MEDIA, CONFLICT AND NATIONALISM: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN SHAPING MIZO NATIONALISM

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Submitted

In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Aizawl

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled **"A Study on the Role of Media in Shaping Mizo Nationalism"** submitted to Mizoram University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication by **Lalnunkimi Colney** bearing **MZU Regn. no. 88 of 2015** and **Ph.D. Regn. No. MZU/Ph.D./1408 of 26.07.2019** is a record of research work carried out during the period of 2019-2025 under my guidance and supervision, and that this work has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other titles in this university or any other university or institution of higher learning.

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DECLARATION

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

MAY, 2025

I **LALNUNKIMI COLNEY**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism and Mass Communication.**

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Last of all, I am tired of citing colonial and well-meaning people who write about our history without knowing us truly. It is time we start writing our own history.

(LALNUNKIMI COLNEY)

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A.I.R.	All India Radio
M.N.F	Mizo National Front
M.N.A	Mizo National Army
M.N.F.F	Mizo National Famine Front
P.P.V	Protected and Progressive Villages
M.P.F.	Mizoram People's Forum
M.Z.P.	Mizo Zirlai Pawl
M.Z.U.	Mizoram University
T.O.I	Times of India
H.T	Hindustan Times
Y.M.A.	Young Mizo Association

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Tale of Blood and Songs

The history of Mizoram is an intertwining of tales of blood and songs. Only around 150 years ago, the Mizos were headhunters, a head on the front of the house meant a prize of pride. But they were also storytellers and people whose lives were filled with music and poems. The British ruled over them for over fifty years, during which the Lushai dialect was introduced and schools were started. When India gained Independence, Lushai Hills became a district under Assam. While the people gained new ground under British rule, they were but servants of the white man, who considered their traditions and way of life uncivilised. When they became a part of India, their struggles continued, but in a different manner. The people's sufferings became a ground for political battle. Most importantly, they became victims of a leadership that barely acknowledged their existence or paid heed to their needs. My father was 20 years old when he stepped out of his village for the last time; by the time he came back home, there was no village. It had been burnt to the ground. My mother-in-law was five years old when her father’s cloth shop was put on fire, and she had to walk to another village with her five siblings, one just a year old, for two days. Over fifty years have passed since Aizawl was bombed(Ranganathan, 2015) by its leaders in the Union government, since one-third of the population in Mizoram were driven out of their villages, but how much do the people of their country know what really happened? In 2024, there were just a handful of journalists who could speak English, but in 1966, there were only a few hundred Mizos who could communicate in English. The reason I want to do this research is to share the stories of pain and resilience of the people through the years, with the hope that it will do a hint of justice to their suffering.

1.2 Introduction

In the technology-dominated world we live in today, the media plays a significant role in shaping the societal structure through its wide connectivity and reach. As Marshall McLuhan(1964) put it, “both time and space” are abolished through the use of technology. Information disseminated on one continent reaches another continent in a mere matter of seconds, thereby influencing the identity formation of the people. This study focuses on the role of media in shaping public perception and discourse surrounding the conflicts in Mizoram, particularly the underreporting and misrepresentation of key events like the 1966 Aizawl bombing and the 1967 Relocation Crisis. It examines how discrepancies between national and local media coverage affected the portrayal of the Mizo people, their resistance, and the socio-political consequences of these conflicts. Additionally, the study explores how the marginalisation of Northeast media has influenced its framing of contemporary issues, such as the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border conflict.

1.3 Role of Media in Society

The media do not operate in isolation but within the context of society. Often referred to as the "mirror" of modern society, the media reflects societal realities while simultaneously shaping them. Media content both portrays societal events and influences social structures and perceptions. As Hodkinson (2011) notes, media and society are intricately connected and mutually influential.

A nation is an imagined political community where people living in a society or nation may never come to know their fellow members, but in their minds, they exist as one nation, giving them the courage to die for such an imagination. While a person may, in their daily life, come across many people such as their neighbours and colleagues, the imagined community expands the thought of feeling patriotic towards a culture or community beyond what we can see, and based on historical facts and dialects. One of the main reasons for the construction of an imagined community is attributed to the influence of printing press capitalism. Capitalists, by publishing

media in vernacular languages, contributed to the rise of nation-states based on dialects (Anderson, 2015).

A historical study of the Zo struggle(Zou, 2010) traces the nation-building process of the Zo people, noting that the first printing press arrived in British Assam in 1836 but took another century to reach the Zo tribes in the hills of Manipur and the Lushai hills. Initially, print technology was dominated by Christian missions. However, this print culture helped develop standard languages promoted by educated tribal elites, fostering a new sense of community identity. The advent of writing and printing played a key role in forming tribal solidarities during British rule. By the 1930s, evangelical print culture and missionary networks had established Bible-based literacy in the Lushai hills, which contributed to a nascent public sphere and tribal unity. Although the British administration did not view missionary activities as a threat to imperial control, there was a significant link between missionary literature and the Zo peoples. While Christian missionaries were required to remain non-political, their work had an unintended but lasting impact on the formation of Zo national identity. The Zo people, influenced by protestant views that dismissed tradition, began writing commentaries on their vernacular New Testaments (in Lushai, Tedim, and Hmar) starting in the early 20th century. The recognition of a shared identity grew through the Zo people's ability to understand themselves from the perspective of others. Though missionary literature introduced the concept of Zo hnam (nation), it was the experience of Zo youth serving in the labour corps during the World Wars that prompted a deeper self-awareness of their political identity. From the 1970s onward, educated Zo elites began to explore their nationality through colonial records and post-colonial India's educational opportunities (Zou, 2010).

Marshall McLuhan underscored the significance of the printed word, describing typography as the "architect of nationalism." Notably, various media forms, including print, radio, and television, have had unforeseen impacts on the construction of nationalistic identities for media consumers (McLuhan, 1987).

While the media has an important role to play in society, media houses have become adept at persuading the masses on specific issues, often constructing a façade of

truthfulness while harbouring underlying objectives. This manipulation leads the public to form their worldview based on biased media portrayals, shaping their perceptions of international relations and political affiliations.

Journalists, influenced by their cultural and traditional belief systems, often reflect varied ideologies and frameworks in their work. News media can therefore serve as a form of propaganda by selectively emphasising certain ideas (Paul & Elder, 2003). The impact of global media on nations is multifaceted and depends on the power dynamics at the national level. While some countries leverage globalisation and media platforms to project their influence globally, the role of states and nations is evolving due to advancements in media technology (Flew et al., 2016).

1.4 Media and Conflict

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, a conflict is defined as a competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: an antagonistic state or action, as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons (conflict, n.d).

Conflicts are prevalent in communities worldwide, affecting both internal and international relations. The media plays a crucial role in covering conflicts, reporting on their causes, processes, and effects. Such conflicts often become central to a country's narrative and its relations with neighbouring nations, thus receiving priority in media coverage. Consequently, conflicts are reported with greater urgency than other issues, such as accidents or man-made disasters.

An interest has risen in the topic of peace journalism due to the portrayal that journalists prioritise conflict as a news value in their reports. While it is expected that a journalist must practice objectivity in reporting, according to research, it was found that a focus is kept on one side where the news is sensationalised and the majority of the reports speak on loss and damage (Gouse et al, 2018).

Johan Vincent Galtung, the father of peace and conflict studies, suggests seeking answers such as the goals beyond “the immediate arena of violence,” “the structural and cultural roots of the conflict,” and the “invisible effects of trauma such as

violence and hatred." He stresses that a journalist must practise fair play where both sides of the party are given a chance (Galtung 1998).

1.5 History of Conflicts in Mizoram

Mizoram, located in northeastern India, shares international borders with Myanmar (494 km) and Bangladesh (318 km). The state has a history of conflicts, having been under colonial rule until India's Independence. When India gained Independence in 1947, it was a district under Assam; it later became a Union Territory in 1972 and attained statehood in 1987. Today, Mizoram is considered one of the most peaceful states in India, with only occasional, mostly non-violent, internal conflicts. Achieving this peace required the Mizo ancestors to traverse difficult terrains, facing famine, deaths and administrative neglect. Despite the current tranquillity, questions remain about whether such historical negligence persists in the realm of media attention and coverage of the state's issues. This ongoing concern is compounded by the fact that Mizoram is significantly impacted by conflicts in its neighbouring regions, specifically Myanmar's Chin State and Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Zo ethnic people, including the Zo, Kuki, and Chin, view themselves as part of a shared ethnic kinship. Due to ongoing conflicts in these areas, thousands of refugees and displaced persons have sought refuge in Mizoram (Peri, 2023).

Mizoram faced its first pre-colonial conflict in the year 1872. It started with the abduction of a young girl named Mary Winchester, who was held hostage and brought home by the Lushai Tribe at a raid conducted in Cachar. The British launched the first Lushai expedition in 1872 to rescue Winchester, attacking villages on the way. The second Lushai expedition was launched in 1890, where the British aimed to avenge the death of one of their officers and eventually invaded the Lushai hills (Thirumal & Lalrozami, 2010).

The Chiefs resisted the invasion, but many were left with no choice but to serve under British rule. The hill tribes, both South Lushai and North Lushai, were invaded, and the people were made to pay tax and engage in forced labour. According to records, the British even attempted to resolve the power conflict with

salt and were successful. If a chief refracted, the government stopped the sale of salt in the market and then men and women started coming together to exchange goods and labour for salt (Pachuau & Schendel, 2015).

During the years of the Chieftanship in the Lushai Hills, a practice of servitude (bawi) was in place. With an intense clash of classes between chiefs, commoners and slaves, a man named Bawichhuaka fought for a society sharing an equal identity. As one of the sons of an emancipated slave, he, along with the missionaries, successfully fought to abolish chieftainship as well as the practice of bonded labour. He formed a political party called the Mizo Commoner Union in 1946 to overthrow the chieftainship (Nag, 2016).

A long-standing question that has prevailed through the years in the minds of the Mizo is the question of identity. According to the demarcation of the region by the British, the state of Mizoram is within the boundary of India, but if one were to judge the people's ethnicity based on dialects or physiognomy, the Mizos could easily identify with the South Asian nations.

According to records, the early occupants of the Lushai Hills, now known as Mizoram, identified themselves with the Israelites in the Bible during the colonial period. They believed that, like the "lost tribes" mentioned in the Bible, the Zo people were also a "lost tribe" destined for redemption. Whereas the Zo people in the precolonial period primarily recognised themselves to their immediate community, neighbours, the chief, and fellow villagers, the British colonial influence introduced a framework of nationalism and tribal identity. The idea of a *hnam* or "nationalist" frame of mind was further encouraged in World War I when a group of around 4000 Zo youth were recruited to fight against the Japanese in Europe. Conflicts between countries and the need for unity amidst chaos led to the birth of a nationalist feeling for the tribals (Zou, 2010).

Mizo identity is best understood not as a static state of being, but as an ongoing process of becoming, shaped through historical and socio-cultural transformations. This process began with the rise of the Sailo chieftainship among the Lushais,

continued through the adoption of Christianity introduced by missionaries, and extends into the everyday lived experiences of individuals in traditional Mizo communities. These experiences include participation in communal practices such as prayer services and death rituals. Being Mizo, therefore, is not a fixed identity that one permanently acquires, but a dynamic and continuous enactment in both time and space. It must be sustained through practice and engagement, and it risks attenuation or even loss when individuals migrate to urban centres like Delhi or other metropolitan areas (Pachuau, 2014).

The idea of a *Zo* nation is still pursued by citizens of the Northeast hill states and the bordering country of Myanmar, who seek to have a reunification putting all Zo people under one government, with the belief that the drawing of borders separated one ethnic clan (Zo Reunification Organisation, 2020).

In the post-colonial period, the Lushai Hills, which became an Autonomous District Council under the Assam Government, faced a major conflict that would redefine its history. In the year 1959, what started with the flowering of bamboo plants led to a rat infestation and eventually to famine, where the fight for survival and negligence from the government led to retaliation and insurgency. The rats ate the standing crops, causing death and starvation for the community. The Mizos, who were aware of the phenomenon, sought relief funds of 15 lakhs from the Assam government, which was ignored by the then Chief Minister Bimola Prasad Chaliha. When the famine struck, the Mizo National Famine Front(MNFF) was formed to cater to the people. The ignorance and marginalisation of the Lushai district at the time of disaster led to the birth of a nationalist movement. In 1966, the Mizo National Front(MNF) declared Independence from which began a 30-year insurgency which ended with a Peace Accord signed with the Central Government in 1986 (Nag, 2001).

The Mizo resistance against the Indian State resulted in 20 years of armed resistance. The period is called *Rambuai* in Mizoram. “That entire period was acutely painful for the Mizos. Villages were burnt, people were regrouped, tortured. People suffered at the hands of both the MNF and the army. Come what may, they just don’t want to

go back to those years. They just don't want the young Mizos to return to such a period of time. Mizos have a pragmatic approach to life," these were the words of the author Sanjoy Hazarika at an interview with The Wire when he was asked how the Peace Accord was a successful agreement for the Mizos (Pisharoty, 2016).

In her study on the role of the media in the twenty years of insurgency of the Mizo National Front(MNF), Emmy Lawbei(2018) found that newspapers such as *The Hindu*, the Statesman, the *Times of India* and the *Indian Express* presented a false report of facts when incendiary bombs were dropped in Aizawl on March 6 and 7, 1966, the year MNF declared Independence. The newspapers reported that air rations were dropped for the people. As per reports in '*The Hindu*' newspaper, media persons were not allowed in the state of Mizoram during the conflict, thereby resulting in a one-sided report of the conflict. The conflicts of Mizoram are not only external; in the post-colonial period, the state has encountered many internal conflicts. As a state housing the highest tribal population in India, with 94.4% tribal population, it comprises Chin-Lushai tribes and sub-tribes such as Pawi, Lakher, Paite, Ralte, Hmar and Vaiphei. The state is also home to minorities such as Chakma, Gorkha and Bru(Reang). Conflicts have emerged between the Mizo tribe and the minorities in recent years. A conflict between the Mizos and Brus was stirred by a demand of the Bru to have an autonomous district council, which was denied by Mizo organisations, leading to clashes between the two communities, resulting in over 40,000 Brus fleeing the state. The Mizo community and the Chakma community have an ongoing dispute with the Chakma stating they are an indigenous community of Mizoram, while the Mizo population consider the Chakmas to be 'non-indigenous.'Minorities, including the Chakma community and Gorkha community, have minimal representation in the media (Ratnamala et al., 2021). A study on Print media representation of conflict between Mizo and Bru with special reference to the 16th Lok Sabha Election found that Brus were under-represented and depicted in a negative tone. The opinions of the Bru's rarely find space in the news reports and are stereotyped as illegal, problematic and outsiders (Ratnamala & Lalrinkima, 2016).

Mizoram is also subject to border disputes with Assam. A major conflict arose on February 27, 2018, when the Mizo student apex body, Mizo Zirlai Pawl(MZP) built a resting shed in the Inner Line Permit reserved forest area. The structure was destroyed by the Assam Police, deeming it to be constructed on their land. The issue resulted in clashes between the two sides, with shots being fired and lathi charges being directed towards students and journalists by the Assam police. In the past, border disputes between the two states had reportedly occurred in 1994 and 2007(Mishra, 2018).

It can be noted that the root of the conflicts that have occurred in the state has to do with the fight for the right of identification. It began with the fight for a Mizo to have an Independent identification and later in the present age, the fight to identify as an Indian. In regard to internal conflicts, it can be seen as a fight of the minorities to identify as a citizen of Mizoram, the state where they were born in but are devoid of equal rights.

This research aims to study the role of media in shaping Mizo identity and Mizo nationalism in the post-colonial period through an analysis of the representation of conflicts in the media.

1.6 Media in Mizoram

The first Mizo newspaper, '*Mizo Chanchin Laisuih*', came out in the year 1897 with Captain J Shakespeare, the Assistant Political Officer of the Lushai Hills, as the editor (Lalruatkimi, 2015). At present, the number of RNI-registered papers in Mizoram is 186. As per the RNI, according to the 19 publications that furnished their annual report for the year 2017-18, the daily circulation of these publications was 5,45,862 copies per day. Radio is also a popular medium of acquiring news and other information in the state of Mizoram due to its wide coverage of urban as well as rural areas. *All India Radio* started functioning as the auxiliary station in Aizawl in July 1966 and covers 76.31% of the population. With the introduction of new media and television, radio has ceased to be the first choice of media consumption. The state gained access to satellite television in the early 1990s. Doordarshan Kendra

Aizawl came into the scene in 1995, before which the people only had access to Doordarshan shows broadcast from Delhi. The first local channel was Skylink, which was launched in 1991, followed by LPS Vision in 1993 and Zonet in 2004. Small-scale cable operators have also emerged in the 11 districts of Mizoram, catering to the local population. With the introduction of new media in Mizoram in the early 2000s, the population, both young and old, have grown to be heavy consumers of internet-based activities and social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Mobile phones were first introduced in the state in 2004, which led to a rise in the consumption of the internet and new media. (Lalruatkimi, 2015).

1.7 Theoretical Framework

For the first and second objectives, this study draws on the theoretical perspectives of Van Dijk (1991, 1998, 2008) to examine the intersection of media discourse, ideology, and the reproduction of racism. Van Dijk's work highlights how media narratives contribute to shaping societal attitudes and perpetuating systemic inequalities, particularly against ethnic minorities. This framework emphasises the media's active role in constructing and disseminating racial ideologies rather than passively reflecting societal realities.

Van Dijk (1991) explains that media discourse plays a central role in the reproduction of racism by shaping public perceptions of ethnic minorities. Media organisations, influenced by corporate interests, professional ideologies, and institutional routines, prioritise narratives that favour power elites. These narratives often reflect a predominantly white, western, male, and middle-class perspective, marginalising minority groups and reinforcing stereotypes. Through this process, the media create mental models that generalise ethnic minorities as deviant or problematic, which audiences adopt as social cognition. As a result, the media become powerful agents in maintaining societal inequalities by amplifying existing biases and excluding minority voices.

For the third objective, subaltern studies serve as the theoretical framework. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” the study applies this framework to understand the subaltern, in this case, the Mizo people during the late 1960s, when they were a small population residing in a district in Assam.

For the fourth objective, the study draws on John Galtung’s Peace Journalism theory. John Galtung advocated for peace-oriented journalism in the face of conflicts, he believed that the task of the media is to give a voice to both or all parties in the conflict. He suggested that sympathising with one side of the party points to the media’s contribution to the conflict in a major way (Galtung, 1985).

1.8 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the national media's coverage of the 1966 Aizawl bombing and the 1959 famine.

2. To compare national and local media coverage of Mizoram’s forced relocation, assessing whether differences in representation align with ideological biases and the interests of power elites.

3. To examine how oral histories of Mizoram’s people align with or contradict media narratives, exploring the ideological constructs that shape public understanding of these events.

4. To analyse media coverage of the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border clash, exploring potential biases and their relation to historical marginalisation.

1.9 Scope of the Study

This study explores the role of media in shaping Mizo nationalism in Mizoram, a state in India that has often been marginalised in national and international media discourse. Located in the Northeast of India, Mizoram, with its relatively small population and a history of conflicts, has often seen its struggles underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media.

It will analyse the presence of race and racism in media discourse, with a focus on how these elements influence the construction of Mizo nationalism. By examining how the media has represented key historical events such as the 1966 bombing of Aizawl, the 1959 famine, the 1967 Protected and Progressive Villages Scheme and the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border conflict, this research aims to understand whether racial biases, marginalisation, and omissions are present in media coverage. The period of analysis extends from 1966 to 2021.

The study draws on Van Dijk's theoretical framework of media, ideology, and discourse to understand how media constructs and reproduces ideologies that shape public perceptions of race and ethnicity. Van Dijk's concepts, particularly the role of media in constructing social cognitions and reinforcing power dynamics, will help analyse how media framing contributes to or challenges the formation of Mizo nationalism. The research will explore how media narratives, whether through coverage or silence, have influenced the collective memory and identity of the Mizo people, particularly in the context of their historical struggles for autonomy and representation. It aims to uncover how media discourse either reinforces or diminishes the Mizo people's sense of nationalism and belonging within the larger Indian state.

1.10 Research methodology

In order to address the purpose and the aims of the study effectively, a triangulation design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods was decided upon. The research design comprises (1) Case studies (2) Oral Histories, and (3) Critical Discourse Analysis

1.10.1 Case Study:

Case studies are in-depth examinations of specific instances or examples within a particular context or field. In research, they provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of a single case or a small number of cases to understand broader principles, patterns, or phenomena (Scoch, 2021). The case study method was employed to

provide a comprehensive analysis of various conflicts in Mizoram, focusing on two key areas: post-colonial era conflicts and conflicts with neighbouring states.

