness of sensitive issues like these did not rise officially as late as 2012, when the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs recognised the term 'chinki' as a criminal offense under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act with a penalty of up to five years in jail (Sharma, 2012).

Mutual Distrust - Image of the 'Vai'

Mizoram has had a history (and reconciliation) of aggression towards the mainland. Even though the 1959 famine was the spark for the insurgency, other factors like religion, culture, race, language etc. also came into the picture as epitomised in the demands for a separate nationhood of Christian Mizos. Terweil (2002) states that the search for identity has led the Ahom leaders of Assam to ritually produce connections of identity to South East Asia; and Baruah (2003) says, 'It is not my intention to privilege Northeast India's ties to Southeast Asia over its ties to the Indian subcontinent except to note that the living within the boundaries of a modern territorial state has a powerful effect on making some ties seem more natural than others' (2003: 6). In the case of India and the North East, the latter can very well be established as the 'other' against whom transgressions are seen as validated actions. Its establishment as the 'other' can be traced back to the formation of the sovereign Indian nation post independence where inclusion of the North East seemed more of a geographical accumulation rather than that of voluntary nationalism and mutual benefit. For example, Manipur's distrust over the government dates back to 1949 when

they were tricked into signing an accord that merged Manipur into India. Baruah (2007) accounts Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's remark, 'Isn't there a brigadier in Shillong?' when he was informed of the reluctance of the princely state of Manipur to merge with India.

In the Mizo language, the term 'vai' is used to classify non tribal Indians as opposed to tribals of the North East. The origin of the term is hazy but many claim that it derives from the Hindi word 'bhai' meaning 'brother'. But today 'vai' is heavily laden with discriminatory and racist undertones - probably stemming from the early trade relations between simple minded Mizos and the business savvy plain people. Added to this is the judgmentalism of a lack of morality due to disparate levels of homogenised solidarities in the two cultures. Over time, a number of very real extra-descriptive values have entered the term and now there is a stigma attached to being a 'vai' as being cunning, evil, dark of skin, ugly etc..

Thus, we see that there does exist a phenomenon of mutual binary feelings of 'us' vs. 'them' in the case of Mizoram and the rest of India. This has resulted in an ethno-nationalism where the Mizos consider themselves marginalised from the mainland. This feeling is not so much philosophical, but empirical and visible in daily life.

Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The analysis of data rooted in quantitative approach helps to unravel responses to numerical data at par with how qualitative approach explores narrative text. The increasing accessibility to media outlets and competitions across media industries, in turn, leads to a more vertical orientation of contents among readers. Contents are increasingly becoming more reader centric as opposed to merely being first hand information by reporters. In view of the on-going paradigm shift from the conventional practice of disseminating information based on parameter of news values set by news editors to readers' parameter, preferences of readers need to be contemplated in order for an accurate analysis.

News

The front page in the three local leading newspapers lays a special emphasis on society and culture events. Political and local government related news stories are usually of secondary importance but the two themes fluctuate every now and then depending on the gravity of the

scenario at hand. However, 'Zozam Times' clearly gives more weightage to police, legal and crime news stories which indicates that this beat generates considerable news interest and holds immense news value to the local readers. Unlike the metropolitan areas, where conflict and business reporting are strongholds in every leading newspaper, newsreaders in Aizawl exhibit a high degree of interest in socio-cultural activities and instances of crime.

