

# Culture of Daily Newspapers in Mizoram

Ratnamala Vanamamalai<sup>1</sup>, Vanlalruata<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University.

<sup>2</sup>Project Fellow, HIMNA-MADAT, Aizawl.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2395.3810.201824>

## Abstract

Mizoram is one of the hilly logged tribal states of Northeast India. It is located in the southern most part of Mizoram having common international borders with Bangladesh in the west and Myanmar in the east. The main objective of the study is to map the culture of dailies in Mizoram. The main research questions of the study are 1. to study the nature of dailies in Mizoram. 2. To find out the nuances of civil society as political economic factors shaping news culture of Media in Mizoram and 3. to analyze the content and style of dailies in Mizoram. Qualitative research method will be used in this study. As research studies on this particular topic is very few and to have an in-depth understanding of the proposed topic, qualitative research method will be used. The primary and secondary data was collected by observation, available literature and intensive interviews to study the first and third objective. To study the second objective, the intensive interviews were conducted with various journalists, Editors, and Publishers of various Media houses. After scanning the scenario of media channels in Aizawl, there is a great potential for improvement and progress.

**Keywords:** Dailies, Mizoram, Civil society, Observation, Intensive interviews

## Introduction

Mizoram, a hilly state is one of the seven sister states of Northeast India. Mizoram is predominantly with Scheduled Tribe population. Mizoram has a strategic geographical position because of its international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is also surrounded by the other Indian states including Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Mizoram is with 8 districts including three autonomous district councils namely Lai Autonomous district council, Mara autonomous district council and Chakma autonomous district council. As per Census 2011, the population of Mizoram is 1,091,014 and has the second highest literacy rate in India (91.58%). Mizoram is also known for its gender parity which is the highest in the country.

## Review of Literature

Robin Jeffrey who documented the Indian language press has concentrated on the press in Assam from Northeast India. The other states including Mizoram was not included

in his famous work "Culture of daily newspapers in India".

A study by Athikho Kasi titled "Mapping of Media (Print) Industry in North East" is a good work which attempted to map the print industry in all the northeastern States. But in this study, the researched had mapped only two newspapers from Mizoram i.e from Aizawl. They are Mizoram Post, an English daily and Vanglaini, a Mizo daily.

There is also a historical study on the first handwritten Lushai newspaper from 1898. It was by Thirumal & Lalrozami and it was on the discursive and material context of the first handwritten Lushai newspaper ~Mizo Chanchin Laishuihã,

An article titled "Perfectly provincial" by Lalramliana Varte found out that the front-page of Mizoram dailies is so tremendously regional and the national news is absent in the front pages if not it is unusually noteworthy.

Mapping Tribal Language Newspapers done by Ankita Pandey in 2016 attempted to map the tribal language newspapers

**Corresponding Author:** Ratnamala Vanamamalai, Assistant Professor, department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University.

**E-mail Id:** ratna2maya@gmail.com

**Orcid Id:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7048-4395>

**How to cite this article:** Vanamamalai R, Vanlalruata. Culture of Daily Newspapers in Mizoram. *J Adv Res Jour Mass Comm* 2018; 5(4):

across the country. The Northeast India has the most registered tribal language newspapers in the country. Mizo is the leader in tribal language print media which account for half of the registrations is spoken by only 1.8 percent of the India's tribes. But this paper was only a very broad view of print media in Mizoram.

As there are only very few works on mapping media in Mizoram and there is a huge research gap to be filled in by this study.

The objectives of the study are

- To study the nature of local dailies in Mizoram.
- To find out the nuances of civil society as political economic factors shaping news culture of Media in Mizoram.
- To analyze the content and style of local dailies in Mizoram

## Research Method

The primary and secondary data was collected by observation, available literature and intensive interviews to study the first and third objective. To study the second objective, the intensive interviews were conducted with various journalists, Editors, and Publishers of various Media houses.

## Print Media in Mizoram

The media scenario in Mizoram is very unique and divergent from the other parts of India. According to RNI (Registrar of Newspapers in India), there are **204** registered publications in Mizoram. Among them **108** includes 36 daily, 43 weekly, 29 monthly newspapers and magazines. The remaining publications are from Church and community based organizations. The small state like Mizoram is talented with a vibrant media industry. With the exception of one or two newspapers and local news-letters, dailies are not published on Sundays in Mizoram. As the majority of the people of Mizoram are Christians, the newspaper is not published on Sundays.