1. Post-Colonial Era Conflicts (1947-1987):

This phase examined conflicts spanning from the conclusion of British colonial rule in 1947 to Mizoram's attainment of statehood in 1987. The case studies selected for analysis focused on pivotal events and issues within this timeframe, including the quest for political autonomy and the emergence of ethnic and political tensions. Noteworthy events for scrutiny encompassed the Mizo National Front's (MNF) nationalist movement and the administrative grouping of villages, which led to significant displacement and the destruction of homes, as well as the proliferation of epidemics. Three case studies were taken into context from this era -

i. The 1959 Mautam famine

In 1959, a devastating famine struck the region, triggered by the recurring Mautam phenomenon, a cyclical bamboo flowering event that occurs roughly every 50 years (Lalthangliana, 2005). It analysed the coverage in three leading national newspapers of the time, *The Times of India, The Statesman* and *The Hindu*. To assess the coverage of the Mautam famine in 1959, 12 samples are selected, with one sample for each month. In the case of newspaper sampling, Stempel (1952) selected separate samples of 6, 12, 18, 24, and 48 issues of a newspaper and analysed the average content in a specific subject category for each sample size, comparing it to the total content for the entire year. His findings revealed that all five sample sizes were sufficient, and increasing the sample size beyond 12 issues offered no substantial improvement in accuracy.

ii. The 1966 bombing of Aizawl and neighbouring areas

A purposive sampling was conducted over a 15-day period from March 1 to 15, 1966, to examine the coverage of the bombing of Aizawl, including its pre-incident and post-incident reporting. The study analysed the coverage in three leading national newspapers of the time, *The Times of India*, *The Statesman* and *The Hindu*.

iii. The forced relocation from 1967 to 1970

The third case study analyses the coverage of a forced relocation undertaken by the Union government between 1967 to 1970. During these years, 200,000 people, amounting to 82% of Mizoram's total population, were relocated, reducing the total number of villages from 764 to 248, with 138 remaining ungrouped between 1967 to 1970 (Sundar, 2011). A critical discourse analysis was conducted on six newspapers, three international and national dailies (*The Daily Telegraph, Hindustan Times,* and *The Times of India*) and three vernacular publications (*Mizo Arsi, Remna Palai,* and *Hmar Ars*i), covering the period from 1966 to 1970.

2. Conflicts with Neighbouring States:

This section analysed Mizoram's interactions and conflicts with neighbouring states, with a focus on Assam. One case study was selected for conflicts with neighbouring states, which is the Assam-Mizoram border conflict. While the two states have had minor skirmishes in the border areas on various occasions, in 2021, it got violent, with bloodshed and casualties. On 26 July 2021, a major clash in Vairengte, a border village in Mizoram, between Assam Police and Mizoram Police left six Assamese police officers and one civilian dead (Bharadwaj, 2021). To analyse the coverage of the Mizoram-Assam border conflict, the study selected Vanglaini from Mizoram, Eastern Chronicle from Assam, and The Hindu to represent national media perspectives. The selected time period was April 2021, during which the states experienced their most significant border clash, leading to intense coverage in both news media and social media platforms.

1.10.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed as the primary methodological approach for examining the case studies. The method was used to examine national and local print media publications in the time period of the specific conflicts as mentioned above. The concept of content analysis has been around for approximately 60 years. It was officially recognised in the 1961 edition of Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, which defined it as the examination of both the explicit and

implicit content within a collection of communication materials (such as books or films). Krippendorff (1980) describes content analysis as a research method used to draw replicable and valid conclusions from data in relation to its context. This process involves organising, categorising, and evaluating key symbols and themes to determine their meaning and likely impact. Content analysis involves several key components, including unitising, sampling, recording/coding, reducing, inferring, and narrating (Krippendorff, 2013).

1.10.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to examine how language and framing in national and local media shape the representation of the 1967 Relocation Crisis in Mizoram. This method was chosen as there was a necessity to have a more precise insight into the texts beyond what a content analysis might be able to analyse. It seems appropriate to adopt tools of analysis that are specifically adapted to language for their study. Based on linguistic research, these tools give a more precise insight into the texts' meaning than content analysis usually conducted in media studies or international relations can provide. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field rooted in linguistics that examines language as a social phenomenon. It analyses texts within their context to determine the role of the discourse they represent in society. More than a linguistic study, CDA is an interdisciplinary approach grounded in linguistics. Its primary aim is to explore social inequalities as they are formed, conveyed, and perpetuated through language. The three central concepts in CDA are power, history, and ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The method explored whether national media portrays the crisis as a necessary administrative action or as a failure of government responsibility, and how this framing influences public perception.

The study also investigated the language used to describe the Mizo people, the government, and the crisis itself, to uncover ideological representations and power relations. The research took into consideration how the Mizo people were

represented in national media, and whether they are depicted as passive victims or as active agents who resisted government policies and survived adversity. The study compared the narrative structures in national and local media coverage, hypothesising that national outlets may present the crisis within a state-centric, linear framework, while local media might offer more fragmented, community-focused perspectives. The analysis explored how these media representations reflect broader ideological goals, such as promoting national unity, legitimising government actions, and shaping public memory of the crisis.

To assess the coverage in national dailies, a critical discourse analysis was conducted on three newspapers, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Hindustan Times*, and the *Times of India*, covering the period from 1966 to 1970. The year 1966 was chosen as it marks the beginning of the *rambuai*, or the movement for independence. The years 1966 to 1970 were particularly significant for examining the tone and nature of the coverage of the PPV. The keywords that were entered were rambuai OR (Mizoram insurgency) OR (Mizoram village regrouping) OR (Mizoram famine) OR (Aizawl bombing) OR Laldenga OR (Mizo National Army) OR (Mizo nationalism) OR (Mizo secession) OR (Civil Unrest in Mizoram) with the date range being from 1/1/1966 – 31/12/1976.

For an assessment of coverage in local dailies, three newspapers, *Hmar Arsi*, *Mizo Arsi* and *Remna Palai* were analysed in a critical discourse analysis for the years 1967 to 1970. These three papers were chosen because they are the oldest editions of newspapers available in the Mizoram State Central Library. This period was chosen because it is central to the grouping scheme introduced by the government. The dates chosen were all the dates available on record, so an analysis was done on a total of 101, 149 and 94 publications.

1.10.4 Oral Histories

Oral history is fundamentally an act of memory, offering a subjective account of the past shaped by what the interviewee remembers, chooses to share, and how they interpret those experiences. It is not a casual conversation, but a structured and

intentional exchange aimed at eliciting a detailed, reflective narrative. Oral history interviews typically combine both topical and life history elements, allowing for a deeper exploration of lived experiences. What sets oral history apart from other interview methods is its open-ended, subjective, and historically grounded approach. Unlike journalistic interviews, which often extract specific quotes to support a predetermined narrative, oral history allows interviewees to shape the narrative themselves, contributing to a more nuanced and person-centred historical record. The integration of digital technologies has further transformed the field, offering new platforms and tools for collecting, preserving, and interpreting oral histories with greater depth and accessibility (Brinkmann, 2017). While the practice of gathering oral accounts dates back centuries, oral history was formally recognised as a methodological foundation for historical research in 1967, with the establishment of the Oral History Association in California. The Association emphasised that well-researched and archived personal interviews could serve as legitimate sources for historical inquiry and scholarly publication (Grele, 2007).

Indigenous societies, while having endured significant disruptions and losses to their systems of knowledge and ways of engaging with the world over the past 200 to 300 years, continue to exist as storytelling cultures. As the celebrated Nigerian author Chinua Achebe notes in his novel Things Fall Apart, “The transition from oral, spoken systems of interaction with the world into written forms is often a violent, imposed process. We should therefore acknowledge from the start that the documented versions of oral histories are removed from their multi-dimensional cultural context, and where the situated transfer of cultural significance takes place.” In regions like Mizoram, which are home to indigenous communities, oral history plays a crucial role in recording and preserving collective memory, especially since a written language was only introduced in the late 19th century (Mustonen, 2019).

Academic critiques often highlight the communal bias in Indigenous oral histories, suggesting that narratives from groups like the Sámi or the Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en First Nations may idealise the past or present cultural stereotypes. While some historical accounts, particularly from the Sámi, were at times humorous

or misleading, these responses can be seen as reactions to colonization and external scrutiny. Postcolonial scholars argue that meaningful collaboration with Indigenous cultural representatives is key to producing accurate and respectful interpretations. This requires context-sensitive approaches, such as Indigenous evaluation methods, which prioritise ethical dialogue and community involvement in the research process (Mustonen, 2019).

For this study, oral history was employed through in-depth interviews with individuals who were directly or indirectly involved in the conflicts under examination. These included not only those who participated in or witnessed the events but also observers and victims. By capturing personal narratives, this method aimed to explore how the media operated during the conflict and how it impacted public understanding. Oral history provided a means to access lived experiences and perspectives that are often missing from official records.

Interviews were conducted with –

a. Two senior journalists

b. Six survivors of forced relocation

c. Two former politicians

1.10.5 Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to, ensuring that all participants' rights and confidentiality were respected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement.

1.11 Tentative Chapterization

The entire study is divided and presented in seven chapters including introduction and conclusion.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Chapter 1, the researcher provides a comprehensive overview of the research topic, detailing its background and significance. This chapter articulated the research problem, outlining its relevance and the specific questions the study aims to address. It also delineated the scope of the study, specifying the methodology employed, including the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques.

Chapter 2: Discourses on Media Narratives of Conflict and the Reproduction of Racism in Media

In this chapter, the researcher provided a comprehensive literature review that explores several key themes, drawing on perspectives from subaltern studies to critically analyse the role of media in shaping perceptions of race and identity. By incorporating subaltern theory, the literature review highlighted how media narratives often overlook or distort the experiences of subjugated groups, shaping both public discourse and the broader societal understanding of these conflicts.

Chapter 3: The Conflict That Should Have Put Mizoram on the Media Map

This chapter focused on the bombing of Aizawl on March 5, 1966, a pivotal event during the Mizoram conflict, and examined how this incident was covered in national and international media. It explored the impact of media coverage on public perception and national discourse, specifically analysing the frequency, tone, and framing of news stories surrounding the bombing and the broader context of the Mizoram independence movement, known as the Rambuai.

Chapter 4: Village Groupings: Discrepancies Between Reports and Reality

The chapter delved into the complex dynamics of media coverage during the 1967 Relocation Crisis in Mizoram. It explored whether there are discrepancies between the portrayal of the crisis in national and local media. The chapter also examined how language and media narratives influenced public perceptions, highlighting the portrayal of the Mizo people, the role of the government, and the broader socio-political consequences of the relocation efforts.

Chapter 5: Oral Narratives of Race and Resistance in Conflict-Torn Mizoram

This chapter examines the oral narratives of race and resistance within the context of Mizoram's conflict-ridden history, particularly focusing on the forced displacement of communities under the Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV) scheme of 1967.

Chapter 6: Media and Ethnic Framing in the Assam-Mizoram Conflict

This chapter investigates whether the marginalization of media in the Northeast, particularly in Mizoram, has influenced local media's framing of the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border conflict.

Chapter 7: Findings and Conclusion

This chapter provides a discussion of the results in relation to the literature reviewed and the objectives outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It includes a summary of the key conclusions drawn from the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

DISCOURSES ON MEDIA NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT AND THE REPRODUCTION OF RACISM IN MEDIA

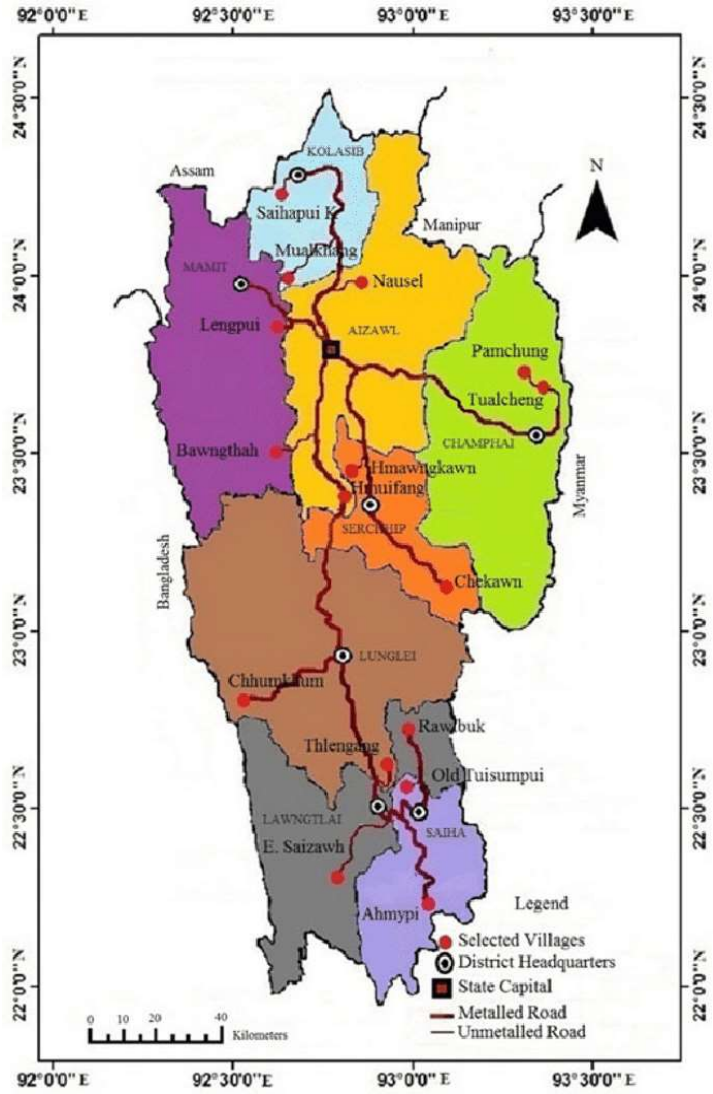


Figure 1. Map of Mizoram

What is now known as Mizoram today was a part of British India for around forty years from 1895. When India gained Independence, it became a hill district in Assam. It was elevated to the status of a Union Territory under the provisions of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. On August 5, 1986, a constitution amendment bill and another to confer statehood on Mizoram was passed in the Lok Sabha (Government of Mizoram, n.d.).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the key themes of this study, drawing on perspectives from subaltern studies and Van Dijk's theoretical perspectives on the reproduction of racism in media. Through various perspectives and examples, it highlights how media narratives often overlook or distort the experiences of subjugated groups, shaping both public discourse and the broader societal understanding of these conflicts.

This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature supporting the study's objectives. These include analysing national media coverage of the 1966 Aizawl bombing and the 1959 famine; comparing national and local media portrayals of Mizoram's forced relocations; examining how oral histories align with or challenge media narratives; and analysing coverage of the 2021 Assam–Mizoram border clash in the context of historical marginalisation. The literature discussed offers a foundation for understanding these events and the ideological frameworks shaping their representation.

2.2 Media and Nationalism

Before offering a comprehensive evaluation of media discourses and racial ideologies, it is important to understand how nationality and identity shape a person's sense of racial victimisation, how the feeling of belonging can be replaced by the experience of otherization.

The term "nation" originates from the Latin word "natio," which translates to "something born." Initially, it had a pejorative connotation in the Roman Empire, referring to foreign groups from the same geographic region whose social status was considered lower than that of Roman citizens. The concept of a "nation" encompasses both objective and subjective elements (Arslaner, 2022).

From a political science perspective, the modern state operates on a dual system: it aims to meet the demands of society while simultaneously seeking to dominate and regulate by observing societal behaviours. This perspective draws on the notion that

nationalism arises within this dual structure. Here, the principles of democracy, justice, and a democratically elected government legitimise the modern state and connect it with the nation. Consequently, nationalism stems from the feelings of loyalty, love, respect, and attachment that a nation develops toward a state grounded in this functional framework (Arslaner, 2022). In a democratic country like India, the citizens are likely expected to experience loyalty, love, respect and attachment. However, in the case of the Mizo people, which this study focuses on, many of these "nationalist sentiments" are absent due to various circumstances that will be outlined later in this chapter.

In his study on the Turkish social democratic movement pioneer Bülent Ecevit's nationalism, Konuralp (2013) also defines nationalism as a sentiment in which love for one's homeland and nation become intertwined. According to his observation, what one feels for one's homeland influences one's political and economic decisions.

While sentiments play a crucial role in building a sense of nationalism among the people, print capitalism has played a major role in evoking national consciousness among the masses. Anderson(2006) attributes three factors that propelled capitalism forward, a change in the character of Latin, the impact of the Reformation, and the spread of vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralisation. Two out of these, he said, contribute to the rise of national consciousness. Firstly, the impact of the Reformation was largely due to the success of print capitalism. Within 15 days, Martin Luther's theses were seen in every part of the country. This mass readership that reached every corner invoked a sense of national consciousness.

He argues that the introduction and growing popularity of administrative vernaculars can be regarded as an independent factor in the erosion of the· sacred imagined community. He says that new imagined communities emerged from a combination of capitalist production systems, the technology of print communication, and the inevitable diversity of human languages (Anderson, 2006).

Print communication connected people across languages. Speakers of the many varieties of French, English, or Spanish, who struggled to understand each other in conversation, became able to comprehend one another through print and paper. This process made them aware of the large number of people sharing their language and helped them realise that they were part of a larger group of hundreds of thousands or even millions. These fellow readers, linked through printed material, formed the early foundation of a nationally imagined community. Print capitalism established new languages of power that differed from the older administrative vernaculars (Anderson, 2006).

Anderson identified the link between nationalism and print media, saying that print media has revolutionised the state of belonging and the fight for one's "nation." A written script was only introduced to the Mizo people in March 1984. While they were under British rule, two missionaries, James Herbert Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, introduced the Roman script for the Mizo language(Lalthangliana,2005). The British upheld a divide-and-rule policy by empowering chiefs and encouraging division. But after chieftainship was subjugated and the Lushai Hills were annexed under India's Assam after its Independence, it may be said that a sense of unity was ignited by a shared struggle, which was further fuelled through pamphlets and vernacular newspapers. Meanwhile, limited access to communication with the rest of the country isolated the people. Poverty, famine and a sense of negligence during *rambuai,* or the period of trouble, added to this alienation.

As per the 1961 census of the Mizo Hill district, between 1959 to 1961, there was one college and only one high school in the entire district. The majority of the people interviewed for this study revealed that they had no access to newspapers outside of the district. The 1961 census report states, "Economically, the Mizo District is very poor, if not the poorest among the districts of the state." It was nearly impossible for the sentiments of a unified Indian nation, stirred by Gandhi's Dandi March and the post-nationalist fervour following Independence, to reach this isolated region of the country. The emotions that resonated with the people were shaped by their local vernaculars, which primarily focused on the struggles of the local populace.

Aloysius(2017) argues that Indian nationalism delivered a state but failed to create a nation, as it primarily served as an ideological vehicle for upper-caste hegemony. While Gandhi and other leaders were engaged in the fight against colonial rule, the tribes of the hills remained largely unaware of these movements, highlighting the exclusion of marginalised communities from the broader nationalist narrative.

2.3 Media Narratives of Conflict and Nationalist Agendas

Since the advent of the printing press, it has become evident that the media frequently constructs its narratives of conflicts, a process historically shaped by the individual wielding the typewriter and, in contemporary contexts, the keyboard. This process is, in turn, influenced by the prevailing hegemonic forces that shape the socio-political landscape.

The term 'conflict' has been given many definitions by different theorists over time. Bonta defined conflict as the incompatible needs, differing demands, contradictory wishes, opposing beliefs or diverging interests which produce interpersonal antagonism and, at times, hostile encounters (Bonta, 1996), while John Galtung defined conflict as a triadic construct consisting of three important factors, attitudes, behaviour and contradiction. According to Galtung, a conflict could start from one of the three points of the triangle. He also divides the conflict into direct and indirect conflicts. He believed that it would be necessary to keep communication channels open for the restoration of peace (Galtung, 1996).

Journalists and owners of media firms play a crucial role in framing conflicts and defining how they will be remembered in history. They hold a major responsibility as their reports of conflicts become historical sources. Researchers have argued that conflict news reporting may shape people's perceptions and understanding of the causes of conflict (Demarest & Langer, 2021).