Fig.1 – Most covered story theme in the front page of the three newspapers

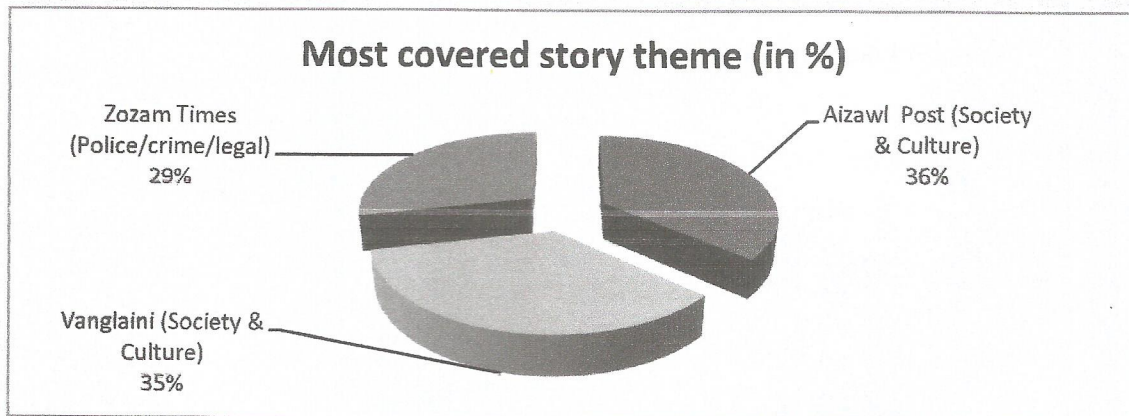


Fig.1 depicts the key constituents in the front page of 'Vanglaini', 'Zozam Times' and 'Aizawl Post'.

'Vanglaini' amasses the highest readership in Aizawl and the other districts of Mizoram. This leading publication gives due importance to society and culture articles which appeal the most to the readers. These stories range from people's reactions to stories encapsulating traditional Mizo value system, new projects, cultural festivals, community services, NGO activities and so on.

With the rise of immigrants and subsequent crime rates, 'Zozam Times' dedicates a substantial portion of its front page to crime, police and legal news stories. This is what sets 'Zozam Times' apart from the other two leading newspapers. On this premise, majority of the readers subscribe to two newspapers; 'Zozam Times' is frequently the added variable possibly for religiously including this increasingly relevant beat.

Themes of front-page pictures in the three newspapers

Pictures consistently draw readers to articles that they would otherwise skip. In all three newspapers, stories on society and culture constitute the bulk of pictorial representation. Mizoram is a state rich in cultural heritage and social events. Such events and activities call for photographs. A story on a music concert or traditional dance can be vividly described through words but would appear incomplete without the aid of visuals. In all the three leading newspapers, 'Society & Culture' is the most featured front-page picture theme. Natural calamities and road accidents have 15.38 % visual coverage on the front page of 'Vanglaini' and 12.90% on that of 'Zozam Times', from the selected set of sample newspapers. This is one tentative setback of 'Aizawl Post' that even for coverages seemingly prints fewer pictures depicting this beat, stressing more on education.

Overall thematic distribution of stories in the three newspapers

There is a clear segregation of the overall thematic distribution of stories in the three leading newspapers. 'Aizawl Post' capitalizes on the gossip and music mania floating around in the local, national and international entertainment world as the beat constitutes 26.54% of the entire paper. 'Vanglaini', on the other hand binges on advertisements that decorate more than half of almost every page. 'Zozam Times' takes the cake of journalistic ethics for dedicating only 20.91% of the paper to advertisements.

As for mishaps and natural calamities, 'Zozam Times' poses a striking contrast to its competitors as statistics reveal 26.34% coverage of this beat in the newspaper and less than 2 % in the other two.

It is seen that agriculture (one of the most thriving sectors in the state) is given minimal coverage in all three newspapers. 'Aizawl Post' covers agriculture at 0.38% while advertisements (26.54%) dominate the content of the newspaper. However, 'Vanglaini', which has a colossal proportion of advertisements, covers agriculture as low as 0.15%. 'Zozam Times' offers some respite to readers seeking a scarcity of clutter but agriculture is once more the lowest at 0.43%.

National news featured across the three local newspapers

In the three newspapers, national stories rarely made front page except 'big breaking news' and stories relevant to Mizoram. On normal days, the second page is reserved for national stories in the newspapers. During the monitoring period, only 5% of the total national news covered by the three newspapers combined have follow-up story the next consecutive days.

Table 1: Comparative distribution of national news featured across the three local newspapers

Themes	'Aizawl Post' (in %)	'Vanglaini' (in %)	'Zozam Times' (in %)
Political& Diplomacies	29.51	33.93	9.62
Society & Culture	14.75	7.14	13.46
Government & Election	11.48	9.82	9.62
Crime & Legal	18.03	10.71	23.08
War & Conflict	0.00	5.36	1.92
Mishaps & Natural calamities	1.64	2.68	1.92
Entertainment & Lifestyle	0.00	0.00	11.54
Science & Technology	4.92	0.89	1.92
Health & Medicine	6.56	0.00	5.77
Economy, Markets & Business	3.28	2.68	7.69
Sports	6.56	24.11	11.54
Education	3.28	2.68	1.92

Table 1 denotes the comparative distribution of national news among the three leading local newspapers in Mizoram.