All the district has its own newspapers respectively. As Mizoram is entirely with hilly terrain, transportation is a challenge even today. It is the reason behind having their individual newspapers in all the districts. Lunglei district has 14 newspapers, 6 from Mamit District, 11 from Saiha, 7 from Lawngtlai, 9 from Champhai district, 9 from Serchhip district and 6 from Kolasib district (MJA Annual Report 2011-2012). Aizawl is with the more publications i.e. 34 newspapers. Although there are many publications in Mizoram, none of the publications have crossed 50000 copies of circulation. There are 144 approved printing presses in Mizoram. The Mizoram Post and Vanglaini has the largest circulation between 40000-50000.

Television is very popular and the most accessed medium in Mizoram. Apart from Doordarshan Kendra Aizawl, 29 cable operators have been functioning in urban and semi-urban areas. Among all states Mizoram is the leading state with 96.8% cable viewers. The local channels in Mizoram provide their viewers with adequate information and entertainment. The local operators like Zonet and LPS broadcast different types of entertainment for 24 hours.

Most of the entertainment programmes broadcasting in Mizoram are the dubbed television serials and films from various parts of the world. Mizoram is a unique place for its international globalized media content. The local television channels broadcast dubbed television series and films from South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Bollywood, Kollywood, Hollywood, Tollywood and Japanese Animes in the local Mizo language. The dubbing industry is a booming cottage industry in Mizoram. They are feeding the major content of the local television channels across the state. So one can see the cultural hybridity in Mizoram.

## Culture of Local dailies

The evolution of print publication in Mizoram was from hand written newspapers to cyclostyle papers, letter press to offset press. Predominantly it is Mizo language dailies. media. Among 204 publications, only 3 English publications i.e. *The Mizoram Post*, *Newslink*, and *the Highlander*. All the other publications are in Mizolanguage.

Vanglaini is the largest circulated Mizo daily with 45000 copies circulation. Vanglaini is the leading daily which reaches all the districts. The other districts have better connectivity and are close by Aizawl. But it reaches Lawngtlai and Saiha only the next day of its publication because of the distance.

As per Clause 13 of the advertising policy of DAVP i.e Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity, the newspapers in Mizoram are able to be empaneled. The newspapers certified by the state governments from North Eastern states need to have substantiated minimum paid circulation of only 500 copies per publishing day.

## Contents of Newspaper

Since there are many different kinds of newspapers in Aizawl, the content differs and there are not much of similar patterns shared by these newspapers. The local news is placed in the first page by all the newspapers. All the newspapers are having local news, entertainment news, national and international news, north east India news and sports news as a common content. Football news is the most covered news in sports. Mostly, the photographs are not clear in all the newspapers. Composition of the photographs is not good enough to compete with the news photographs in other parts of the world. Advertisements are

the main source of income in all the newspapers. There are four newspapers which are published in English language.

But when we see the content of other district newspapers like Lawngtlai or Lunglei, almost all the newspapers are with only two to four pages. The content of the newspaper is mostly local news, national news, international news, sports news, entertainment and advertisements.

### Political Economy of the Newspaper

The media houses depend much on the Information and Public Relations Department for news sources. Without the press releases of I& PR, the newspapers cannot survive. Government advertisements are their main financial support for most of the newspapers in Aizawl. The newspapers from autonomous district councils depend on the local district council advertisements. Also they thrive on the subscription of newspapers by the government offices. The individual subscription in the districts other than Aizawl are very less. Predominantly the newspapers are run by a single person and the journalists employed in the leading dailies in Aizawl city, the state capital are also poorly paid. So there is not much motivation or demand in news gathering. So they mostly depend on the press releases churned by the I& PR. So we can call it the local dailies practice churnalism rather than journalism. Oxford dictionary define Churnalism as a kind of Journalism that is created on the replication or recycle of material acquired from sources such as press releases or syndicated news reports, instead of original research. Even the news from Church and other community based organizations are also mostly produced from the press releases of them.