Media coverage can have both positive and negative impacts on conflicts, and the ethical considerations of media coverage should be taken into account. There are potential positive effects of media coverage, such as promoting accountability and transparency, and negative effects, such as inciting violence and perpetuating

stereotypes (Waldron, 2005). Especially when the region covered is in a location that is remote to the media house's central location, reportage can often become dwarfed and lacking accountability. George Blainey (1966) wrote a book about the Tyranny of distance, which details how the remote location of Australia, especially from Great Britain, has shaped its history. Blainey explains how distance defined the history of the nation, both political and economic and says it served both as an advantage and a disadvantage. On one hand, it was protected from certain threats while on the other hand, it limited development (Blainey, 1983). Taking the Tyranny of Distance in the context of journalism, a journalist from Australia, Fiona Carruthers (2002), who worked for ABC Sydney, wrote in an article,

"Yet for journalists, it's difficult to view distance as anything

but a disadvantage. So often the themes of the times - from asylum seekers to talk of a

social justice package for the country's indigenous people - are played out in relative

isolation. The same Australian voices dominate and drive debates; while in- depth

discussion of how other countries handle similar issues is obscured by distance and

indifference. Even basic logistical issues like contacting talent in time zones up to 16

hours behind Australia affects our ability to position stories in an international context."

The tyranny of distance, while it can serve to be an advantage in the context of security and exposure to external threats, in the case of journalism, is more often a disadvantage.

Another valuable perspective to consider when it comes to media narratives is how media coverage contributes to the "imagining" of communities, shaping perceptions of national identity and potentially influencing conflicts within and between nations.

Taking points from Anderson's work once again (1983), his concept of the nation as an 'imagined' political entity, one that is inherently bounded and sovereign, illustrates how media shapes and drives its narratives. Media can often be used to instigate or promote nationalism within the 'imagined community,' to the point where the narratives of events, rather than representing the truth, serve to advance the nationalist agenda.

A significant example of the use of media to instigate nationalism can be taken of the German media, wherein the Jewish People were effectively portrayed as enemies that needed to be eliminated under Hitler's regime. It can be noted that in the early years of Adolf Hitler's regime, efforts were made to portray him as a family man through the use of media by framing the scene, lighting and architectural space. In the 1930s, Hitler had become renowned as a gentleman with good taste in home decor even though he had started acting out on his Nazi ideologies. (Hsu, 2015) The radio played an important role in the Nazi regime, a propaganda minister of the time even spoke of how their claim to power would not have been possible without the use of radio and aeroplanes. The state controlled the media content, thereby having a direct influence on the framing of messages and the intended effect on the public (Tworek, 2019).

Even in Russia, the media have often been accused of practising censorship, selecting news that favours the "nation" and the ideologies of those in power. The Kremlin, which is the executive branch of the Soviet Union, has been credited with influencing newspaper owners to produce content that is aimed at instigating ethnic notions and capable of controlling any intended discord among the public through the use of media. In a study, it was found that nationalist newspapers covered 26% of official causes, and the same amount covered ethnic tensions as the cause of conflict (Schenk, 2012).

What took place in Germany and Russia is a form of oppression in which the working class is ruled by the ideas of the ruling class, with the media used as an agent to fulfil their propaganda. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist philosopher, introduced the school of thought that, beyond the power of capitalism, people are

also ruled by the power and influence of ideas. According to him, the ideas of the ruling class defined the structure of the society for all, and their ideological beliefs, which were used as a tool to manipulate the masses, were what helped to keep them in power (Bates, 1975).

In the Rwandan conflict in 1992, the Chairman of Habyarimana's (MRND) party, Leon Mugesera, through a radio station, called for the Tutsis (an ethnic group of the African Great Lakes region) to be thrown into the Nyabarongo river, saying this would send them to their Ethiopian fatherland. The dead bodies were thrown into the river and swept into Lake Victoria. In situations like these, extremist media channels were made useful for propaganda and worsening conflicts. Messages of hate were passed not only through radio stations but also through newspapers against the Tutsis. Such implications were the results of the silence and inaction of journalists. Inaction and peace journalism cannot go hand in hand (Mogekwu, 2011). In the case of Pakistan, journalists were hesitant to report on the causes of conflict and the suffering of civilians due to the threat to their lives. In many situations, it is political leverage that often influences journalists to frame the report in a particular direction to influence the public to favour political agendas. In some cases, journalists avoid peace journalism due to security reasons. A study on the coverage of conflict reporting in Pakistan found that the Pakistani press framed the conflicts with India, Afghanistan and the Taliban to be high-security threats while conflicts with Balochistan and Karachi were shown to be posing moderate threats. When reporting on conflicts, they focused on the conflict and not on the causes of the conflict. Human rights abuses by the Taliban were ignored in the reports, while the brutal measures taken by the Taliban were highlighted (Hussain, 2019).

When it comes to conflicts, a substantial amount of research has been done by various scholars to study the coverage of the Gulf War and the role of media in framing the highly debated conflict from a particular angle. In 1992, when two researchers assessed the media representation of socio-political conflict with a focus on the Romanian Revolution and the Gulf War, they found that rapid technological developments had become a disadvantage. CNN’s on-site coverage with immediate

satellite links and access to broadcast materials became a tempting tool to broadcast news reports without verifying the significance and impact. CNN's firefighting coverage was seen to focus on the coverage, giving more importance to it as the news item than the event itself. (Shinar & Stoiciu, 1992). Twenty-seven years later, in 2019, research focusing on the Gulf War as its case study found that in 1990, journalists turned to officials from US military and intelligence sources as their source on the conflict and highlighted militaristic viewpoints and interests. Sources that could have suggested a diplomatic solution were neglected. The conflict was framed in a favourable view of the Bush administration to both the press and the public. (Kuosmanen, 2021).

While the inaction of journalists can have major implications, the choice of words, phrases and images used by journalists can provide contrasting portrayals of the same event and have a major impact on citizens' perceptions. Researchers attempting to understand the implications of media framing of civil liberties conflicts and their effect on tolerance studied a Ku Klux Klan rally. Comparing two coverages, they found that in one paper, the rally was framed as a free speech issue and in another, as an angry clash between two groups. Those who read the news report from a free speech perspective showed a higher tolerance towards the group, while those who read the report framing the incident as a hindrance to public order showed relatively less tolerance, as per the assessment (Nelson et al., 1997).

Likewise, the choice of language employed in media narratives concerning conflicts, as well as its portrayal of the individuals affected by these conflicts, holds the potential to wield substantial influence over a nation's populace. In February 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it led to 14 059 civil casualties. Five million Ukrainians were forced to seek asylum. A study carried out to compare how asylum seekers from Ukraine and Africa were covered in the international mediascape found that there was a stark contrast in how asylum seekers from the two countries were covered. In the case of Ukraine, the asylum seekers were shown in a pitiable light and a human-interest frame, while asylum seekers from Africa were shown in a security frame where they seemed to be a threat to

security. There was an attempt to invoke sympathy for the refugees from Ukraine while the African refugees were depicted as a threat to the destination countries (Iberi & Saddam, 2022).

Research on US media coverage of the Israel and Palestine conflicts showed that media framing was practised under the influence of US foreign policy and political interests. In May 2021, when a 12-day conflict arose between Israel and Palestine, it was found that CNN focused on the viewpoints of elite Israeli and US leaders and used language and images that focused on violence. The humanitarian and historical contexts were ignored (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023).

Some researchers have based their study on the angle of the Dan Rather Maxim. CBS news anchor Dan Rather had mentioned in an interview that during times of war, "journalism tends to follow the flag." (Jensen, 2005). After studying the coverage of Abu Ghraib and one year of drone warfare by The New York Times, Washington Post and USA Today, researchers found that the press adhered to the Dan Rather Maxim. Instead of providing room for coverage from the angle of human rights violations, the coverage was influenced by the press's national identity. (Major, 2017). A similar pattern could be seen in 2017 after four Arab nations, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut all diplomatic ties with Qatar. Researchers attempted to study the coverage of the diplomatic rift in the Middle East through an analysis of 80 English-language newspapers from 34 nations. The four countries had cut diplomatic ties, accusing Qatar of supporting terrorist organisations. The researchers found that newspapers and news agency headlines followed the lead of their national governments, suggesting a media-government alignment on crucial diplomatic relations. This was found to be a worrying factor as media in these countries would be publishing news aligning with their respective nations' point of view rather than from an independent investigation and report (John & Meruyert, 2018).

These kinds of power-play incidents in the media are not isolated, they make their mark across developed and developing nations as well. Take, for example, the tsunami, which for Sri Lanka became a basis for reporters to stir up sensational

reporting influenced by ethnic partiality. In a news report post-Tsunami, a Sinhala newspaper reported that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE), a group of non-state actors, were ransacking supplies without proof of the same. A media house announced the death of an LTTE supremo named Velupillai Prabhakaran, which turned out to be a false report, but no corrections were made on the same. Despite the disaster that had struck the country, the only focus of the country's papers was portraying a negative frame of the LTTE (Deshapriya, 2008).

And again in 2019, when six coordinated suicide attacks were carried out in historical churches and hotels in Sri Lanka's Colombo, leading to 235 deaths, the media were in a frenzy. Research on the role of civil repair played by two newspapers, the Daily Mirror from Sri Lanka and The Express Tribune from Pakistan, found that while the Daily Mirror failed to play the role of 'civil repair,' the latter newspaper, The Express Tribune, was able to find its footing. The Daily Mirror was seen to publish news using a specific lexis against all Muslims and Islam, thereby influencing the readers to form a certain perception towards the religion (Khan et al., 2021).

Taking India into account, despite the alleged involvement of the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the Gujarat riots in 2002, the media's portrayal of the conflict and political campaign is believed to have served as an advantage for Modi with support from RSS, the business community and Indian investors of media companies which started focusing on Modi's campaigns. Traditional mass media were combined with new media for an effective campaign strategy (Berglund, 2015).

Take, for example, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, research suggests that the media played a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing government policy in response to the attacks. The media's focus on the nationality of the attackers and the involvement of Pakistan exacerbated tensions between India and Pakistan and hindered efforts to establish peace between the two countries. The media's emphasis on the bravery of Indian security forces and the resilience of the Indian people may have contributed to a sense of nationalism and a desire for retaliation against the perpetrators of the attacks (Siddiqa & Ali, 2011).

Within India, taking a closer look at the media coverage of the Northeast states as this research focuses on Mizoram–one of the eight Northeastern states, these states are assigned a low status in the news agenda, and only one or two states are highlighted regularly while there is silence on the issues of the rest of the states. These states, which are geographically isolated from the national capital, Delhi, suffer the negative impact of the Tyranny of Distance.

When it comes to the Northeast states, issues of conflict are given a preference while other issues, such as crime, law and order and accidents, are neglected. An example can be taken of a hunger strike against corruption by Anna Hazare in 2011 which was covered by national and international news outlets while there was minimal coverage of Irom Sharmila of Manipur who was on a hunger strike for 16 years starting 2000 in a protest against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. A 34-day hunger strike in Sikkim by young Lepchas to protest the construction of dams also went largely unreported by the national media (Roy & Narula 2015).

In Manipur, when identifying how local media engaged with media frames in the coverage of the people's demand for Inner Line Permit(ILP) and subsequent protests by tribals, it was found that while media advanced the cause of the ILP, the media called for dialogues when it came to the protests of the tribals. Media houses not only framed the reports but also took an active part in the ethnic politics (Roluapuia, 2016). Representation in media texts can also go a long way in determining identity threats to minority communities. A study explored how ethnic minorities from the Northeast are represented in media texts, with a further focus on the issues of Khasi identity that are instrumental in the othering of non-Khasi/non-tribals. It found that the identity threat (real and symbolic) of the Khasi prods them to 'other' non-Khasi or non-tribals who are taking away their jobs, lands and even women and that the othering of non-tribals/non-Khasi is made possible due to the power, control and dominance exerted by the Khasis. (Korsi, 2020). It would be interesting to note that the first instance of state manipulation to suppress news took place before India attained freedom. The outside world did not get to know about the Naga National Council's declaration of Naga National Independence because the information was

not dispatched by the postmaster of the Kohima post office after following instructions from the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, Charles Pawsey. Due to the absence of a strong media during the insurgency in the Northeast, the central government had a free run to conduct full-scale army operations and impose undemocratic laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The media's indifference to the country's Northeast regions was proven by the absence of detailed reports on the horrific acts committed in the region (Samir, 2015).

On studying the media coverage of conflicts in Assam, a study found that the regional press provided four times more coverage of the conflicts in study compared to the national coverage. However, an analysis of three events over five years showed that while the coverage is skewed, events from the region are attracting more attention. A series of blasts in 2008 saw ten times the coverage of an incident in 2004, popularly known as the Dhemaji blast. However, the coverage had a negative tone, with the national media focusing on the conflict and the attribution of responsibility frames. It was only the regional press that focused on the human-interest frames (Syed, 2018). A study of conflict coverage of three states in Northeast India, Manipur, Assam and Nagaland concluded that newspapers played an important role in providing a platform for mediating conflicts between the various stakeholders involved, such as insurgent groups, governments and civil society organisations. While the reports gave space to conflict and peace angles, there were often attempts to emphasise and exaggerate the violence. It was further found that gender related issues were absent in 80% of the reports (Kabi & Nayak, 2019).

Donoghue(2020) analysed 763 issues of *Outlook*, *India Today*, and *The Week*, where she uncovered significant patterns in the representation, or lack thereof, of Northeast India (NE) in national media discourse. According to her findings, while state-sanctioned violence under laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) has been repeatedly enacted with impunity, these events do not significantly register on the national public conscience. Donoghue attributes this to a broader invisibility of the region in the symbolic realm of mainstream media. Without media visibility, she argues, the deaths, disappearances, and human rights

abuses in the NE tend to carry less moral or emotional weight for the wider Indian public.

Donoghue further notes that the omission of the Northeast extends beyond narrative content to include structural and institutional representation. From Hindi-language television serials to mainstream Bollywood cinema, the NE is rarely represented, and when it is, the portrayals are often superficial or stereotypical. Her study finds that this marginalisation is compounded by the underrepresentation of individuals from the NE in national newsrooms and senior editorial roles. This lack of diversity in decision-making positions results in limited attention to events in the region and, more importantly, a deficit in contextual understanding when such events are covered.

According to Donoghue, what is deemed newsworthy in the NE is often filtered through narrow and reductive frames, primarily focused on violence, conflict, and insurgency. These narratives are typically devoid of the region's complex historical, political, and social contexts. As a result, media representations flatten the diverse realities of the Northeast into homogenous, one-dimensional discourses, reinforcing long-standing stereotypes that frequently go unchallenged.

Her study also highlights the systemic barriers that hinder the Northeast's ability to generate and sustain its media content. Donoghue argues that economic marginalisation and the perceived lack of profitability have contributed to the neglect of the region's stories in national media. Consequently, audiences from the Northeast remain either invisible or severely misrepresented in the media content available to them, resulting in a profound disconnect between the lived experiences of these communities and their portrayal, or omission, in mainstream national narratives.

2.4 Theories on Media Discourse

This study employs a tripartite theoretical framework to interrogate the media representation of selected conflicts. First, it utilises Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the linguistic and ideological structures embedded in conflict reporting. Second, it draws on the Subaltern Studies framework, with

particular emphasis on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay Can the Subaltern Speak?, to examine the extent to which subaltern voices are represented or silenced within these narratives. Third, it applies Johan Galtung's peace journalism paradigm to evaluate its relevance and potential applicability in reshaping the coverage of the selected conflicts toward more constructive and peace-oriented discourse.

2.4.1 Van Dijk's Reproduction of Racism

Ideologies, as conceptualised by Van Dijk (1998), are fundamental to understanding how media discourse operates. He describes ideologies as the interface between the core properties of social groups, such as their interests and goals, and the shared social cognitions of their members. Ideologies are inherently group-based, fostering the 'Us' versus 'Them' dichotomy that forms the basis of discriminatory practices. The media, as a critical institution within the societal power structure, play a significant role in constructing and perpetuating these dichotomies. Van Dijk (2008) introduces the concept of the Ideological Square, which illustrates how power elites control the media to frame ethnic minorities within narratives of deviance, conflict, and negativity. This framing not only reinforces existing prejudices but also shapes broader societal attitudes that legitimise the marginalisation of minority groups.

The media's role extends beyond merely reflecting the interests of dominant groups; it is deeply embedded within the societal power structure. Van Dijk (2008) argues that the media serves as an integral component of this structure, achieving their influence through professional and ideological norms of "newsworthiness." These norms prioritise narratives that align with the interests of power elites, while simultaneously marginalising minority voices. The exclusion of minority groups from public communication spaces leaves them with limited avenues to counter prevailing narratives. When minority groups engage in resistance, their actions are often framed negatively, aligning with existing stereotypes of deviance and violence. This cycle perpetuates the social and institutional marginalisation of these groups, reinforcing the systemic barriers they face.

Central to this framework is the understanding that media representations significantly influence public discourse by shaping mental models of ethnic situations. Van Dijk (1991) notes that these mental models often generalise into negative attitude schemas, which underpin prejudices and discriminatory practices. In the absence of diverse and inclusive narratives, media representations become the primary source of information for audiences, shaping their perceptions and reinforcing societal biases. The dual exclusion faced by minorities, being both misrepresented and underrepresented, further exacerbates their marginalisation, as it limits their ability to challenge dominant narratives or assert alternative perspectives.

Van Dijk argues that the key aspect of news texts lies not in what is explicitly stated, but in what is left unsaid, and that the hidden ideological structures within news texts must be revealed. Building on this perspective, Van Dijk (1988) developed a critical discourse approach called the Socio-Cognitive Approach. In this framework, he identified four principles that facilitate a subtle ideological analysis to uncover ideological biases. These principles include highlighting positive aspects of "Us," emphasising negative aspects of "Them," downplaying negative aspects of "Us," and downplaying positive aspects of "Them."

In 2020, a researcher in Turkey studied the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic over 7 months, analysing two leading newspapers in the country, one pro-government and the other critical of the government, using Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis. The study found that newspapers with differing ideologies framed their reports in distinct ways, with the media lacking a neutral stance and presenting coverage that reflected their respective ideological perspectives (Burak, 2021).

A group of researchers in Iran also analysed newspapers using an analytic descriptive method, examining 80 news stories from top Iranian and American newspapers. They found that the frequency of Van Dijk’s strategies varied across news genres. These strategies were most frequently used in political news (3,110 instances) and least in science and technology news (360 instances). The researchers suggested that this difference is potentially related to the nature of the genres, with political news offering more opportunities to impose an intended ideology through Van Dijk’s

strategies, whereas the science and technology genre is more constrained in this regard (Keshvardoost et al., 2018). This study will also assess the vernacular and national coverage of a forced relocation in the area of study, Mizoram, using Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis.

2.4.2 From a Subaltern Perspective

Another lens through which coverage of news, especially of the minority or geographically distant locations, is covered is through a subaltern perspective. Gayatrai Spivak's (1994) 'Can the Subaltern Speak' has attracted a lot of attention for its throught provoking insight on the "politics of representation," questioning who speaks for whom and under what circumstances and how Western intellectuals often fail to adequately represent the experiences and perspectives of the subaltern, leading to a silencing of their voices. Some theorists have suggested that Gayatri Spivak pointed out the dangers of assuming it is simply a matter of allowing the subaltern (oppressed) groups to speak, without recognising that their essential subjectivity has been, and continues to be, constrained by the discourses that have constructed them as subaltern (Ashcroft et al., 1999).

Subaltern Studies entered the historiographical debate surrounding the representation of the culture and politics of marginalised groups. It criticised colonial, nationalist, and Marxist interpretations for stripping ordinary people of their agency, and proposed a new approach aimed at reclaiming history for the subordinated. Initiated by an editorial collective of six South Asian scholars based in Britain, India, and Australia, Subaltern Studies was influenced by Ranajit Guha. Guha, a prominent historian known for his earlier work A Rule of Property for Bengal, edited the first six volumes of Subaltern Studies(Guha, 1963). The term "subaltern," derived from Antonio Gramsci's writings, refers to subordination across various dimensions such as class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture. It was used to highlight the significance of dominant and dominated relationships in history. The attempt to recover the autonomy of the subaltern subject in Subaltern Studies closely mirrors the "history from below" approach used in Western social history, which emphasises the experiences of ordinary people rather than elite figures. However, the search for a

fully autonomous subaltern often led to the realisation of the limitations of subaltern agency. Acts of rebellion by subaltern groups were frequently short-lived and marked by failure, as these moments of defiance did not lead to lasting change. The desire to restore autonomy to subaltern groups was continually frustrated because, by definition, subalternity entailed the impossibility of true independence. As a result, subaltern resistance, while sometimes defiant, often only offered temporary glimpses of opposition, rather than lasting transformation (Prakash, 1994). Subaltern groups, oppressed by the proletariat and the majority elitist population, exhibit signs of defiance and resistance both in discourse and action. However, these efforts often result in only temporary movements, as they remain at the mercy of the dominant group. Ultimately, they are coerced into reaching agreements that, while seemingly benefiting the subaltern, primarily serve the interests of the dominant group.