As evident from Table 1, 33.93 % of the entirety of 'Vanglaini' national news is allotted to political and diplomacies. 'Aizawl Post' also capitalises largely on this beat with 29.51%. National news in 'Zozam Times' heavily concentrates on crime and legal stories (23.08%). Society and culture is comparatively low on the national level while national entertainment news

in 'Vanglaini' and 'Aizawl Post' is essentially nil. As far as celebrity gossip is concerned, readers prefer international celebrity news to Indian ones.

Fig.2 : Most featured theme of national story across the newspapers

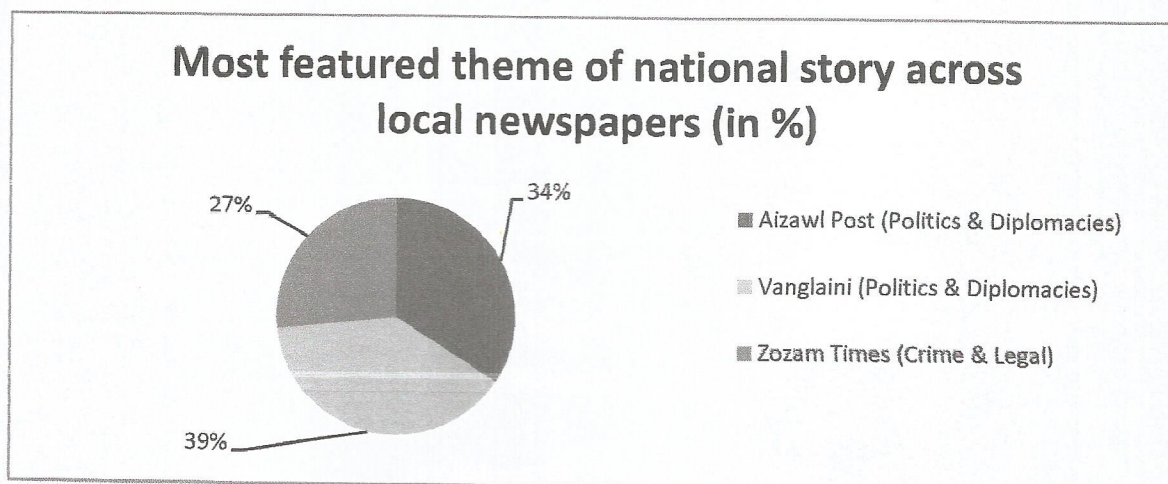


Fig.2 indicates 'Most' featured theme of national story across the three local newspapers.

Political and diplomacies dominate the national stories featured in 'Aizawl Post' and 'Vanglaini'. These political and diplomacies stories mainly comprised of controversies surrounding high profile political figures, party manifesto, political nexus, election campaigns and parliament sessions among them. Crime and Legal related stories covered by 'Zozam Times' mainly revolves around high profile political figures except for some comparatively revolting isolated crimes.

International news featured across the three local newspapers

In the fraction of international news distributed in the three newspapers against a given set of beats, the sports beat hogs the bulk of the international coverage in all three papers taking up as much as 60% of the international sections. This is not very surprising taking into account the popularity of football in the state, which begs the need to cover, for example, an English Premier League (football) match rather than the Indian Premier League (cricket).

Next to Sports, Entertainment & Lifestyle is another widely covered theme. 'Aizawl Post' devotes over 21% of the paper to celebrity news and music lyrics (which appears daily). Reality

shows based singing competitions aired by local cable television channels draw large chunk of audiences.