A study by Ratnamala&Lalrinkima titled Print Media Representation of Conflict between Mizo and Bru with Special Reference to 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Election confirmed that the Mizoram civil society dominated the media coverage. The Mizo vernacular media gave more importance to the views of the Mizoram civil society. The media has published the press releases of the Mizoram civil society without editing. The quotes from the Mizoram civil society dominated the news coverage. The media and the Mizoram civil society are intertwined and the media coverage on Mizo and Bru conflict is regulated and legitimized by the Mizoram civil society. The interviews with the journalists from Lunglei also confirmed that if they receive any press releases from the local NGOs, they would publish it without editing or even paraphrasing.

Most of the local Mizo news is based on government programmes and schedules. Most of the hard news seen in newspapers and local televisions are government official programmes. There are not much feature stories. Most of the newspapers in Aizawl and other districts are black and white. Of the 28 newspapers studied in Aizawl, only five are with colour printing.

### Print Media is still a male bastion

Two female journalists are interviewed for this study. There are only few women in the field of journalism in Aizawl. From the interviews, it can be said that women do not have much access to the field of print journalism. Almost all the newspapers are run by Men and also the decision makers in the print media are men.

### Qualifications of the Journalists

Most of the journalists in Aizawl do not have any journalism degree. Only few are having a degree or diploma in journalism. Others are mostly graduates and post-graduates in different disciplines. Some are not even graduates. Most of the newspapers coming out from the district headquarters are usually a one-man show. A single person acts as the owner, publisher, reporter, editor and many times the circulation manager of the newspaper.

### Irregular publication of Newspapers

Some newspapers are very irregular and even the copies are difficult to find for data analysis for this study. One of the Mizoram Journalist Association office bearers said that some newspapers are very irregular and have no proper newspaper office. This is due to lack of advertisements from the government for financial support and also lack of readership. Although 33 newspapers are registered from Aizawl, only 28 are regular. The other 5 are very irregular, sometimes they publish only once during the whole month and also if and only they get advertisement. During the field visit in Lunglei and Lawngtlai, it was found out that irregular power supply also interrupts the regular publication of those newspapers.

### Infrastructure

Only few newspapers from Aizawl are having a decent office while most of them are having an office in old and narrow buildings in and around Treasury Square Aizawl. Most of the offices are not a desirable healthy work environment. In the districts, the newspaper printing press is utilized for other commercial printing too. In Lunglei, the newspaper office offers multiple utility: Printing press, Photo studio cum shops. In Lawngtlai, mostly the homes of the owners are used as newspaper offices. The newspapers from Aizawl and Lunglei are printing with Offset printing press. But newspapers from Lawngtlai are printing with usual LaserJet printers.

### Lack of Competition

The journalists might be having competition but due to the non-existence of by-line for the reporters, there is very little competition in having good news stories. Most of the news is taken from the department of I & PR and

this leads to similarity in the news contents of different newspapers and local television.

### No Connection with News agencies

The media in Aizawl and other districts are getting news from different websites in the internet. There is no direct connection with national and international news agencies. They are not subscribing to any national or international news agencies.

### Traces of Religious influence in the Newspapers

Most of the newspapers from the district headquarters are carrying biblical verses in their publication. Also many of their names are from Bible.

### Conclusion

The newspapers from Aizawl fall under the small newspapers. Their circulation is not beyond 50,000. The Mizoram Post is the largest circulated and it claimed to reach 50,000 circulation copies. Vanglaini is the second largest with 45000 circulation copies. The news contents are mostly similar in all the newspapers. Football news is the most covered sports news in all the newspapers. Sports news contents need to be improved with variety of other disciplines.

The photographers in newspapers need to improve their composition of photographs to compete with other photojournalists in other parts of the world. It will be a great improvement if more women got into journalism.

The media of Aizawl will be much more improved if the coverage of government programmes is lessened and investigative feature stories are increased. It would be better if all the media houses and newspapers are having an up to date websites, e-papers etc. Connection with reliable news agency is very important for any media house which the media in Aizawl lacks.

It would be a significant improvement if the journalists or the upcoming journalists are having a degree or at least pursue a diploma/short course in journalism. The quality of the news contents will be having more competition if by-lines are given. After scanning the scenario of media channels in Aizawl, there is a great potential for improvement and progress.

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Date of Submission: 2018-09-25

Date of Acceptance: 2018-10-09