The emergence of Subaltern Studies, said Chakraborty (2000), was part of a broader effort to connect historical analysis with the push for greater democracy in India. It sought to develop a non-elitist perspective on history, aligning closely with the "history from below" tradition found in English historiography, as seen in the works of Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson, E. J. Hobsbawm, and others. Both movements were rooted in Marxist thought and drew significantly from the ideas of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, aiming to move beyond rigid, deterministic interpretations of Marx associated with Stalinism...The stated goal of Subaltern Studies was to create historical narratives that positioned subaltern groups as active agents in history, rather than passive subjects.

There were a lot of peasant rebellions in British India between 1783 and 1900. But the elitist interpretations of these peasant uprisings often overlooked their deeper meaning, dismissing them as "pre-political" in nature. Anil Seal, a key figure in the Cambridge School of Indian History, for instance, characterised all nineteenth-century peasant revolts in colonial India as lacking "specific political content," describing them merely as traditional forms of unrest. Marxist perspectives, meanwhile, tended to interpret these uprisings as expressions of false consciousness or as "safety valves" that helped maintain the broader social structure. According to

Ranajit Guha, however, both these approaches missed a crucial point: at the core of every peasant rebellion was a deliberate effort to challenge and dismantle the symbols of social prestige and power held by the ruling classes. He argued that the essence of these insurgencies lay in a battle for dignity and recognition. Guha wrote, "It was this fight for prestige which was at the heart of insurgency. Inversion was its principal modality." In other words, these acts of rebellion were deeply political, as rebels sought to appropriate or destroy the emblems of their oppressors' authority in a bid to erase the markers of their subaltern status(Chakraborty, 2000). The same can be said of the uprisings in post-Independent India, where the smaller communities annexed in the country staged rebellions against their subaltern status.

2.4.3 Johan Galtung's Peace Journalism Theory

To write on peace journalism, one would have to start with Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, who is commonly known as the father of peace studies. In his article Peace Journalism and Reporting on the United States, Johan writes:

"Journalism's role is not only to report on the world, but also to make key actors, states, capital, people, transparent to each other. The role of peace journalism is to identify forces and counterforces for and against peace and to make them and their dialectic visible, creating outcomes that could be potential solutions."

According to Galtung(2002), war journalism is characterised by four key features: it is predominantly focused on violence and conflict; it is heavily shaped by propaganda; it privileges the perspectives of elites; and it adopts a zero-sum framework in which one party's victory necessarily entails the total defeat of the other. Unlike war journalism, which often centres on violence and elite perspectives, peace-oriented journalism emphasises accuracy and prioritises the voices of those most affected by conflict. It views peace not as a one-sided victory but as a process in which all stakeholders can achieve mutual benefit. This approach requires journalists to adopt a more interpretative lens, one that highlights efforts toward peacebuilding, downplays divisive narratives based on ethnicity or religion,

anticipates potential future tensions, and examines the deeper structural factors contributing to conflict. Ultimately, it seeks to support conflict resolution, social repair, and long-term reconciliation(Galtung 1997,1998).

It is often found that there is a disconnect between the theory of peace journalism and its application in newsrooms. For example, a study conducted in Kenya analysed 257 media articles, of which 61% focused on election-related violence, while 39% addressed the Dusit attack. The vast majority of the content (76.6%) consisted of standard news reports, with the remainder comprising 28 feature stories, 27 opinion pieces, three editorials, and two articles categorized as "other,"including a journalistic self-analysis and a historical overview. Across international media platforms, both events received comparable levels of attention. Domestically, The Daily Nation provided more extensive coverage than The Standard for both incidents.

The study revealed that war journalism (WJ) was the predominant framing, accounting for 50.2% of the sample. The remaining coverage was distributed among peace journalism (PJ) at 16.7%, mixed approaches at 23.7%, and articles with no clear frame at 9.3%. A critical insight from the research was the evident disconnect between the theoretical framework of peace journalism and its actual implementation in newsrooms. By combining content analysis with interviews of the journalists responsible for the coverage, the study uncovered both the structural influences on journalistic output and the attitudes shaping individual reporting choices.

A recurring theme in the interviews was scepticism toward peace journalism. Many practitioners expressed concern that PJ conflicts with traditional journalistic norms, particularly the emphasis on presenting events as starkly and directly as possible (Arregui, Thomas, & Kilby, 2020).

2.5 The History of Mizoram: Narratives of Conflict and Transformation

The Lushais were colonized by the British for 52 years from 1895 to 1947. During this time, they were ruled under a dictatorial regime with no political or civic rights. When India became Independent with the Union and state governments reorganising,

for five years it was under an Advisory Council appointed by the Governor. It became a district council in 1952 and stayed that way till 1972 when it became a Union Territory. It became a state in 1987 (*Government of Mizoram, n.d.).*

When India became an Independent nation, Manipur and Tripura were princely states while the rest of the northeastern region fell under the state of Assam. In the year 1972, Mizoram was carved out as a union territory. After 15 years, in the year 1987, Mizoram became the 23rd state of India.

A study revealed that as the Mizos shifted from oral traditions to print culture, they cultivated a unique print identity that defined a distinct Mizo identity… This vision enabled the people of Mizoram to develop a sense of national consciousness, arising when languages and cultures converge to visually represent a community through print. The technologies of writing and printing played a vital role in building a strong foundation for the formation of a 'tribal' identity among the Mizo people (Lalrintluangi, 2015).

It is essential to examine how this Mizo identity was represented in both local and national media during times of conflict, particularly in the 1967 relocation crisis. The portrayal of the Mizo people in the media during this turbulent period reflects broader socio-political dynamics and can provide insights into how their struggles and aspirations were communicated to a wider audience. Analysing this representation allows for a better understanding of the narratives constructed around Mizo identity and how these narratives interact with the lived experiences of the community.

The Mizo people have a fragmented historical record. Their only documented history is the oral tradition of their emergence from the cave of Chhinlung/Sinlung, a narrative passed down through generations. Much of what is known about Mizoram’s history comes from British colonial records. The British established the Aijal Garrison on February 15, 1890, marking the beginning of their occupation of the Lushai Hills. However, a formal declaration was only made in 1895. This British

rule persisted until 1947, when India gained independence, a period spanning over fifty years *(Government of Mizoram, n.d.)*.

Resistance against the oppressive rule of local chiefs had begun even before independence, taking a formal political shape with the formation of the Mizo Union (MU) on April 9, 1946. The MU aimed to challenge the chiefs' authority and sought autonomy in matters related to land, customary laws, culture, and the recognition of Mizo dialects. In response, the interim Indian government established the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee in 1947, led by Assam Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi. The Committee recommended the creation of District Councils, which eventually granted Autonomous District Council status to the Lushai Hills under Article 244(2) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (Hluna, 2025).

However, the Mizo conflict escalated with the bamboo flowering of 1959, which led to a rodent infestation that devastated cash crops and triggered a severe famine. Both the Assam State and Union Governments failed to provide adequate relief. The repeated cautionary messages about the famine, based on indigenous knowledge concerning the bamboo flowering that occurs every fifty years and causes widespread famine, were dismissed as heresy. This prompted Laldenga, a former Indian Army soldier, to establish the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF). The MNFF attempted to provide relief through local efforts, however, the impact of the famine was felt in every corner of the Lushai hills. On October 22, 1961, Laldenga transformed the MNFF into the Mizo National Front (MNF), spearheading an Independence Movement that advocated for complete independence from India. On February 28, 1966, the MNF's armed wing, the Mizo National Army (MNA), captured eleven towns in the Mizo Hills and declared independence on March 1, 1966. The armed struggle for Independence continued for twenty years till June 30, 1986 when a Peace Accord was signed by representatives from the Mizo National Front and the Government of India (Hluna, 2025). On February 20, 1987, Mizoram became the 23rd state of India.

In the 20 years of *rambuai*, two events are particularly memorable to the Mizo people: March 5, 1966, when Mizoram experienced its first bombing by India, a fact

that remains unacknowledged by the Indian government, and the "khawkhawm" or grouping scheme. Hluna (2012) writes that he saw the fighter planes at around 10 am on March 5th as they bombarded Aizawl. Only 13 people died as most of the ten thousand residents had fled the town when tensions arose between the MNF and Indian security forces. However, the bombs hit houses, schools, churches and hospitals. The IAF fighters also bombed Khawzawl on March 6, Hnahlan on March 7, Sangau on March 8, Tlabung on March 9, Pukpui on March 13 and Bunghmun on March 23 (Hluna, 2025).

The grouping scheme, initiated on January 3, 1967, involved relocating 80% of the population into "protected and progressive villages" (PPVs), reminiscent of concentration camps. This scheme, based on similar strategies in Southeast Asia, was executed in four phases due to a lack of troops and was partially interrupted by stay orders from the Gauhati High Court. Despite its origins in Malaya and Vietnam, where similar programs had failed, the grouping aimed to serve as both a counter-insurgency measure and a development initiative. The scheme grouped together 2,36,162 people in 104 centers, while 36,431 people remained in unaffected villages (Nunthara, 1989).

Although the Mizo National Front had to retreat from its pursuit of an independent nation, the attainment of statehood largely provided the people with a sense of belonging and a region they could call their own, governed by representatives they elected. However, the inkling of nationalism that had been spearheaded by the MNF continues to resurface on any conflict with the government of India.

The most tumultuous years in Mizoram’s history took place during the years when it was a district council from the year 1952 to 1972.

Despite these pleas, the Assam government, under Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha, disregarded the district council’s concerns. The famine began in early 1958 near the Tuirini River, and by 1959 it had spread throughout the Mizo hills, yet the government still did not officially recognize it, preventing sanctioned relief due to bureaucratic regulations (Nag, 2008). “While the government slept over the files, rats

were busy devouring foodstuff. It destroyed rice stocks virtually overnight" (Nag, 2008).

In desperation, the Mizo Union sent an SOS and dispatched a delegation to the plains for expert advice. In response, the Assam government sent an entomologist who briefly camped in Aizawl but found no evidence linking the surge in rat populations to the flowering bamboo groves. The chief executive member called for an urgent rice supply, but the Assam administration failed to grasp the severity of the situation. Traditional responses like fire torches, screams, and bait were temporary, as rats ravaged twenty acres in a single night. By custom, Mizo tribals reserved jungle yams and roots for true emergencies; Assam's continued silence left them feeling deeply frustrated and abandoned (Nag, 2008).

The Mizo National Famine Front, initially established to provide famine relief, transformed into a political movement due to the hardships caused by the famine. On October 22, 1961, the organization dropped "famine" from its name and rebranded itself as the Mizo National Front (MNF). Under the leadership of Laldenga, a former soldier and District Council clerk, the MNF aimed for an independent sovereign Mizoram. This struggle continued for twenty years until a Peace Accord was signed on June 30, 1986 (Lalzarmawii, 2008).

According to Sajal Nag (2008), Mizo elders, recalling the *mautam* famine that historically occurred every fifty years, anticipated a similar crisis and proactively sought relief from the Assam government. On October 20, 1958, the Mizo Union, the first political party in Mizoram and the ruling party in the district council, passed a unanimous resolution stating, "With the flowering of bamboos in the Mizo district, rat population has enormously increased, and it is feared that in the next year, 1959, the whole district would be affected." They urged the Assam government to sanction Rs. 15 lakhs to the Mizo District Council for famine prevention measures across the Mizo district, including the Pawi-Lakher region (Nag, 2008).

Mizo culture was historically untouched by rebellion or insurgency; these ideas only entered the conversation following the 1966 emergency. The influence of the Indian

government’s colonial legacy is so pervasive that even former fighters of the movement still refer to it as an insurgency. Since that emergency, a generation has grown up bearing an inherited trauma, an accumulation of unacknowledged experiences that has left them hesitant and unwilling to fully embrace this new phase of nationalism (Malsawmkima, 2015).

In these twenty years, what had the most detrimental impact on the people was a government initiative to consolidate the villages, supposedly for security and protection reasons. In 1967, an order on grouping in Mizoram, enacted under the Defence of India Rules, was published. It stated, “All buildings except places of worship and all movable and immovable properties situated or left behind in those areas shall ... be destroyed or rendered useless before 11.1.1967(Nunthara, 1989)."

The period between 1966 and 1967 marked one of the darkest chapters in the history of Mizoram. During these years, the mortality rate escalated daily due to severe scarcity, widespread malnutrition, and the lack of adequate healthcare facilities. Access to hospitals and dispensaries was extremely limited, as curfews were enforced almost daily, from dawn to dusk, making it difficult for medical professionals to reach those in need (Rosanga, 2008). Moreover, the military's actions, including the burning of villages suspected of sheltering MNF (Mizo National Front) volunteers, exacerbated the crisis.

H.K. Bawihchhuaka, the Chief Executive Member of the Mizo Hills District, reported in the District Council Assembly in December 1967 that "eighty-five villages were burnt down" (Rosanga, 2008). Following this, additional villages were set on fire, leading to an estimated total of around 120 villages destroyed by the army. S. R. Zamawia noted that the regrouped villages were referred to by freedom fighters as "concentration camps" (Rosanga, 2008). The elderly and children suffered the most in these camps, with many perishing due to the harsh conditions. As Rev. Chhangte Lal Hminga described, the process of regrouping was both humiliating and demoralizing, and the death toll among the elderly during this period was alarmingly high (Rosanga, 2008).

This last expedition marked the establishment of the Aijal Garrison on February 15th, 1890, on the site selected by Mr Daly and described by him as “a good place for a permanent post” (Verghese & Thanzawna, Vol. 1. 286). This was also the year that officially marked British occupation of the Lushai Hills for the next half of the new century until 1947, the year of Indian Independence from British rule.

2.5.1 Borderline skirmishes

The states of Mizoram and Assam which share a 165 km long boundary have seen frequent boundary disputes since the British era. The two states are located in the Northeastern corner of India. According to the 2011 census, the state of Assam has a population of 31,169,272 while the state of Mizoram has a population of 1,091, 014. The border districts in Assam are Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, in Mizoram the border districts are Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit.

Borderlines drawn differently on two separate occasions have been cited to be the root cause of the border skirmishes. The Mizoram government accepts the border as drawn by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, a law restricting entry to certain border regions to certain groups, by the British in consultation with Mizo chiefs. However, the state of Assam and the union government followed later border lines drawn in 1933. The Mizoram government has stated that it was not consulted on the drawing of the second border and thereby, only accepts the demarcation of the first map. As per the 1873 regulation, Mizoram has a claim over 509 square miles of the inner line reserved forest area. However, the state of Assam which accepts the 1933 regulation strongly disagrees with the claim. Historians have blamed the British for drawing maps out of their vested interests in tea cultivation without consulting any sides of the party (Colney, 2021). Several dialogues involving the Centre held since 1995 to resolve the dispute have yielded little result.

2.6 Research Gap

Despite the historical and socio-political significance of events such as the 1966 Aizawl bombing, the 1959 famine, the forced relocations during the counterinsurgency period, and the more recent 2021 Assam-Mizoram border clash,

scholarly engagement with these incidents through the lens of media representation remains limited. Notably, there exists a significant gap in academic literature concerning a comprehensive analysis of media coverage, both national and local, of the forced relocation of Mizo communities. No study to date has critically examined how national and local media narratives diverged in their portrayal of these relocations, nor how such representations may reflect deeper ideological biases or power structures, particularly those rooted in racial or ethnic hierarchies.

Moreover, there has been little to no systematic documentation of oral histories related to the forced relocation experience. The absence of these first-hand narratives from scholarly discourse not only marginalises subaltern voices but also hinders a fuller understanding of the lived realities that challenge or complicate dominant media accounts. While one small-scale study has touched upon the media coverage of the 1966 Aizawl bombing, there remains no in-depth, comparative analysis that situates this event within broader discourses of media omission, racialised representation, and state power.

This study aims to address these critical lacunae by examining how national and local media constructed narratives around key historical and contemporary conflicts in Mizoram, and by incorporating oral histories to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of these representations.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONFLICT THAT SHOULD HAVE PUT MIZORAM ON THE MEDIA MAP

3.1 Introduction

To put the three together, rats, bamboo, and famine, might seem quite odd, but in 1959, the tribesmen of the Lushai Hills experienced the deadly impact of bamboo flowering and the havoc caused by a humongous rat population. It had been just twelve years since the Lushai Hills became a part of India and a district under Assam. The cyclical pattern of bamboo flowering, known as *mautam* among the tribesmen, was an indigenous knowledge passed down through their forefathers. However, their knowledge was dismissed as superstition, which led to the start of the chaos that would ensue for twenty years, coming to be known as *rambuai* (troubled land).

3.2 The Dreaded Mautam Famine

The Mautam famine occurred every fifty years, a pattern the tribesmen recognized after years of living in the mountainous region. The first recorded Mautam famine occurred in 1861. During this period, various diseases broke out, and the population was compelled to subsist on wild yams and the cores of wild banana trees. Documentation regarding this initial Mautam famine is limited, as it has been transmitted primarily through oral accounts passed down through generations. The second Mautam famine, which took place in 1911, was characterized by the death of bamboo and trees, with rats devastating the paddy fields. At that time, the Lushai Hills had a population of 91,024 and was under British colonial rule. In an effort to control the rat population, the British government offered rewards to individuals who brought in rat tails. By March 31, 1913, approximately 179,015 rat tails had been submitted, and the government disbursed a total of Rs. 1,532 in rewards. Rice was distributed to the people on loan, but many were unable to repay these loans, ultimately becoming subject to forced labor. This crisis also prompted large-scale

migration, with many individuals relocating to Tripura and Assam(Lalthangliana, 2005). The third Mautam famine occurred in 1959, by which time the Lushai Hills had become a district under the jurisdiction of Assam in the newly independent Indian state.

Determined to prepare for it, they decided to alert the Assam government in advance to help alleviate the suffering of the people.

So, on October 20, 1958, the Mizo Union which was first political party in the Mizo District and the ruling party in the district council decided to pass a resolution. They said, “With the flowering of bamboos in the Mizo district, rat population has enormously increased and it is feared that in the next year, 1959, the whole district would be affected. As a precautionary measure against the imminence of famine, following the flowering of bamboos, the district council feels that the government be moved to sanction to the Mizo district council a sum of Rupees 15 lakhs to be expended on test relief measures for the whole of the Mizo district including the Pawi-Lakher region” (Nag, 2008).

There were two times the Assam government would ignore the plea of the Mizo Union that would change the face of the history of the Mizos, and this was the first one.

When the Assam government led by Chief Minister Chaliha was notified of the impending famine, his administration decided to send an entomologist who came to Aizawl and stayed for a few nights. His final report was that there was no evidence that could connect the flowering of the bamboo groves to a rat population increase. As a result, the pleas of the district was ignored as a tribal superstition.

But the rats proved the diagnosis wrong when in early 1958, areas close to the Tuirini river, started becoming infested with rats. By 1959 the rodent population had taken over the rest of the Mizo hills and the crops were plundered.

Nag(2008) writes in his book that the people tried to quell the situation and drive away the rodents with their own measures. They lit up fire torches, sometimes they

took to screaming and also resorted to putting up baits. However, these futile attempts by the civilians were insufficient against an army of rodents. A preplanned intervention by the state and union governments was necessary to trap the rodents and provide relief to the famine-struck community. The rats devoured twenty acres of crops in a single night, however, relief could not be sanctioned until the government officially recognized the famine. In these hills, the people rely on the land for their food, as they are deeply connected to it. There were no markets selling vegetables; they were plucked directly from the fields. But the rodents consumed everything above ground, forcing the people to dig for jungle yams and roots to survive. The first form of relief came in 1960, one year after the famine destroyed the crops and devastated the community.

Seeing no other option for relief, the locals decided to take the matter into their own hands. A group of Mizo intellectuals had formed an organisation, Mizo Cultural Society with an intent to promote and preserve the customs and traditions of the Mizo society and polity in 1958(Zarzosanga, 2016). Just one year later, the name of the Mizo Cultural Society was changed to Mizo National Famine Front with an aim to provide relief to the people.

In the year 1961, the Mizo National Front was born, this time, as the name suggested, the organisation members were no longer concentrated on providing relief to the people. They decided that they had had enough of the Indian government and would take matters into their own hands by demanding a separate state from the Indian Union. Zarzosanga(2016) looked into the transition of the Mizo Cultural Society to the Mizo National Front in his study on the strands of nationalism. He found that the root of ethnic nationalism that was propagated by the Mizo National Front had been sown long before the famine. It had been sown under the rule of the British and the Mizo chiefs and, had an intent to protect the people from cultural invasion.