Fig. 3 :The top three featured themes of international stories

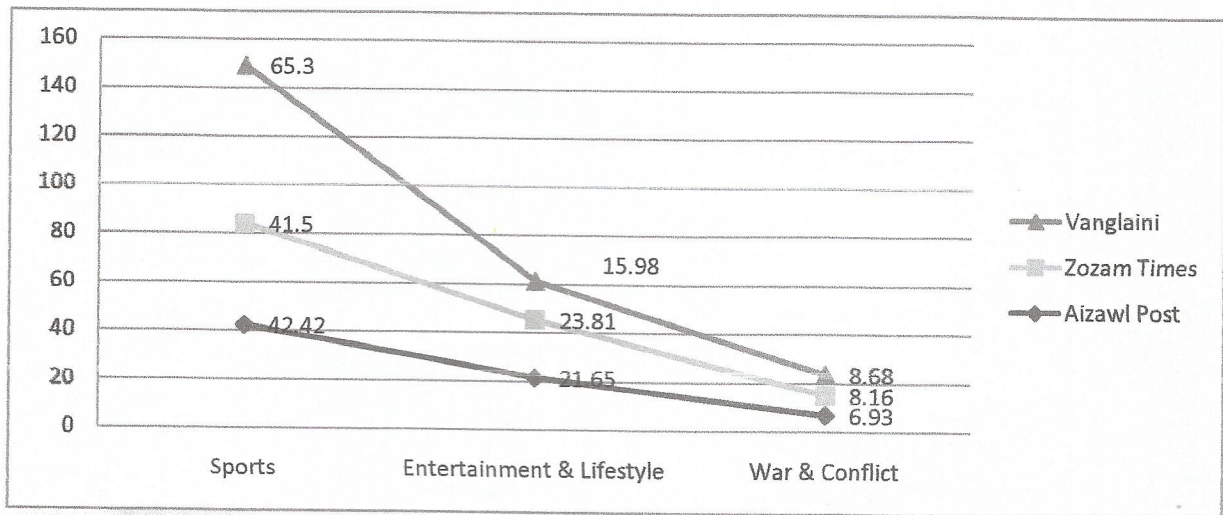
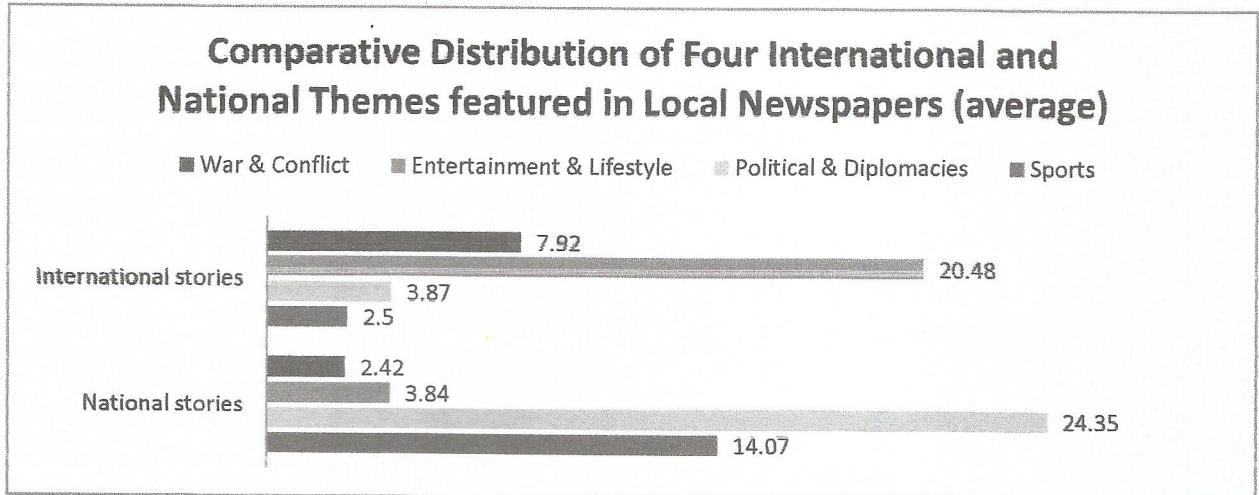


Fig.3 depicts top three themes featured in the three newspapers

In the three local dialect newspapers, the top featured theme in the international segment is Sports. In 'Vanglaini', Sports news steals 65.3% of the international stories page while Entertainment & Lifestyle and War & Conflict follow at 15.98% and 8.68% respectively. English Premier League or Champions League news is fodder for a majority of the male readers while relatively large groups of female readers feast on American/Korean celebrity gossip.

Fig. 4: Comparative distribution of four international and national themes featured in local newspapers



Averages of the four themes covered of national and international stories by the three local newspapers were taken separately for comparison. As shown in Fig.4, when it comes to War and Conflict, more representation is given on the international level than on the national. However, the margin is small in comparison to the gargantuan drop from international (20.48) to national (3.84) representation of entertainment and lifestyle in the three studied Mizo dialect newspapers.