Anderson (1983) posits that print culture plays a central role in shaping the idea of a nation. In the case of Mizoram, however, it was hunger that became a driving force for unity, a shared struggle against famine and neglect. While the Mizo National Front may not have had widespread support for secession from India prior to the

Mautam, the aftermath of the famine provided it with a stronger foundation and steady momentum.

R. Zamawia and Zoramthanga, both MNF freedom fighters, have highlighted the strategic intent behind the MNF's independence movement in their books. Zamawia explained that the armed rebellion was not meant for a prolonged conflict but to draw the Indian Government's attention after failed diplomatic efforts and bring them to the negotiating table. Similarly, Zoramthanga reiterated that the MNF's ultimate goal was always to achieve the highest political autonomy for the Mizo people, with the independence movement serving as a tactic to push for a diplomatic settlement (Zarzosanga, 2016).

The second plea of the Mizo Union ignored by the Assam government was of the rising power of the MNF's leader, Laldenga, and the simmering secessionist movement.

On February 28, 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF) launched its first attack, named "Operation Jericho," and declared independence on March 1, 1966. In response, the Indian government retaliated, not with a simple military presence or gunfire, but with the first aerial bombardment of its own citizens, an unprecedented attack on Aizawl that had never occurred before and has not been repeated since. This brutal assault shocked the people, but it did not quell the movement.

On March 11, Laldenga wrote to Chaliha after failing to contact him by wireless. He condemned the strafing by the Indian Army and highlighted that it had not spared hospitals, churches, or civil jails. He lamented how someone who had been a member of the peace mission in Nagaland could ever sanction such an order.

After twenty years of a movement for Independence led by Laldenga, at 9:15pm in 1986, Laldenga and a representative of the Indian government signed a document establishing peace in the region. In 1987, Mizoram became the 26th state of India (Lalchungnunga, 1994).

This chapter employs Teun A. Van Dijk's theory of race and racism in media to critically analyze newspaper coverage of the Mautam famine and the strafing of Aizawl in March 1966. It examines the titles and language used in these reports to uncover the tone of narratives and biases. Additionally, it explores international media representations of the secessionist movement using newspaper archives available through Google News Archive.

3.3 The International Tone

On August 1, 1979, a news report titled '*India claims armed guerrillas invading from China*' was published in *Lakeland Ledger*, a daily newspaper from Lakeland in Florida. The title uses the word guerrilla to refer to the Mizo freedom fighters, and the report details how police seized documents from a group of armed Mizo "guerrillas" who were accused of plotting to kill top officials or take them hostage to bargain for the release of Laldenga. The news relates the Mizo freedom fighters to China and does not specify the reason for their movement, while focusing on its tactics of trying to "kill" top officials for the release of their leader.

On January 14, 1975, the *Glasgow Herald* published a news report saying, "*Indian Police Chiefs Killed*," which details how three police officers were shot dead by Mizo 'guerrillas.'

In *The Montreal Gazette* on June 23, 1980, a report says, "*New Ethnic Rioting in India*," and talks about how Mizoram rebels killed four soldiers and injured 22. At the Sarasota Herald-Tribune on April 2, 1980, a news report titled, '*Indian Army Alerted as Assam Presses Seperatism*," was published. It also details how the government was restricting free movement of the press, saying, "The situation is so unsettled in the northeast that the Indian government refuses to allow foreign correspondents to visit there."

On November 24, 1979, a news report titled "*India Gripped in Unrest*" was published in the *Gadsden Times*, detailing how unrest in Mizoram erupted following the arrest of rebel leader Laldenga in July 1979. The report highlights the continuation of violence that had begun in 1966 and flared again in July.

On June 21, 1979, *The Hour* published a report titled "*India tells police to shoot on sight*," in which the Indian government ordered police to shoot on sight to control the fourth consecutive day of mob violence between tribespeople and townspeople in Aizawl.

On August 16, 1979, the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* reported that two Mizo rebels, Lalsangliana Sialo and Biakchunga, surrendered, and a grant of $125 was offered to those who followed suit. On June 17, 1979, the *Lakeland Ledger* reported that *Mizo tribesmen killed Indian district officer* R.K. Choudhury, leaving behind a manifesto demanding that all non-Mizo residents leave the 8143 square mile territory.

3.4 Representation of the March 1966 Bombing in Leading Indian Newspapers

A purposive sampling was conducted over a 15-day period from March 1 to 15, 1966, to examine the coverage of the bombing of Aizawl and its surrounding areas, including its pre-incident and post-incident reporting. Another 12-day sampling from the year 1959 was carried out to analyze the coverage of the Mautam Famine. These assessments were based on reports from three newspapers: *The Times of India*, *The Statesman*, and *The Telegraph.*

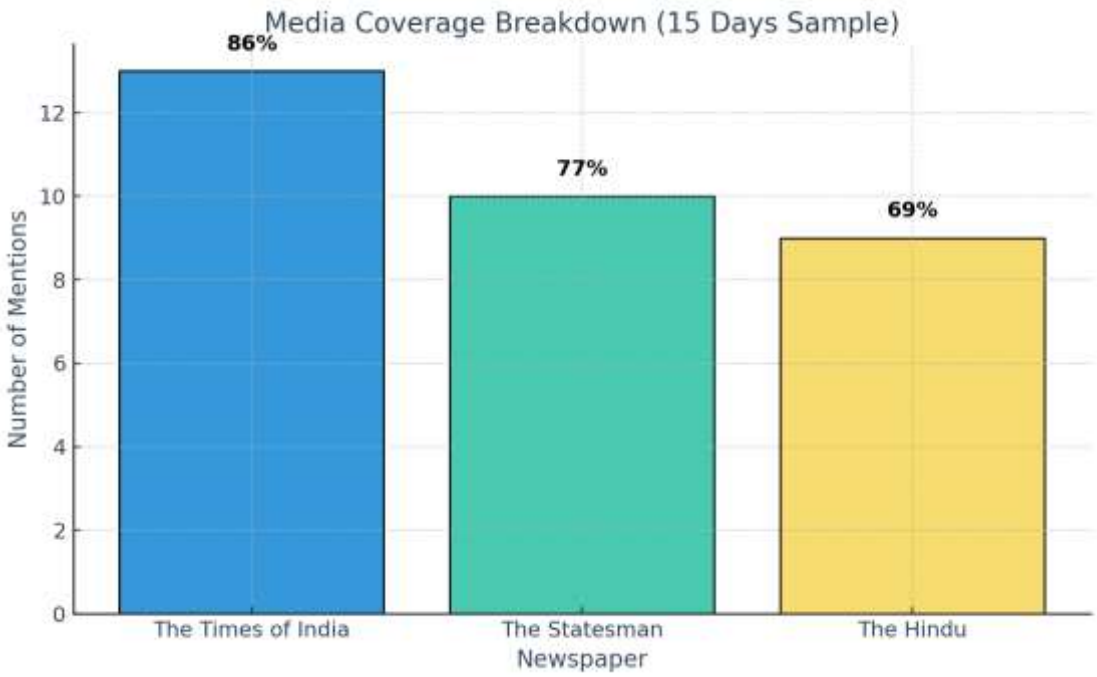


Figure **2: Frequency distribution of stories mentioning the MNF movement in the newspapers**

Table 1: Placement of news stories

Newspaper	**Page 1**		**Page 2**		**Others**	
The Hindu	**8**	**80%**	**0**	**0%**	**2**	**20%**
Statesman	**9**	**69%**	**0**	**0%**	**4**	**30.7%**
Times of India	**6**	**46%**	**0**	**0%**	**7**	**53.8%**

Table 2: Frequency of news themes

Themes	**The Hindu (9)**	**Statesman(10)**	**Times of India(13)**
Rebel Framing	7(77.7%)	6(60%)	4(30.7%)
Humanitarian Aspect	0	0	0
Political Elements	3(33.33%)	3(30%)	1(7.6%)
Military Power	7(77.7%)	2(20%)	7(54%)

Table 3: Tone of News Headlines in The Hindu

Date	Headline	Keywords	Remarks	Racial Framing / Racist Elements
March 3, 1966	MNF terrorists paralyse Mizo administration	Terrorists, paralysed, weapons	No mention of the demand for sovereignty	Framing Mizo resistance as terrorism
March 4, 1966	Army sent to put down Mizo Violence	Violence, rebels, extremists	Leniency with Nagas cited; arms from Pakistan	Portraying Mizo violence as extreme actions
March 5, 1966	Troops to go into action in Mizo district	Troops, action	Minimal details provided in the text	Lack of direct reference to the Mizo issue
March 6, 1966	Heavy firing in Aijal: 20 Mizos killed	Heavy firing, killed, secessionist	Security forces highlighted, civilian impact absent	Focus on military actions, not on civilian suffering
March 7, 1966	Army continues march on Aijal	Army, freed civilians	Sub-column mentions PM visiting Assam	No mention of Mizo civilians' perspective
March 8, 1966	Besieged Aijal freed by Army units	Freed, rebel resistance collapses	IAF support highlighted	Framing Mizo resistance as a threat to be defeated
March 9, 1966	Aijal returning to normal	Returning to normal	Suggests resolution of conflict	Implies Mizo resistance is the cause of disruption
March 10, 1966	Mizo rebels suffer heavy casualties	Rebels, heavy casualties	Focus on losses among rebels	Negative portrayal of the Mizo rebels
March 15, 1966	Aijal returns to normal	Returns to normal	Highlights post-conflict recovery	Ignores Mizo cultural or community implications
March 15, 1966	Letters to editor: Deep laid plot behind uprising	Plot, uprising	Opinion-based framing	Framing Mizo resistance as part of a larger conspiracy

Figure 3: The Hindu newspaper from 1966

Table 4: Tone of News Headlines in Statesman

Date	Headline	Keywords	Remarks	Racial Framing / Racist Elements
March 2, 1966	Midnight raid by 10,000 Mizos: Treasuries looted and officials kidnapped	Raid, looted, kidnapped	Focus on the scale of violence and loss	Framing Mizos as violent "others"
March 3, 1966	Mizo rebels to be dealt with sternly	Rebels, stern	Mention of heavy response expected	Dehumanizing portrayal of rebels
March 3, 1966	Reinforcements sent to Aijal; Lungleh safe	Reinforcements, safe	Focus on military movements	Portrays Mizos as a threat requiring response
March 4, 1966	Troops moved to Aijal	Troops, moved	Details on troop deployment	Military framing of Mizo resistance
March	Aijal still besieged	Besieged, losing	Portraying dire	Mizo resistance

5, 1966	**by rebels; Mizo Union losing support**	**support**	**situation, loss of support**	**framed as insurgent threat**
March 6, 1966	**Large parts of Aijal and Lunglei held by rebels; MNF has betrayed our trust**	**Held, rebels, betrayed**	**Loss of trust and control in the area**	**Negative framing of MNF as a betraying group**
March 7, 1966	**MNF declared illegal**	**MNF, illegal**	**Political response to the rebellion**	**Racialized labeling of group as illegal**
March 9, 1966	**Aizawl returns to normal; Political rehabilitation may not be easy**	**Returns to normal, political rehabilitation**	**Resumption of order with political challenges**	**Exclusion of Mizo voices in political solution**
March 10, 1966	**Poverty and anger behind Mizo rebellion; Troops halfway to Lunglei**	**Poverty, rebellion**	**Focus on the root causes of rebellion**	**Poverty framed as contributing to violent revolt**
March 12, 1966	**Army visit waring Lungleh; Brit nationals in Mizo hills**	**Army visit, nationals**	**International angle with military involvement**	**Framing Mizos as needing external military intervention**
March 14, 1966	**Mizo district council to function again**	**Council, function**	**Restoration of local governance**	**Mizo agency in governance overlooked**
March 15, 1966	**Autonomous body for Mizo hills; Few women now in Aijal**	**Autonomous body, women**	**Shift in political power and demographic change**	**Recognition of political change without addressing underlying tensions**

Figure 4: The Statesman newspaper from 1966

Table 5: Tone of News Headlines in Times of India

Date	Headline	Keywords	Remarks	Racial Framing / Racist Elements
March 2, 1966	Treasury is looted- post taken	Looted, post taken	Focus on looting and military action	Focus on criminality, no mention of the political context
March 3, 1966	Stern action to be taken against Mizo hostiles	Stern action, hostiles	Emphasis on strong military response	Framing Mizo resistance as a threat
March 4, 1966	Copters ferry Assam Rifles men to Aijal	Copters, Assam Rifles	Government blamed for the unrest	Framing Mizo actions as hostile, blame on the Assam government
March 5, 1966	Mizo rebels disrupt water supply to town	Rebels, disrupt, water supply	Focus on Mizo rebels affecting civilians	Portraying Mizo actions as harmful to the local population
March 6, 1966	Aijal holds on as army mars town	Aijal, army, mars town	Military presence in town highlighted	Highlighting military force over Mizo autonomy

March 7, 1966	**Army columns enter Aijal**	**Army, Aijal**	**Army presence escalating**	**Framing Mizo actions as rebellion to be controlled**
March 8, 1966	**Life returns to normal at Aijal**	**Normal, Aijal**	**Suggests post-conflict stability**	**Framing Mizo resistance as temporary disturbance**
March 9, 1966	**Mizo situation well at hand**	**Mizo situation**	**Suggests control over the situation**	**Minimizes the Mizo political situation to mere unrest**
March 10, 1966	**Army marches on to Lungleh**	**Army, marches, Lungleh**	**Focus on military advance**	**No mention of Mizo civilian impact, focus on military movement**
March 11, 1966	**Entry from Pak not ruled out**	**Entry, Pak**	**Uncertainty about foreign involvement**	**Suggesting external influence in Mizo struggle**
March 12, 1966	**Army column to reach Lungleh today**	**Army column, Lungleh**	**Focus on military progress**	**No mention of Mizo civilians or their plight**
March 14, 1966	**Army enters Lungleh and vital border posts**	**Army, Lungleh, border posts**	**Strategic military action highlighted**	**No reference to the Mizo demand for sovereignty**
March 15, 1966	**Lungleh is cleared of hostiles**	**Lungleh, cleared, hostiles**	**Victory for the army**	**Framing Mizo resistance as the enemy to be cleared**

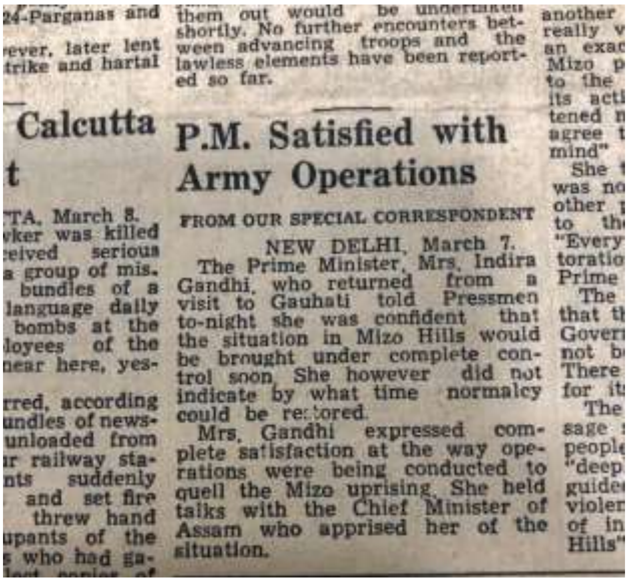
Figure 5: The Times of India newspaper in 1966

3.5. Representation of *Mautam* Famine in leading Indian newspapers

In 1959, a devastating famine struck the region, triggered by the recurring Mautam phenomenon, a cyclical bamboo flowering event that occurs roughly every 50 years. Despite tribal elders predicting the crisis, their warnings were dismissed by the Assam government as superstition, leading to a lack of preventive action. This negligence spurred the creation of the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), an organization initially focused on famine relief. Over time, the MNFF transformed into the Mizo National Front (MNF), which led a twenty-year armed struggle for independence (Prasad, 1994).

Table 6: Frequency of coverage related to famine and food shortage in the year of the Mautam Famine (1959)

Month	The Hindu	The Telegraph	Times of India
January	-	-	-
February	-	-	-
March	-	-	-
April	-	-	-
May	-	-	-
June	-	-	-
July	-	-	-
August	-	-	-
September	-	-	-
October	-	-	-
November	-	-	-
December	-	-	-



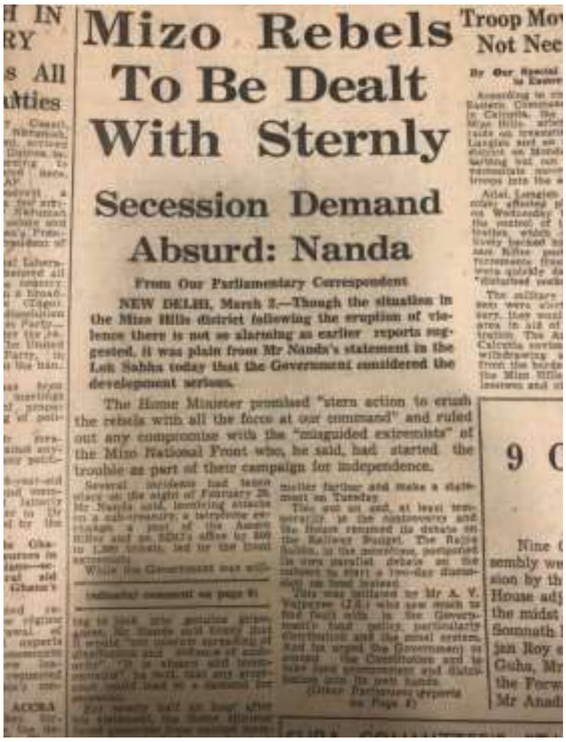
P.M. Satisfied with Army Operations

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, March 7.

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who returned from a visit to Gauhati told Pressmen to-night she was confident that the situation in Mizo Hills would be brought under complete control soon. She however did not indicate by what time normalcy could be restored.

Mrs. Gandhi expressed complete satisfaction at the way operations were being conducted to quell the Mizo uprising. She held talks with the Chief Minister of Assam who apprised her of the situation.



Mizo Rebels To Be Dealt With Sternly

Secession Demand Absurd: Nanda

From Our Parliamentary Correspondent

NEW DELHI, March 2.—Though the situation in the Mizo Hills district following the eruption of violence there is not so alarming as earlier reports suggested, it was plain from Mr Nanda's statement in the Lok Sabha today that the Government considered the development serious.

The Home Minister promised "stern action to crush the rebels with all the force at our command" and ruled out any compromise with the "misguided extremists" of the Mizo National Front who, he said, had started the trouble as part of their campaign for independence.

ARMY MARCHES ON LUNGLEH: HOSTILES ACTIVE

"The Times of India" News Service

Move To Seal Border

Figure 6, 7 & 8: Clippings of news reports on the early clashes between the MNF and the Indian army.

CHAPTER 4

VILLAGE GROUPINGS: DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN REPORTS AND REALITY

"The past is a dim past, a past that has no record except that inscribed upon the hearts of the people by the accumulation of experience after experience related from father to son through the ages."

- Lushai Chrysalis (McCall, 1977)

4.1 Introduction

Between 1967 and 1970, villages in Aizawl were grouped together as part of a strategy by the Union government to gain greater control over the movement of anti-state agents. The experiences of the people during this period were reported in international, national and local vernacular media. This chapter aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the coverage in six selected newspapers to understand the lived experiences of the people and to compare any differences in representation.

4.2 The evolution of Hunger into PPV

It has been suggested that human survival without food could range from eight to twenty-one days, depending on various factors (Kottusch et al., 2009). While the exact duration the headhunter tribes of the Lushai Hills endured hunger during a devastating famine is unknown, it is clear that it was this very hunger, an overwhelming craving for food combined with anger at the authorities' failure to provide relief, that ultimately sparked their desire for independence from India. What began as a desperate struggle for survival, rooted in the most basic human need, gradually evolved into a history marked by bloodshed and violence.

The Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV) grouping initiative was officially completed on January 4, 1967, following an intensive ten-week period of implementation. This initiative involved the consolidation of 106 villages into 18 designated centres, which collectively housed a population of approximately 52,210

individuals. The repercussions of this ‘forced’ grouping initiative were significant and widespread, affecting a total of 236,162 people who were relocated across 104 centres specifically designed for their accommodation. In contrast, only 36,431 individuals remained in villages that were not impacted by this grouping initiative (Nunthara, 1989**).**

A study titled Interning Insurgent Populations: The buried histories of Indian democracy found that based on interviews with civilians who endured grouping in Nagaland and Mizoram, what people recall are years of hardship.

“What they remember is not the agricultural extension agents, the pharmacists or the administrative officers who ostensibly manned the regrouped villages/ camps as part of a supposed ‘hearts and mind approach,’ but the army search operations, the starvation, the regime of curfews and the reduction of identity to a roll call and a piece of paper. Separation from their fields, their homes, and their forests filled them with a yearning which no amount of ‘improved poultry and piggery’ could compensate for” (Sundar, 2011).