Readership of Newspapers in Aizawl

Fig. 5 : Readership of Local Newspapers

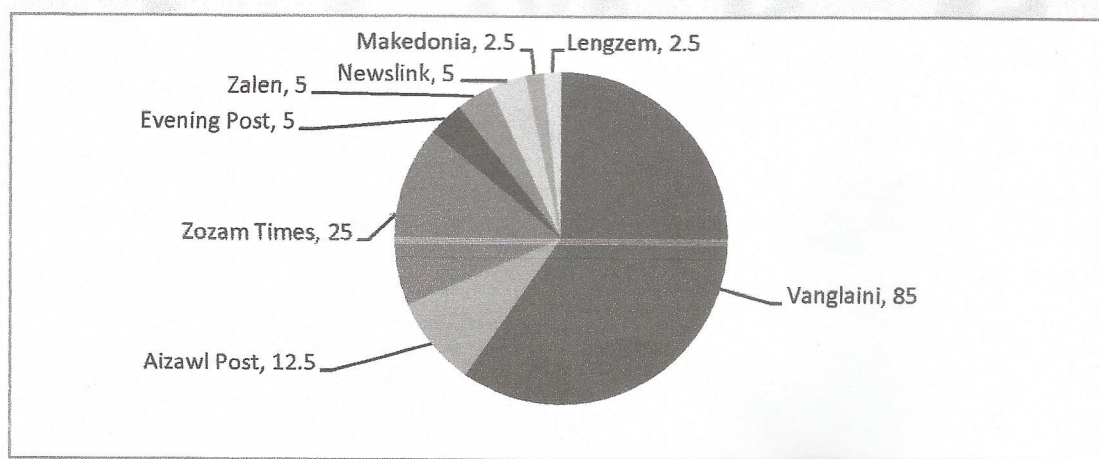


Fig.5 provides a diagrammatic illustration of the break up.

Fig. 5 clearly shows that the frontrunner in Mizoram's print media venture is 'Vanglaini' amassing 85 % of the readership, and 'Zozam Times' is the trusted alternative. Out of the 25 % that subscribe to 'Zozam Times', about half subscribe solely to 'Zozam Times' while the other half simultaneously read Vanglaini. 'Aizawl Post' is third in line with a 12.5 % readership from the selected sample population. Lack of advertising clutter is a reason cited for its subscription. 5 % of the sample population subscribe to smaller papers such as Evening Post, Newslink and Zalen (the only Sunday edition newspaper in Mizoram). Evening Post, circulated in the evening stands out for containing fresh news after nightfall (it is the only evening edition paper in Mizoram) and Newslink is the leading English daily, offering respite to the Non-Mizo speaking readers.

What Interests Readers and What Doesn't

Table 2

Newspaper Page/Section	First Preference	Skips First
Front Page	60	2.5
Entertainment	47.5	12.5
Sports	10	25
Editorial	2.5	27.5
Second Page	0	15
Others	0	10

Table 2 shows Readers' first preference and skips first page/section.

Majority of the Readers (60%) read the front page of any newspaper before flipping to other pages while some alternate between front page and entertainment (47.5%). Evidently, it can be assumed that readers are not foremost interested in the national events.

Popular Themes in Mizo Dialect Newspapers

Table 3

Themes	Most Read	Most Skipped
Politics	17.5	30
Community Stories	10	0
Entertainment	40	12.5
Crime	15	5
Sports	22.5	30
Natural Disasters	20	5

Table 3 indicates popular themes in Mizo dialect newspaper

As evident from Table 3, Entertainment is the most favoured theme in Mizo newspapers standing tall at 40%. Community stories may not be the most read but at the same time, it is the least skipped followed by news relating to Crime and Natural Disasters. While many readers would ascertain to reading political news, larger number of readers (30%) would rather skip it. Similarly, while Sports has the largest chunk of loyal readers, largest number of readers skip them as well.