According to Sundar (2011), over 200,000 people, amounting to 82% of Mizoram's total population, were relocated, reducing the total number of villages from 764 to 248, with 138 remaining ungrouped. In some cases, original villagers were asked to host families from relocated communities, while others initially took shelter in churches, primary schools, or temporary bamboo structures before constructing permanent homes (Sundar, 2011). He writes that, in certain situations, villages could negotiate the timing of their move. For example, in Lungpher, the Village Council President requested permission from the army to allow villagers to stay through Christmas, agreeing to burn their own homes afterwards. Consequently, they relocated to the Phullen grouping centre in January 1969.

4.3 PPV in the Media

The plight of the people in the Lushai Hills was hardly heard of by the rest of the country. From what the rest of the country read, the people from these hills were anti-nationalists who needed to be controlled. Nibedon(2013) writes, "*protests from the people of India were hardly to be expected. Some eighty per cent of the Indian people did not read newspapers and would never stumble across the policy of "internal colonialism" being practised in the tribal belts of the east. The national policy and the national opinion was against the tribesmen. That is because in the eyes of the Indian leaders, they were the "national enemies*."

He further explained how it would have been difficult for any reporter to get to Mizoram during the underground movement, as the army could not even get a photographer to come to the state. The army wanted a professional photographer to take photos of the villagers for their identity cards, however, no one from Assam was willing to take the journey.

There were no reports except for those presenting the perspective of the government, such as the statement by the Assam Chief Minister on April 1: "*Almost daily, there are encounters with hostiles in various locations, and many of their hideouts have been identified and destroyed. We are not dealing with mobs of rioters or a conventional army, but with rebel groups using guerrilla tactics*." These types of reports were what the Indian public, especially newspaper readers in the morning, had access to (Nibedon, 2013).

4.4 PPV in the eyes of the international and national media

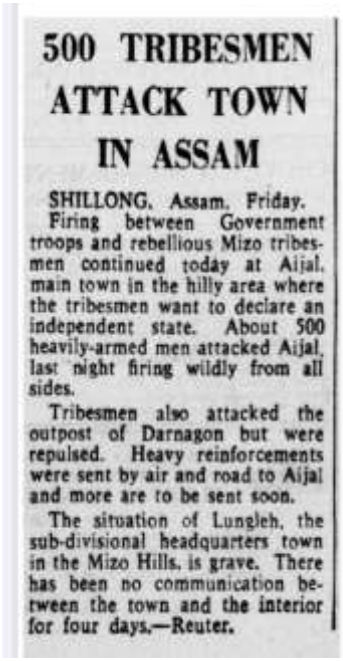
A critical discourse analysis was conducted on three newspapers, one international British daily newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*, and two national newspapers, *The Hindustan Times*, and the *Times of India*, covering the period from 1966 to 1970. The year 1966 was chosen as it marks the beginning of the independence movement, which will now be referred to as *rambuai*. The years 1967 to 1970 were particularly significant for examining the tone and nature of the coverage of the PPV. The keywords that were entered were rambuai OR (Mizoram insurgency) OR (Mizoram

village regrouping) OR (Mizoram famine) OR (Aizawl bombing) OR Laldenga OR (Mizo National Army) OR (Mizo nationalism) OR (Mizo secession) OR (Civil Unrest in Mizoram) with the date range1/1/1966 – 31/12/1976 selected.

4.4.1 The Daily Telegraph

In June 1855, British Army officer Colonel Arthur B. Sleigh established The Daily Telegraph and Courier, reportedly motivated by a personal dispute with Prince George, Duke of Cambridge. The timing coincided with the recent removal of stamp duty on newspapers, which had lowered costs and increased access for a wider audience (Pellegrino, 2023).

There were 26 results that showed up with the keywords in *The Daily Telegraph*. The first is on March 5, 1966 with the title, '*500 Tribesmen Attack Town in Assam'* which talks of the attack by "500 heavily-armed men" on Aijal and clashes with government troops. The other reports talk of Pakistan supporting the "Mizo tribal rebels," an army being sent to quell the rebellion, and fears of a China-backed rising of Mizo and Naga rebels.



500 TRIBESMEN ATTACK TOWN IN ASSAM

SHILLONG, Assam, Friday.
Firing between Government troops and rebellious Mizo tribesmen continued today at Aijal, main town in the hilly area where the tribesmen want to declare an independent state. About 500 heavily-armed men attacked Aijal, last night firing wildly from all sides.

Tribesmen also attacked the outpost of Darnagon but were repulsed. Heavy reinforcements were sent by air and road to Aijal and more are to be sent soon.

The situation of Lungleh, the sub-divisional headquarters town in the Mizo Hills, is grave. There has been no communication between the town and the interior for four days.—Reuter.

Figure 9: Clipping of news report on MNF movement in The Daily Telegraph

In these 26 reports, *The Daily Telegraph* mentions PPV only in two reports. The first one is a report on January 5, 1967, where it says "*The Indian Army today began a massive operation in the Mizo hills to regroup villages in this rebellious tribal belt. Some 70,000 tribesmen declared "peaceful" by the Indian authorities, are to be shifted to 20 newly-built strategic townships*." Another report on March 26, 1968, mentions that a sixth of the population, roughly 50,000 people, had been resettled in protective hamlets while the army claimed it had rebels on the run. This report was published under the title "Stiffer Upper Lip in Nagaland."

A report by a foreign correspondent also mentioned how Indira Gandhi would not allow them to travel to the affected (rebel) areas. The journalist, Harold Sieve mentions, "Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister told a gathering of foreign correspondents in New Delhi on Thursday that journalists were among those who 'caused trouble' if allowed into Nagaland." A similar restriction could be expected in Mizoram, which was also experiencing significant unrest at the time.

MIZO REBELLION 'UNDER INDIAN ARMY CONTROL'

Daily Telegraph Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Monday.

Mrs. Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister, said today the Army has secured a grip on the situation in the Mizo Hills area of eastern India where Mizo tribesmen have revolted against the Delhi administration. She was talking to reporters in Gauhati during her two-day trip to West Bengal and Assam.

She said that she did not know that any outside country was concerned in the Mizo revolt. There had been suggestions in the Indian Parliament that Pakistan had assisted the rebellion.

Meanwhile, the Army was claimed to be making steady progress against the rebels.

Special Article—P14

Figure 10: Clipping of news report on MNF movement in The Daily Telegraph

4.4.2 Hindustan Times

Hindustan Times is one of India's leading English-language newspapers, founded in 1924 by Sunder Singh Lyallpuri. It played an important role in the Indian independence movement. It is the second most widely read English newspaper in India after The Times of India (Princeton University Library, n.d.).

Eighty-two results showed up with the keywords mentioned above in *Hindustan Times*. This chapter focuses on particular mentions of the forced regrouping and PPV. The first report, published on January 14, 1967, mentions the resettlement of villages into PPVs. The title says, "18,500 Mizos resettled." The brief report mentions that the operation began on January 4, and the entire operation, which involves around 60,000 villagers, was expected to be completed in the next month.

More Mizo villages regrouped

New Delhi, Nov. 13 (PTI)—The second phase of regrouping in the Mizo Hills district of Assam—called "operation accomplishment II"—has been completed and the regrouped villages are being handed over by the Army to the civil administration, it was officially stated here.

The first phase of regrouping was carried out in January-February 1967 along a 10-mile belt astride the Vairangte-Aijal-Lunglei road and involved the movement of about 40,000 persons. Though attempted for the first time in India under considerable handicaps, it was a rewarding experience. It was welcomed by the local people as it provided security to them by isolating subversive elements and brought them nearer civilisation.

The second phase of the scheme covered the regrouping of villages on the Tripura, Pakistan and Burma borders of the district. It also incorporated areas adjacent to the Selling-Champhai, Lunglei-Demagiri and Lunglei-Lawngtlai roads, besides some portions of the eastern part of the district.

The scheme covered a total population of 1,27,968 from 326 different villages and involved the movement of 54,838 people. There are altogether 37 group centres, each with an average population of 2,500.

Figure 11: Clipping of news report on regrouping scheme in Hindustan Times

On January 31, 1967, a news report was published with the title, "40,000 Mizos Resettled in 14 New Townships." A press party from Delhi had visited Mizoram to report on the resettlement of the Protected and Progressive Villages. The report was a

result of the visit. It talked about how people will now live in peace and security, and mentioned that there was not a single case of forcible evacuation.

The report reads, *"The green garbed Mizo hills echo to the march of feet and the roar of jeeps and trucks as hundreds of Mizo families move into their new and safer homes along the 150-mile Vairengte-Lungleh road under operation security. They will now live in peace and security and carry on their usual vocations. The response from the Mizos who are migrating from villages sprawled over 4000 square miles has been magnificent, according to the security office commander. Not a single case of forcible evacuation has been reported."*

The report talked of new schools opening, a four-bed hospital, a dispensary and a ration stall. It mentions a dreamy church where people spend most of their time singing hymns on Sundays.

It says, "*Although many Mizos still gaze over the hills and cast a longing eye over the villages left behind, a large number of migrants feel they will be safe in the new townships…a majority of the councillors were convinced that the operation was in their own interest, and that their traditions and religious customs would be fully respected*."

On the availability of agricultural land, the report mentions, "*New townships were selected carefully bearing in mind three main points, availability of water, open spaces and of jhoom lands in the vicinity.*"

On February 13, 1967, a report titled 'Tension still Prevails in Mizo Hills District' mentions the uprooting of villages to liquidate what remained of the rebel forces. It says the operation involved uprooting a little less than a third of the Mizo population from an area covering nearly half the district they inhabit.

The report states that authorities prioritised selecting new villages based on water availability, potential for future expansion, and adequate land for cultivation to ensure that villagers are safe from hostile elements and can lead a stable life with improved economic prospects.

The report said that the villagers were allowed to bring all their belongings, including building materials and grains. And upon arriving at the new sites, they received free rations, medical aid, and essential facilities to help them settle into their new homes. It further said that since the launch of "Operation Security," over 40,000 people have been resettled in areas less vulnerable to the Mizo National Front rebels.

Insecure Mizo village hums with new life

New Delhi, Oct. 27 (PTI)—Ngopa, a small village in north-east Mizo Hills district, a victim of armed gangs, now hums with happy life. With the help of the army, the villagers have built for themselves a 10-bed civil hospital, a middle school and a civil canteen.

The village, with a population of less than 2,000, was in an inaccessible area. The nearest motorhead was five days' march along the only line of communication—a footpath. Until an army unit moved into the area, life in the village was insecure as the misguided unlawful elements used to terrorise the population and extort money and rations. Many preventable diseases like diarrhoea, dysentry, malaria, goitre and tuberculosis used to take a heavy toll.

After an army camp was opened there, a couple of officers quickly learnt the local language and soon got down to understanding the problems of the people. An association was formed with villagers as office-bearers and the army doctor took charge. In addition to his unit duties, the doctor was made responsible for training the nursing staff chosen from among the villagers to look after sanitation and to give medical cover to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases.

The response of the villagers was magnificent. They built a big hut for a hospital from their own resources. Today it has seperate wards and is capable of accommodating indoor patients. The hospital was formally inaugurated on Jan 28. Army doctors attend to about 100 civilians daily in their out-patient department.

Medical care

With the availability of medical care the number of patients has been going down and there have been no deaths from preventable diseases. Most of the medicines are arranged through the civil administration and free medical treatment is given not only to the people of Ngopa, but also to a dozen other nearby villages.

The education of children, which had remained suspended because of insecure conditions, has restarted. A middle school has been started with the help of an Army Education Corps instructor. He holds regular classes and has won the confidence of the children.

Children have learnt by heart the national anthem and sing it daily with great enthusiasm. Annual examinations for the middle class are conducted by army officers.

Daily necessities of life were scarce before the army's arrival there. The villagers had to buy salt and kerosene from as far as 80 miles away. Now a civil canteen has been opened in the village by army authorities where one can buy even cosmetics and cigarettes. Villagers are helped by the army in replenishing their stocks.

Figure 12: Clipping of news report on grouping initiative in Hindustan Times

The reporter, however, says that the villagers in conversations with visiting journalists said they did not leave their original homes spontaneously or willingly, though authorities affirm that no force was used. The reporter mentions the villagers being unenthusiastic for their new homes, even with the assistance provided, and they complained about the quality and quantity of rice and atta supplied, despite receiving free rations at a rate of 3.15 kilograms per person per week. The reporter made it a point to highlight that the free rations received by the resettled villagers

were the highest scale in India for both adults and children, and that they are additionally permitted to consume their own grain stocks. He also wrote that the resources allocated exceed the per capita provided to refugees from Pakistan in 1947.

It further says each village is equipped with potable drinking water, medical facilities, and schools, "*Resettled villagers are assured work in agriculture or on border roads, with no interference in the Mizo people's traditional way of life.*"

The reporter goes on to suggest that the villagers who were relocated did not realise how fortunate they were, writing, "*They have yet to realise that this action has been taken by their own government in their own interest with due regard to their own needs. This is largely because there is no civil administration anywhere in the district, except perhaps on a limited scale in Aijal town.*"

On April 2, 1967, another report quoted the Chief Minister of Assam, BP Chaliha, talking of the regrouping attempt among other matters. The report says, *"Mr Chaliha said that initially there was considerable local opposition to the scheme, which was really understandable as nobody could be quite enthusiastic about leaving his home. Each phase of regrouping, particularly the first and third between Lungleh and Aijal was marked by desperate attempts by hostiles to foil it. There were a number of cases of attacks and ambushes on the security forces engaged in the operation and they sustained considerable injuries."*

On May 22, 1968, a report titled, Mizo Rivalries Bedevil Development talks of regrouping of villages as a 'burning problem.' It reads, "*A burning problem now in hand is the regrouping of new villages at strategic locations, near platoon positions. The army started to herd the villagers into shifting home in March after they had prepared their fields for cultivation. The season is too advanced now to clear new land to sow for a crop this year…The civil administration is rarely consulted on such population movements dictated by strategic considerations."*

The report mentions how two party rivals, Hrangaia, a Mizo Union District Council Executive Member, and Dengthuama, the then Congress President, agreed that relocation of villages must be done with adequate notice to the public. It suggests that even the district authorities were not consulted: *"The district authorities tend to concur with this view but since they had not been consulted by the army about the movement of villages begun in March, they keep a diplomatic silence on the issue."*

A report published on May 21, 1968, titled 'Precarious Security in Mizo Hills' mentions the burning of houses for the first time. It read, *'Punitive measures adopted by the security forces are drastic. Villagers harboring hostile elements are burnt to the ground with their treasured stocks of paddy. Able-bodied men suspected to have connections with the hostiles are marched off to the overcrowded jails in the towns, causing depletion of the family's workforce in the fields.'*

The report also mentions the impact jhum cultivation will have on the 19 PPVs, as the cultivable land will only be used for two years, after which the land has to be left to grow in the wilderness for the next six years.

On October 28, 1968, another report paints a beautiful picture of the PPVs. The report is titled, 'Insecure Mizo village hums with new life.' The report praises the setting up of an army unit which, it said, helped provide medical assistance to villagers through a doctor and the setting up of a middle school." It says, "*Daily necessities of life were scarce before the army's arrival there. The villagers had to buy salt and kerosene from 60 miles away. Now a civil canteen has been opened in the village by army authorities, where one can buy even cosmetics and cigarettes. Villagers are helped by the army in replenishing their stocks.*"

On January 9, 1969, a report titled, 'No Talks Till Mizo Rebels Completely Surrender,' says, among other topics, that the government plans to continue its "*policy of giving protection to the loyal Mizos. The experiment of regrouping the villages along the main roads where the security forces can easily protect them will be extended."*

The next and last mention of grouping activities is mentioned in a report on November 17, 1969, titled '*More Mizo villages regrouped*.' It said the second phase of regrouping in the Mizo hills District of Assam was completed after the first phase of regrouping was carried out on the 10-mile stretch astride the Vairengte-Aijal-Lungleh road involving the movement of 48000 persons. The report praises the regrouping attempt, saying, "*Though attempted for the first time in India under considerable handicaps, it was a rewarding experience. It was welcomed by the local people, as it provided security to them by isolating subversive elements and brought them nearer civilisation."*

4.4.3 Times of India

The *Times of India* (TOI), established in 1838, currently publishes 55 editions and reaches a diverse readership across the country, with major editions in Delhi and Mumbai playing a central role. The newspaper now operates over 139 editions and is distributed in 1,200 towns across India. In an analysis of the *Times of India*, 84 results showed up when the keywords mentioned earlier were typed into the system.

The first mention of the grouping can be found on February 14, 1967 where a report published by the Times of India titled, 'Barely One Per Cent of Mizos Favor MNF, Better Life Awaits Resettled Tribals, Unique Experiment,' writes, *"Away from our familiar turmoil, a novel experiment is being conducted in Mizo Hills district to resettle a group of unsophisticated, tradition-bound people in a way of life more prosperous than they had ever known, but in its essence no different from what they have been accustomed to through the ages."* It talks about 40 villages relocated to seven centres in the first phase, and 36 villages relocated to another seven centres in the second phase, with the third phase ongoing. The reporter was part of a press party that visited Aijal. He mentions new amenities like water supply and medical aid, with each centre having a school. The reporter talks about robust rations that would make the inhabitants of the centres, "*the envy of most people in the country,"* and that the settlers will receive free rations till they are employed or have a field for agriculture. It further praises Operation Security, saying, "*The operation has brought the Mizos out of their seclusion without interfering with their social and religious traditions*."

More Mizo Hills Parts Brought Under Central Control

NEW DELHI, September 2.

THE Government is progressively bringing more and more parts of the Mizo Hills district under its direct administrative control, Mr. V. C. Shukla, Deputy Home Minister, told the Rajya Sabha at question time today.

He said Mr. Om Mehta was the Government had seen press reports that Pakistan had deployed Chinese-trained Assam and Mujahids on the eastern border to start trouble in the territories probably to synchronise with fresh activity among the rebel Mizos. But the Government had no information to confirm these reports.

Two loyal Mizos had been shot dead by a member of the outlawed Mizo National Front on June 8, he added.

Steps had been taken to intensify the operations against the rebels and to safeguard the lives of loyal Mizos.

PROVISIONAL GOVT.

Mr. Shukla said the Government was aware that Mr. Laldenga, president of the Front, had claimed to have formed a provisional government in Pakistan. But the Pakistan Government had informed New Delhi that it was not aware of it.

Mr. Shukla said the rebels were not collecting taxes but extracting money from and looting the property of loyal Mizos. There were several rebel persons and "we are trying to eliminate them."

The Government was screening 657 Mizo refugees handed over by the Burmese authorities to find out how many were hostiles, Mr. Shukla told Mr. Mahabir Das.

Action would be taken against those identified as hostiles, Mr. Shukla assured the House.

Mr. R. P. N. Sinha asked how these people had crossed the border and what steps the Government was taking to prevent such incidents.

Mr. Shukla replied that India and Burma had agreed to have a free border, but after the trouble in the Mizo Hills, the Burmese Government had set up police posts to prevent refugees from crossing the border.

"We have also deployed a number of check-posts".

Filial's Report: Mr. Shukla declined to place on the table of the House the report of Mr. Filai, sub-divisional officer at Lungleh, who was captured and taken to Pakistan by the Mizo hostiles and subsequently released.

Mr. Shukla said it would not be in the public interest to disclose its contents. "We are utilising the information in the report and it will not be proper to give it out because it will help the hostiles," he added.

Mr. Shukla told Mr. A. D. Mani that Mr. Filai was not subjected to any third-degree methods during his captivity and detention in East Pakistan. The officer had reported that he was not maltreated.

Ailing Children: Some 50,000 out of 27,500 school children (37 per cent.) in Delhi were suffering from one ailment or the other in 1965, according to a medical survey, the Education Minister, Mr. M. C. Chagla, told Mr. Mahadev Das. The Delhi Corporation was understood to be exploring the possibility of extending its present school health programme covering certain areas to all the corporation schools, he said.

Nagarvala Case: There has been no delay in processing the case against Mr. R. D. Nagarvala, I.P. (Gujarat), taking into consideration the voluminous record and the Divan Commission's 1,000-page report, Mr. J. L. Hathi, Minister in the Ministry of Home Affairs, told Mr. Devi Singh. These documents had to be "carefully examined before taking a decision," he said.

Mr. Hathi said the commission's report had already been referred to the Vigilance Commission.