Bad Traits: According to Audiences

Fig.6

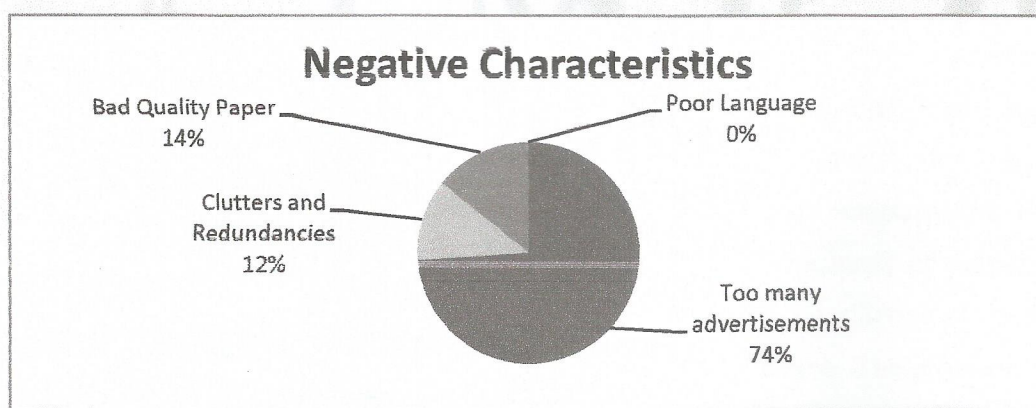


Fig. 6 indicates bad traits in the local newspapers according to audiences

Majority of newspaper readers complain of too many advertisements, especially in the leading paper 'Vanglaini'. Interestingly, language is not seen as an issue.

Conclusion

In trying to understand the representation of Mizo ethno-nationalism in print media, we have to take into account the fact that there exists a co-relation between media and the human psyche. George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory states that television has a subtle but continuous influence on audiences; and that the intensity of delusions of social reality depends upon the time exposed to it. Audiences unknowingly absorb the dominant symbols, images, and messages and apply it to their individual understanding of their own social milieu. This results in the cultivation of a 'dominant image pattern.' Moreover, Agenda-setting theory of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw maintains that the media sets an agenda for people by telling them 'what to think about' rather than telling them 'what to think'. Media thus not only influences topics of public agenda, but creates them as well. One could say that priorities established by media become public priorities. In the case of Mizo ethno-nationalism, it becomes very interesting to know that even though the issue is reflected in the daily life of the Mizos, such is not reflected in the local print media.

The susceptibility of entertainment to become the most popular beat of media is exemplified in the success stories of the Kardashians and Biebers of the world. The success of entities like them can be attributed equally to both the aficionados and the naysayers, which is to say, the relevancy of topics which these entities create is sustained by the persistence of the criticism (and not ignorance) that exists alongside the support. The idiom 'jumping the shark' illustrates the general acceptance of the decline of ethics and creativity in media in popular culture. In the case of Mizoram's print media, we also witness such proclivity towards entertainment. For example, War and Conflict beat covers mostly international incidents. Elements of sensationalism and shock journalism may be attributed to the popularity of this beat, considering the lack of not only awareness but coverage of ongoing conflicts within the very nation. The problems faced in the very neighbourhood of Manipur due to AFSPA are a case in point.

The situation can be said to be a result of either of the two reasons. A possible but improbable reason could be that the Mizo populace has consciously decided that it prefers to be informed on

topics of leisure over contemporary issues pertaining to their immediate milieu. A more probable explanation is that Gerbner, McCombs, Shaw et al have been correct in rightfully establishing the inability of the masses in choosing what they are to be provided. For example, the number of advertisements in the content is the single most problematic issue for readers but there seems no signs of a possible change. For the content of print media in Mizoram thus becomes the sole decision of the powerful few. Whatever the reason for the situation may be, it is undoubted that relevant issues of ethno-nationalism, even though being an issue of common awareness, are not a priority beat in the local print media.

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ⁱ The 'Z' possibly refers to the hero Zampumanga. However the idea here is that of a dignified warrior, 'Z' also signifying later heroes like Changbawla, Vanapa, Neuva, Taitesena etc.

ⁱⁱ The Inner Line was a boundary stretching across the plains to demarcate the hills, entry being possible only by official permit. Today this line runs across Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram.

ⁱⁱⁱ The act marked certain territories as 'Excluded Areas' in order to help development without interference.

^{iv} High on the agenda of the Mizo Union was a plan to curb the activities of the village chiefs by curtailing the unlimited powers conferred on them by the British Raj. The chiefs, on their part, rallied themselves behind the Zalen Pawl.