ICCR Affairs: Mr. Chagla told Mr. A. C. Gilbert that the Central Vigilance Commission had advised that no action was called for in relation to the affairs of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

He said it was not in the public interest to disclose the findings of the Special Police Establishment, but the establishment's report had been considered in consultation with the commission.

The commission had suggested that the council should follow strictly the accepted rules of propriety in its financial dealings, he said.

Import of Books: Mr. Chagla said the import policy for books had been further liberalised to provide for an increase in the value of the quota licences already issued. There would be a free issue of supplementary licences in favour of established importers of standard technical books, etc., and of import licences in favour of libraries, colleges, universities and technical and educational institutions.

It had also been decided to stop up the temps of the schemes for re-publication in inexpensive editions of standard educational works of foreign origin.

Sindhi Medium: Mr. Chagla told Mr. Jaipendra Dashoram that "each State will no doubt take necessary action, keeping in view, inter alia, the local conditions" in regard to Sindhi being recognised as a medium of instruction at the secondary education stage.

Mr. Dashoram had drawn the Government's attention to the report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities in which there was a reference to this matter and asked what steps had been taken.

Tagore Theatre: Mr. Bhakt Darshan, Deputy Minister of Education, told Mr. I. K. Gujral that the Tagore open-air theatre in Delhi would be handed over to the Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development for maintenance.

Mr. Gujral had asked whether the design of the theatre was unsuitable for dramas and other purposes and whether there had not been a "huge waste of money" on the building.

The Deputy Minister said the Rabindranath Tagore Centenary Committee had been given grants totalling Rs. 20 lakhs and an interest-bearing loan of Rs. 17 lakhs. The grant was given for the construction of the Rangshala.

He admitted that there was a considerable delay in the completion of the theatre, but said it might be used for dramas, dance performances or ballet shows with the same stage.

The following points were also made:

A proposal to set up a common secretariat for several wage boards, including the recently-constituted wage boards for road transport and electricity undertakings, is under consideration.

The Bikaner has claimed the privilege of exemption from payment of security deposits to the State Electricity Board. The matter is under the consideration of the Andhra Pradesh Government.

The Government is examining the question of extending the enhanced rate of provident fund to 31 more industries. The additional amount estimated to be contributed as a result of this is estimated at Rs. 1.59 crores per month, benefiting 29.40 lakhs workers.

No time-table has so far been fixed for further talks with the U.S. authorities on the Indo-U.S. foundation proposal.

It has been decided to make an ex-gratia payment at four per cent. by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission to its employees from the financial year 1967-68.

Against the target of 2,700 units of telephones, 2,581 units were produced during 1967-68. The shortfall was due to difficulties experienced with the aluminium castings.—U.N.I. & P.T.I.

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Figure 13: Clipping of news report on grouping initiative in Times of India

Reporting on the impact of the regrouping on the "Mizo rebels," a report titled Mizo rebel chief still in East Pakistan: Chavan, published on August 3, 1967, says, "*The Mizo rebels were angry with the regrouping of villages in the Mizo Hills district*." It goes on to say that the regrouping had hurt the strength of the rebels.

The report also quoted Mr. Chavan as saying that the grouping of 100 villages was completed on February 15 and that the regrouped villages found the arrangements "*generally satisfactory and had a greater sense of security*."

On March 16, 1968, in a report titled 'Long Haul In Mizo Hills: II--Re-Grouping For Peace,' the reporter praises Chahilha for cutting the link, "*voluntary or forced*" between the rebels and the population. It talks of the operation as a "*turning point in*

the bid to put the Mizos on the road to peace and prosperity." It talks about pharmacists and administrative officers being moved into the PPVs. The PPVs were also referred to as a budget risk to the Assam government, with the district budget shot up from 10 lakhs in 1965-66 to more than 2 crores in 1966-67, with IAF charging Rs. 12000 an hour for flights that could airdrop around nine tonnes of supplies at a time.

The PPV is then described as a dreamy destination, the report says, "*The living standards in the PPV by the yardstick of rural India seem high, every one of the 228 families has a spacious stilted hut of bamboo matting and thatched roof to itself with a kitchen garden in the rear or a piggery underneath.*"

It also suggests that people in the PPV are spoon-fed with welfare and must be grateful for it. *"The immediate impact of such over-administration on the minds of the locals is difficult to gauge. Are they grateful for so much spoon-fed welfare or merely pick up on the Government's minor lapses to laugh and to criticise."*

BARELY ONE PER CENT. OF MIZOS FAVOUR MNF

Better Life Awaits Resettled Tribals: Unique Experiment

"The Times of India" News Service

AWAY from our familiar turmoil, a novel experiment is being conducted in Mizo Hills district to resettle a group of unsophisticated, tradition-bound people in a way of life more prosperous than they had ever known, but in its essence no *different from* what they have been accustomed to through the ages.

Despite its undisputed strategic importance, derived from a 150-mile-long border with East Pakistan and a 250-mile-long border with Burma, the district had been, until recently, practically left to itself by a somnolent administration. As a result, the sense of belonging could not grow with the Mizos. High prices and poverty, coupled with the growing influence of an emerging middle class amenable to foreign pressures of all sorts, steadily widened the chasm over the years. The ground was well laid for a bust-up and last year the Mizo National Front seized the opportunity with its independence slogan.

It is difficult to say how much influence MNF had over the Mizos. According to persons having an intimate knowledge of the area, not more than one per cent. of the population could have any sympathy with the kind of terrorist activities the hostiles are indulging in. This should put the number of hostiles at about 3,000, all of them certainly not active collaborators.

MNF FORCES ON THE RUN

In the year that has elapsed since the abortive rebellion, it has become clear that MNF does not enjoy wide popular support. Yet, it dared act, presumably because it had not expected such swift security forces. The rebellion was put down in a week, and the MNF forces, or whatever remained of them, were soon on the run. Chased by the security forces, some of them crossed into East Pakistan and others into Burma. The

ation and improved methods of agriculture.

Simultaneously, there are proposals o organise cottage and small industries o far unknown in the area. The Mizos possess a fine craftsmanship, pecially in textiles and latticed work r cane and bamboo, but they produce only what they need, and seldom re such products marketed, though with a touch of sophistication, the rticles may become a rage. A ready venue of employment is road-building.

The success of "operation security" lepends on how the civil administration conducts the affairs of the cores in future. The operation has brought the Mizos out of their seclusion without interfering with their social and religious traditions.

"Operation security" is only one aspect of how the problem of the Mizo rebels is being tackled. The ther aspect, of tracking down and liquidating the guerilla bands, continues without relent. In the two months between November 25 and January 25, 30 MNA personnel were killed in encounters with the security forces; 125 were captured and 45 surrendered. At a rough estimate, over 800 persons have been detained so far on suspicion that they were connected with the rebels. Of these, 200 were released after inquiry.

"OFFICERS" CAPTURED

Prominent among those who have either been captured or surrendered are the self-styled Maj.-Gen. Lalhruila, "Vice Chief of the Army Staff; "Major Laichuana, Capt. Lalthangsanga and Capt. Soremiana, "Administrative Staff Officers;" Maj.-Gen. Liandawla, "Q.M.G." and "Chief Commissioner of the Southern Area;" Zobbi, daughter of the "Chief Commissioner," and some self-styleH police and intelligence officers.

The process of liquidation of the rebels is likely to be accelerated in

Figure 14: Clipping of news report on grouping initiative in Times of India

Another report, on April 27, 1968, titled 'Judicial Probe Into Death of Nurses Ordered,' reports that Mr. R Barua conceded that the government had succeeded only in partly cutting off the base of the hostiles by its policy of regrouping villages.

A report published on August 11, 1967, titled 'Successful grouping of Mizo villagers, a tribute to Army,' credits the success of the regrouping scheme of Mizo villages as a tribute to the skill of army leadership. The report says the grouping was a necessity, however unpleasant to the villagers, and it was not without flaws.

The reporter interviewed the Chief Executive Member of the Mizo District Council, who said there is no security in the regrouped villages. When hostiles fired from a regrouped village in Baktawng, the security forces resorted to mass beatings in the village, injuring 25 people. The places chosen were scorching hot as forest lands had been cleared, there was an acute shortage of water, it was infested with flies and fleas, and the villagers could not take up cultivation. In some places, the report said, the security forces had indulged in excesses, and it was for similar reasons that in Nagaland, loyal people were driven to the rebel camp.

The report praises the army, saying in the Mizo district, the security forces have handled the project with "tact and sympathy," moving the people into new settlements without much demur.

It says, "*Enough care has been taken to see that the traditional tribal way of life is affected to the minimum extent and that the villagers have adequate supplies of their daily necessities.*"

It also says, "*With capture of the top leaders of the MNF, the successful implementation of the regrouping scheme and the relentless pressure maintained by the security forces against the hostiles, the situation has improved considerably*."

On August 22, 1969, another report talks of the regrouping, it was titled, 'Stability in the Northeast, New Problems and Challenges.' It talks of the resettlement, saying the government has done "*a neat job of shifting most of the loyal Mizos from the exposed hamlets in the bush and resettling them in protected villages dotted along the Aijal-Lungleh road.*"

On June 27, 1970, a report titled 'Insurgency Nearing An End: Problems of Peace in Northeast,' talks about the relocation from 900 villages to 125 protected villages. It says a great deal has been done on communications with the construction of new roads.

4.5 PPV in the eyes of the local vernaculars

A review of Mizo Literature found that there were several dailies (newspapers) already in circulation during and before *rambuai.* These papers, mostly used as political organs, were such as *Zoram Thupuan* by the Zalen party, *Hmar Arsi* by the Mizo Union Party, *Mizo Aw* - which began in 1964 was short-lived but revived since 1972, and *Remna Palai* by the Mizo District Congress Committee, which started in 1968. Another paper, *Tawrh Bawm,* started in November 1968, intending to lighten the mood of the public (Zama & Vanchiau, 2016).

This study analyses three local papers in print during *rambuai*, particularly focusing on the impact of the forced relocation on the people of Mizoram. It focuses on *Mizo Arsi, Remna Palai* and *Hmar Arsi* as these are the oldest editions of newspapers available in the Mizoram State Central Library. The keywords that were identified include grouping, burning of houses, murder/killing, food shortage, famine, rambuai, surrender of MNF forces and the peace appeals. All the reports for the selected period, including columns, letters to the editor and editorial, were assessed to understand the impact of the forced relocation in various aspects.

The analysis involved a thorough examination of media coverage across specific years. In *Remna Palai*, 102 publications dated 1968 and 1969, the earliest records available, were carefully reviewed to capture significant coverage from these initial years. Out of 102, 84 were found with the inclusion of said keywords. In *Mizo Arsi*, the analysis extended to 161 publications, from which 136 reports were identified with the mentioned keywords. In *Hmar Arsi*, 94 publications were assessed, out of which 31 were found with the keywords. Each available date within the records was systematically analyzed, allowing for a detailed comparison of media responses to key events during that period.

4.5.1 Remna Palai

Remna Palai was the mouthpiece of the Congress party and focused on news largely related to the promotion of activities of Congress officials and their visits to PPVs, as well as a call for peace by the party members. Remna Palai can be loosely translated to Ambassador of Peace. While the paper was political, the maximum reports highlight the suffering of the people during rambuai. It was a daily paper priced at 10p, with a circulation of 1,300 copies, published by the Mizo District Congress Committee. In *Remna Palai*, 84 reports mention village regrouping, insurgency, famine, curfew and *rambuai*. The maximum reports lament on the impact of regrouping.


REMNA .. PALAI

(AMBASSADOR OF PEACE)

Editor : Z.V.Laimawia.
NITIN CHANCHINBU.

THAWHLEHNI. THE 31ST DECEMBER 1968. A MAN 10P.

MIPUITE THAVVENNA TURIN.
by L & O., Muallungthu.

BUNGKAWN VENG KOHHRAN HRUAITUTE INKHAWM.
by a reporter.

Figure 15: The Remna Palai newspaper in 1968

On the impact of the regrouping, one main area of focus in the reports is on the separation of the tribesmen from their lands, which gave them food and sustained them. Tribal people share a deep connection with their lands, viewing them as integral to their identity and way of life. These lands are where they socialised, worked, slept, and where they found sustenance and life itself. However, they were uprooted from these ancestral lands and placed under strict curfews, limiting their ability to tend to their jhum fields. The limited land in the regrouped villages could

not sustain everyone, and the curfew restrictions prevented them from venturing far to find more arable land.

Nibedon (2013) describes the severe impact of regrouping on villagers' lives. They were unable to tend to their fields due to long distances (often six to seven miles away) and faced strict curfews and extensive ID checks, which restricted their movement. The confiscation of arms also prevented them from hunting, while overcrowding in villages left insufficient land for farming. Agriculture, the primary source of livelihood, was nearly halted by "Operation Security," forcing villagers to rely on unfamiliar wheat flour rations from the government. These rations were sometimes stopped as a form of collective punishment. The forced resettlment led to the loss of traditional thlam (family or communal structures). Additionally, soldiers often harassed villagers, slapping them freely and without cause.

A report published on March 17, 1969, by *Remna Palai* with Vox Pipuli attributed as the author, details the struggles of the people in eleven points. It says, "*Our poverty has increased for many reasons. Even today, many villages are restricted from practising jhumming, and extensive community volunteer work prevents us from tending to our fields. We are often required to work as labourers without pay, which strains us further. Grouped in villages, our fields are far away, and we are not allowed to stay overnight to tend to them; by the time soldiers finish checking our permits, the day has passed. Our chickens, eggs, and agricultural produce are taken without any compensation. Those who support the soldiers by pointing out supposed suspects (kawktute) often accuse people they dislike, resulting in wrongful detentions just to please the soldiers. Our food is poor, sickness is rampant, and we lack medicine; anyone possessing medicine is imprisoned. If medicine is found in MNF camps, nearby villagers with medicine are captured. The MNF demands food from us at gunpoint, and we give it out of fear. Later, others accuse us (for giving food to MNF soldiers), and soldiers capture and punish us, sometimes even relocating entire villages. We are also restricted from transporting basic necessities to neighboring villages, and whenever we seek help, we face demands for bribes. People suffer simply from being accused of communicating with the MNF or for daring to maintain*

distant fields. These points only begin to describe our hardships in the simplest terms, but what solution will end all this suffering?"

A report published on February 6, 1969, talks about the joy of the cancellation of forced regrouping attempts. It says, "*Twelve villages along Sialsuk village, which were supposed to be regrouped, have been cancelled. The people were very happy about this. The leaders tried their best to avoid regrouping, including Mizo Congress officials. The people were very afraid that they would be regrouped, especially as the place suggested did not have water or any field for jhumming. Some people had moved to the assigned village, but now they will return.*"

As people could not harvest their agricultural produce and the ration was limited and sometimes in low supply, the people suffered from famine. This was a topic often touched open in the news reports as it weighed heavy on the people, a report on March 17, 1969 says, "*Since the Mau Tam in 1960, Mizoram has continually faced hardships in acquiring food; there has not been a year we could proclaim ourselves as fully sustained, as trouble has followed us. In earlier times, we experienced what we call major famine deaths, but now it is much worse than that, and many people have died due to a lack of food. The number of people surviving on leaves and bamboo shoots remains uncountable among the Zofate this day*."

From the reports it can be understood that the leaders of the community often tried to appeal to the government to stop the regrouping attempt, a report on January 3, 1969 reads, "*Congress has tried hard to speak against regrouping in Shillong and Delhi to appeal to the Indian government, but it has not been successful. This (forced regrouping) is killing the Mizo people and making them poor; no one can deny this*."

Another report on December 19, 1968, reads, "*The Congress assembly resolution decided that the government should stop regrouping, as it brings death, destruction, poverty, and hardships in all aspects. While it has not been successful in Malaya, Vietnam, and Nagaland, and despite some potential benefits in Mizoram, the negative effects far outweigh any positives."*

To add to the suffering of the villagers, the soldiers practiced slavery on the tribesmen, a report on December 21, 1968 talks about the problems faced due to forced labour and theft of their livestock by the soldiers, "*From now on, while we are working on our fields, soldiers should not employ us forcefully, as this is against the Indian Constitution. When they take our livestock, such as chickens and goats, they should pay the necessary fee for it. The soldiers should also stop demanding wood and water from us forcefully. We have heard from many reliable sources about forced labor, which is against the Indian Constitution; one should be compensated for their work. Additionally, they should cease making people spend entire days searching for relatives of MNF members and then punishing them when they cannot be found."*

On December 9, 1968, a report detailed the findings of a visit by a peace mission from the Congress party to several villages, including Saitual, where they held a public meeting. The meeting, which took place when the curfew was not in effect, revealed the severe distress faced by the villagers. The community was grappling with a lack of basic amenities, including education and healthcare. While there was a primary school and an ME (Middle English) school, the teachers were working voluntarily for a meagre sum of Rs. 15 per month. At times, they had to go without payment for up to two months. The villagers also reported a shortage of medicines in the area.

The report further highlighted the exploitative conditions the villagers had been subjected to. Over 3,000 times, the people of Saitual had been forced to work as coolies for the soldiers, with no compensation for their labor. Furthermore, by June 1968, 490 chickens had been taken from the village without payment, with only a few individuals paying a nominal amount of Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 2. In addition, villagers were compelled to supply firewood and water to the soldiers daily, again without any form of remuneration.

The officials also visited the Ruallung grouping, which included the villages of Maite and Mualpheng. Here, they found that the inhabitants there were suffering in much the same way as those in Saitual. Over 300 people in these villages were similarly

burdened, forced to supply firewood and water to the soldiers daily, without receiving any payment or compensation for their labour.

4.5.2 Mizo Arsi

Mizo Arsi was a daily newspaper priced at 10p, with a clear political leaning, published by the Mizo Union party and edited by C. Pahlira. The news reports were mainly focused on politics, world news and advertisements, apart from the local events. In a typical publication, *Mizo Arsi* was published in a tabloid form and had around 13 news reports including, local, national and international news as well as 2-3 advertisements. Of the 161 reports analysed from *Mizo Arsi*, 132 mention events such as village regrouping, insurgency, famine, curfew, peace missions, the killing of soldiers, the surrender of the MNF, and the broader conflict known as rambuai.


MIZO ARSI

Figure 16: Mizo Arsi newspaper in 1968

While it is difficult to fully grasp the extent of suffering experienced by the people during the *rambuai* period and the impact of forced regrouping on daily life, certain news reports offer a glimpse into their struggles. For instance, a report dated March 8, 1969, recounts an incident from February 21, 1969, involving a woman named Phichuaii, a mother of five who was living in the Farkawn Grouping Centre. Facing severe food shortages, she had gone to the Tiau riverbank, on the Indo-Myanmar border, to collect mustard leaves. Tragically, gunfire from the Burmese side struck her, leading to her death. The incident was reported to Farkawn security forces, who then instructed villagers, both men and women, to retrieve her body. The report also noted that Phichuaii's husband was imprisoned at the time, leaving their five children orphaned. In a quiet plea, the reporter wrote, "*They do not have any food to eat. If her husband could be released from jail, it will be very good.*"

The impact of regrouping during the *rambuai* period was wide-ranging. One of the most visible changes was the relocation of villages to the sides of highways, a move intended to make it easier for security forces to monitor the population and deliver supplies. To this day, as one travels across Mizoram, villages can be seen clustered along highways and roads, remnants of that strategic displacement. In contrast, earlier settlements nestled on serene hilltops were abandoned and remain deserted even now.

On December 3, 1968, a report details a meeting between Thiak Village Council Members and the Brigade Major of the 61 Mountain Brigade. According to the report, the VC informed the Brigade Major of the 61 Mountain Brigade that MNF activity in Mizoram had significantly declined, yet village regrouping continued unnecessarily. From a farmer's perspective, they argued, regrouping is not a permanent solution, as people will eventually be displaced again. They criticised the policy for relying on force rather than building trust among the population.

A report dated December 31, 1969, noted that, according to All India Radio (Guwahati), another phase of village regrouping was set to begin in January 1970. This phase would affect approximately 5,500 people, who were to be resettled into

ten new villages along the highway. The report too, emphasised that this policy was a major concern among villagers.

Beyond logistical and security issues, regrouping disrupted cultural and religious practices. The report highlighted that many were anxious about the timing, being resettled during the Christmas and New Year period, a season of deep cultural and religious significance in Mizoram. Some residents reportedly appealed to the government to allow them to stay in their villages until after the festive season.

Politically, the policy faced resistance. Both major parties of the time, the Mizo Union and the Congress, publicly opposed the regrouping. The Mizo Union had expressed its objections repeatedly, and the Zoram Congress Committee had also passed a resolution against the move. Despite the opposition, the grouping process went on, as the reporter concluded, "*However, since the government found it necessary, no one could stop it*."

On August 1, 1968, a report focused on the ongoing famine in Mizoram, detailing a meeting of the Mizo District Council held on July 30, 1968. In the resolution passed, the Council called on the government to take immediate action to bring rice and other essential supplies to areas like Aizawl, PPV, and surrounding regions, and to increase the stock to ensure people's survival.

During the meeting, HK Bawichhuaka remarked that if the government viewed Mizoram as the cause of trouble, they should allow the people to go hungry. He warned that this would only dampen the spirits of the citizens who had placed their trust in the government. He also urged the union government to take a serious view of the situation, even if the Assam government did not.

Hrangaia highlighted the plight of refugees who had come to Aizawl in search of food. He expressed his disillusionment with the post-independence situation, stating that the greatest achievement of Independence had been the reduction of beggars in India, but in Mizoram, the government's failure had left people with no choice but to beg. He criticised the government administration for its ineffectiveness, pointing out that even basic communication like sending telegrams had been impossible, and the

poor roads had exacerbated the food shortage. He further questioned if any other state in India was suffering as Mizoram was, sharing the personal hardship he and his son had endured, going without rice for three days and surviving only on leaves.

In November 1968, a report suggested famine in the Lushai Hills. It read, The District Council passed a private resolution stating, *'Due to the government's failure to prepare adequate food and essential supplies, Aizawl, Lunglei, and PPVS have been suffering since July 1968. We do not want this to continue, so we urge the government to ensure the availability of food and other necessary items in preparation for the summer. These supplies, including medicines, must be made available at administrative centres and security posts."* The council condemned the government's poor preparation during the famine, particularly during the monsoon, and highlighted the difficulties faced in transporting food and necessities from Silchar. They also expressed confusion and frustration over the government's restriction on the transportation of rice, despite the numerous challenges faced by the people.

Another news report dated October 1, 1968, described the extreme severity of the famine caused by the ongoing Rambuai, stating that even past famines like Mautam and Thingtam seemed less devastating by comparison. Every village was affected, including those in PPVs (Protected and Progressive Villages) accessible by road. Most residents had no rice and were surviving on leaves and forest plants. The report highlighted that even mothers had no breastmilk to feed their babies, and there was no alternative liquid food available. Senior citizens and infants were the worst affected, with death rates higher than in previous years. At several security posts, people without farmland or work as coolies were left with nothing. Though some attempted to help by collecting food, they had only cucumbers and leaves to offer. In response, the District Council appealed to Assam authorities to reroute food supplies. When no reply was received, telegrams were sent to the Home Minister and the Central Food Minister, requesting changes in the supply routes for eight villages, including N. Hlimen, Sakarwardai, and Darlawn.

The people started fearing death due to starvation. A news report published on November 28, 1968, highlighted the growing fear of starvation among villagers affected by forced regrouping. The Village Council President (VCP) of Kelkang and his team had travelled to Aizawl to request permission to return to their original village. A total of 175 households from Kelkang had been relocated to Ruantlang, while others from Buang, Khuangleng, and Laisen were moved to places like Bungzung, which already had around 450 houses and lacked sufficient wood, water, and food.

Villagers expressed their desperation, describing the situation as one of hunger-driven despair. In Khualen, security forces had burned their crops before they could harvest them, leaving them without rice. They had only managed to plant taro root and jungle yam, which were not enough to sustain them. Being moved to another village with no food supply, they said, was essentially a plan to let them die of hunger.

While famine was widespread across villages, it was the disruption to their children's education that caused even greater distress among the villagers. A report published on November 15, 1968, highlights the severe impact of the rambuai in *Zoram* (while not yet a state, the Lushai Hills was repeatedly referred to as Zoram, meaning land of Zo people, in the reports). Due to ongoing unrest, children in many villages have been deprived of proper education for nearly three years. This, the report states, was one of the greatest setbacks the region faced. The situation was seen as a significant step backwards, said the report, with no clear estimate of how many children had fallen behind and will not be able to reach their educational potential.

The reporter feared that some children had grown too old to continue their studies, while others were forced to abandon education as they had lost everything, their houses and their lands, while many were unable to attend school because they are struggling with food shortages.

As later reports highlighted, it was not just education that the children were missing out on, they were also lacking food and nutrition. In a visit reported on July 5, 1968,

J. Sengluaia, Rural Administrative Officer of the District Council, along with MDC Lalhmingthanga and two CAs, spent three days at the Thingsulthliah PPV Centre, which includes nine villages and 520 houses. Officials reported widespread hunger, with many children lying in bed without food. “There is no food to be found anywhere,” they stated. “Only those who can eat leaves are surviving.” They returned in tears, noting that none of the houses they visited had any rice.

The food shortage was so immense that even hospitals were not able to provide their patients with food. A report dated July 18, 1968, revealed the worsening food crisis in Mizoram, noting that even hospital patients were suffering. On July 16, the civil hospital contractor failed to supply rice, leaving staff in distress. Hospital workers managed to collect 8 kilograms of rice, which was boiled and shared among 82 patients. As of 11 a.m. the next day, July 17, no additional rice had arrived, and the patients remained unfed, waiting. The report credited the dedication of the doctor in charge for keeping the hospital functioning under such dire conditions.

The food shortages led to illnesses, but then, there was also a shortage of medicines. Many reports highlight the need for dispensaries in every PPV, while some highlight deaths due to the combined distress of food and medicine shortages. For example, a report published on September 9, 1968, talks about the visit of C. Pahlira, Executive Member of the District Council, to the Sihphir dispensary, where he found a severe shortage of medicine. With seven villages grouped under the Sihphir PPV, the area had 430 houses, 1,692 adults, and 1,013 children. The ongoing food shortage had led to a rise in illness, worsening the impact of the medical crisis. In August alone, 13 people died and only 3 births were recorded, resulting in a net loss of 10 people.

On January 14, 1969, a report titled A Year of India's Growing Wealth (India Ram Pum Hausak Kum), and A Year of Poverty for Mizoram highlighted the stark contrast between India's agricultural prosperity and the dire situation in Mizoram. While India had harvested an abundant rice crop, totaling 96.5 tons , enough to sustain the country for three months , and Assam had also experienced significant agricultural success, Mizoram's harvest was barely enough to last three months due to the impact of the *rambuai* and forced grouping initiative which had left the people

without access to their fields and sufficient rice production. The report stressed that the people were facing acute hunger and were waiting for government aid. Without timely food assistance, the region faced the imminent threat of famine, with the potential for widespread death and suffering.

While starvation raged the lands and educational access became limited, news reports also suggest that the civilians were subject to acts of inhumane violence. A news report dated August 19, 1968 detailed how on August 11, during a tlaivar (death vigil) in Saitual village, local youth had gathered to pay their respects to a deceased member of their community, when security forces suddenly surrounded the house of the deceased. The young men gathered in the house were forcibly taken to the village school.

The following morning, they were brought before the villagers. Here, four of the young men attempted to flee into the crowd but were shot by security forces. Three, Hnema (son of Liansia), Rangkhuma (son of Lamkunga), and Rokunga (son of Lalthiauva), were killed. The fourth, Zamliana (son of Darnghaka), was injured.

The reports also suggest that the populace was ridiculed without any reason. A report dated September 16, 1968, highlights how in Muallungthu village, security forces entered the premises and gathered all the villagers in the village square. The villagers were ordered to take a drum and sing throughout the morning. Some soldiers moved among them, mockingly attempting to sing the Mizo songs.

Moreover, the reports indicate that numerous individuals were subjected to wrongful imprisonment. On December 31, 1969, a news report was published saying, "*According to a reliable source, many individuals who were imprisoned due to the unrest in Zoram will soon be released. This decision comes after it was revealed that many of these people were detained without just cause. Ch. Chhunga, the president of the Mizo Union, informed Chief Secretary Rustomji that numerous individuals were incarcerated simply for providing food to the MNF or for allowing them to stay in their homes... Chhunga emphasized that these individuals were not involved in any*

wrongdoing and that the government must review the situation, as many innocent people, who were not members of the MNF, have been unjustly imprisoned."

On December 31, 1969, the hills of Aijal were yearning for rest from the revolt and had just one request to the government: to let them spend the festive season in their homes. A report published by Mizo Arsi on the date says, "*According to an announcement by All India Radio (Guwahati), the villages in Zoram are set to be regrouped again, with the process scheduled to be completed by January 1969. This regrouping will affect approximately 5,500 people, who will be relocated into 10 new villages along the highway. The village regrouping has become a major concern for the local population, with many fearing they will be unable to spend Christmas and New Year's in their homes. Some villagers have appealed to the government, requesting that they be allowed to celebrate the holidays in their villages before the regrouping takes place. Political parties, including the Mizo Union Party, have consistently opposed the regrouping attempts since their inception, and the Zoram Congress Committee has passed a resolution expressing their opposition as well. However, despite the widespread resistance, the government has deemed the regrouping necessary, and no efforts have been successful in halting the plan*."

During this time, the burning of villages and homes had become a common sight. On August 1, 1968, a report highlighted the widespread destruction caused by the security forces during the conflict in Mizoram. On July 26, 1968, while the MNF (Mizo National Front) sought refuge in Chhawrtui village, the security forces set fire to the village, forcing the residents to flee. Despite this, the MNF volunteers continued to demand food from the village, further compounding the hardship of the villagers.

In response, the entire village was forced to abandon their homes, leaving only with their clothes and basic belongings. They sought refuge in Khawhai village, where they began the difficult task of looking for food and clothing.

4.5.3 Hmar Arsi

In *Hmar Arsi*, a total of 94 issues were reviewed, with 32 reports containing the previously mentioned keywords. The paper, priced at 10 paisa per copy, was a daily publication printed by the Hmar Arsi Press in Aizawl and edited by J. Thanghuama. It presented itself as non-politically influenced. Each issue typically featured 9–10 reports per page, including 2–3 items focused on Mizoram, alongside regular columns such as jokes, "Jet's Questions," and international news. The overall reporting was largely Aizawl-centric.

HMÂR ★ ARSI

Assam Tlâng mite dinhmun

Jets Question Box.

Fun Fair

M.N.S.P. Central Committee

Figure 17: Hmar Arsi newspaper in 1969

While the Lushai Hills was a district under Assam during *rambuai*, various news reports suggest that the people were discontent with the way the state leaders handled the people's struggle. A report on February 19, 1969 talks about Mizo District Council meeting held to discuss the budget for Mizoram for the year 1969-1970. During the meeting, a member, Hrangaia, expressed concerns about Assam's governance, stating, *"The way Assam has looked after us is worsening. It is not the*

same as before; things are getting worse and worse. During colonial times, we had ownership of our celebrations, such as Christmas. But under India, even Republic Day feels like just another holiday for high-ranking officers."

He also criticised the lack of relief for those killed by the MNF, saying that the security forces have not brought comfort to the public but instead disrupted civil proceedings. Bawichhuaka, another member, also spoke during the meeting, raising issues about the PPV. He stated, *"They are not considering how many families can live under one roof. They provide just 10 tin sheets and expect all families to share the space. We live in fear, fear of the underground, fear of the security forces. We have no proper living spaces and no means to earn a livelihood."*

Hunger and famine were recurring themes in all three newspapers. In Hmar Arsi, a report dated June 10, 1969, expressed the growing hopelessness in *Zoram*. The writer noted that the people had nothing left to say except that there were still lives to be saved. While some reports spoke of slight improvements in grouped villages, particularly where air-dropped rations were available, many could not afford to buy the food. Hunger was worsening daily. Despite this, men continued to spend their time in volunteer work. The reporter wrote that people no longer thought about saving food for the next year; they couldn't even hope for a meal the next day. In a striking expression of despair, the reporter admitted that, "*rather than continue suffering from hunger, we wish for a sudden death to end the misery"*.

Another report on March 15, 1969, also mentions severe food shortages and the possibility that the people would find it hard to survive if they were forcefully relocated to another village. It said, "*The security forces are attempting to group the residents of Lungchhuan village, near N. Vanlaiphai, which consists of approximately 150 households. The villagers have completed their harvest but are currently facing famine and food shortages. If they are forced to relocate, they will not only endure significant distress but also lose the opportunity to prepare for the next planting season. In despair, they have expressed, "We will not be able to survive next year."*

Many reports reflected on the hardship faced due to food shortages. On September 29, 1970, a report reads,"*Instead of spending so much money on supplies and related expenses, the government could ease the situation by reducing curfew hours and lifting the curfew in the afternoons. This would allow us to tend to our fields and harvest our food, relieving both the financial strain on the government and the hardship faced by the people. When there is rice, other shortages become more bearable. If they could support us in continuing our work instead of preventing us from working, it would make a significant difference*."

The situation in the Lushai Hills was increasingly grim, even as Assam exported rice to other states. In a letter to the editor dated May 24, 1969, Lalngehta Sailo questioned the imbalance, expressing concern over reports of starvation and suffering in the grouping centres. While Aizawl's Deputy Commissioner A.K. Palit was praised for storing rice out of fear of famine, Sailo pointed out that many grouped villages were struggling. Some centres had approached the DC for atta (flour), often without success, and diseases were reportedly spreading.

He noted that people were surviving on wild yams and taro root, forced to do unpaid community work, and in some cases, dying of hunger. A report published in the Assam Tribune on May 12, 1969, also confirmed severe famine and deaths in several grouping centres. This news deeply disturbed Mizo students living outside the state. Sailo questioned the silence of Mizo Union and Congress leaders and MLAs, suggesting their voices had not been strong enough for the government to act. "*This is a year of abundant rice harvest for Assam*," he wrote. "*If rice is being exported to other states, why are we, the people of Assam, dying of hunger*?"

The people of the Lushai Hills had traditionally regarded rice as their staple food. However, a report published on July 4, 1969, urged the public to shift this mindset to survive the ongoing famine. The writer appealed to the people not to view rice as the only essential food, suggesting that doing so would help them overcome the crisis and reduce dependence. He argued that wild yams, corn, bananas, and potatoes could also serve as staple foods, and emphasised that there should be no shame in surviving on these alternatives.

While the grouping scheme was officially called “Protected and Progressive Villages” (PPVs), a letter to the editor on May 21, 1969, challenged the reality of this title. The writer questioned whether the term progressive was appropriate, stating, “*The progress of any country or place is measured by the lives of the people and how they live. When I look at us, the people living in Durtlang PPV, I cannot accept the term ‘progressive village.*’”

He described the daily struggles faced by residents: having to dig for roots to survive, lacking money to buy rations, never tasting flavorful food, and living in poorly built huts that immediately mark them as PPV dwellings. He criticised the punishment of those unable to participate in volunteer work, and the absence of basic necessities like sugar, water, and land for housing, since most of it was already occupied by the original residents.

The writer suggested that instead of PPV, the villages should be called PBVs, Protected and Backward Villages. He urged the government to consider the hardships being faced so that the villages might truly become progressive. He called for fair compensation for volunteer work, support for school construction, flexible curfew enforcement for those working late, and permission for farmers to sleep in their agricultural fields when needed.

During the *rambuai* and forced grouping process, there was a heightened refugee situation in Aizawl, with displacement occurring within the district itself. On June 10, 1969, a refugee who had fled from a village shared his experience in a letter, following up on a previous letter published on April 11, 1969. He described the extreme conditions many refugees faced, stating that some had to leave without even a single piece of clothing when security forces set their homes and lands on fire. In Aizawl, they found no land to settle on or time to build homes, and they were without money to buy even a week's worth of food. Forced to rent cramped rooms from wealthy individuals, their earnings went entirely toward rent. The refugee appealed to the government to provide rations for one or two weeks, even on a loan basis, as many had no one to turn to for help, not even for a kilogram of rice. He also

requested second-hand clothes for the refugees and hoped that the spread of diseases caused by poor food quality could be eased.

The Mizos often took to songs to express their joys and sorrows. Roluahpuia (2023) writes that historical studies have analysed how *hla*(songs) reflect sociocultural change and transformation in Mizo society, particularly from the time Mizos converted to Christianity. On March 12, 1970, Hmar Arsi published among its reports a song composed by Tanpuia of Sialsuk Village, titled '*Khaw Sawi Khawm Hla*,' or a song about grouping, it goes

"*From all we have experienced, the most painful has been the grouping*

Across every corner of Zoram, the community spirit has faded away

In these times, I find myself longing for our Father in Heaven

And yearning for the new city where friends and loved ones will be reunited,

Where the One who loves us is present.

I think back to the days when we would gather with family and friends to sing together

Those times are now just a distant memory, replaced by silence and sorrow

I try not to dwell too much on the pain of our land, but it is overwhelming

Our wise leaders, the "white men," have turned their backs on us

We need God to save our dying, lonely land."

CHAPTER 5

ORAL NARRATIVES OF RACE AND RESISTANCE IN CONFLICT-TORN MIZORAM

The Indian soldiers were professional from New Delhi's point of view. To the innocent Mizos they appeared something less. Their lovely hills had become a steaming prison with invisible bars. – Nirmal Nibedon (2013)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the oral narratives of race and resistance within the context of Mizoram's conflict-ridden history, particularly focusing on the forced displacement of communities under the Grouping and Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV) scheme of 1967 to 1970. It explores the personal accounts of individuals who were displaced from their ancestral homes and relocated to regrouping centres, as well as those who witnessed the March 5, 1966 bombing of Aizawl and experienced the broader impact of the Rambuai. By analyzing these narratives, the chapter seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the enduring impact of this government policy on the Mizo community and the complex relationship between displacement, identity, and survival, while outlining the role of media in conflict. This chapter offers a critical lens on the intersection of race, resistance, and the socio-political upheaval that shaped the region's history. Until now, the impact of the bombing and subsequent grouping has primarily been documented from the perspectives of administrators and army officers through official reports and personal diaries. While data has been collected to quantify displacement, this is the first study that narrates the story of the people in their voices.

5.2 Narratives of displacement

Figure 18: Rosiamliama, resident of Bawngchawm village

Rosiamliana was a young boy of around 9 when, on a New Year morning, just as the Christmas festivities had ended, an announcement was made in their village in Bawngchawm.

Bawngchawm was a picturesque village atop a hill. It had sunny winters and summers that were cool, with hundreds of big oak trees and mango trees surrounding the village. In 2024, it started making headlines for being a paragliding site, paragliders from Mizoram and from other parts of the world often glide through its lush hills. However, in 1967, it was not a fancy village that made headlines; it was just a home to Rosiamliama and hundreds of other families.

On that January morning in 1967, Rosiamliana and his family were asked to leave their house by the authorities. When they walked out of the house, they realised it

was not only them but the entire village that had been asked to leave their homes. To their utter dismay, their village had been chosen among those selected to be regrouped under the Protected and Progressive Villages Scheme of the government.

During its 6 p.m. news broadcast on January 3, 1967, All India Radio announced the Government of India's decision to group villages in the Mizo Hills for security purposes. Lt. Gen. S.H.F.J. Manekshaw and Assam's Chief Secretary A.N. Kidwai disclosed the decision during simultaneous press conferences in Calcutta and Shillong. The Indian press largely appreciated the government's effort to involve them in the matter (Jafa, 2000).

Between 1967 and 1970, the village regrouping campaign in the Mizo Hills affected over 236,000 people through various schemes implemented under the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1953. The first phase, known as Protected and Progressive Villages (PPVs), was carried out within a 10-mile radius of the Silchar-Kolasib-Aizawl-Lungleh highway. Completed in just 10 weeks, it merged 106 villages into 18 centres, affecting 52,210 people. While civil administration eventually took charge, day-to-day operations and security were managed by the military. The second phase, launched in August 1969, introduced the New Grouping Centres. This regrouping covered 184 villages across five sectors and relocated 97,339 people into 40 centres. The third phase, called Voluntary Grouping Centres, began in August 1970. Despite its name, it involved the regrouping of 47,156 people from various areas into 26 centres. A final category, known as Extended Loop Areas, was implemented later in 1970, relocating 34,219 people from 63 villages into 17 centres. In addition, three more centres were set up in Mamit, Tuipang, and Sangau, affecting another 4,938 individuals (Nag, 2012).

"On that night," Rothangi, sister of Rosiamliana told me, "The people of the village did not sleep a wink. They wandered around the hills, visited the places they had frequented and tried to make the most of every minute. All the people of the village cried, mothers and fathers and young men and women as well."

It was a night of tears and memories, a final night to remember the life they had built as families and neighbours. “The next morning, ”Rothangi said, “They burnt down most of the village after we had taken everything we could carry on our backs (Rothangi, personal communication, December 09, 2024).”

Another resident of Bawngchawm, Lalchansanga Colney, often relished his childhood in the village. He was born in Cherhlun, but his family had migrated to Bawngchawm in 1952 and he attended primary school in the village. But what is most clear to his memory was their last night in the village: “The people sang and cried through the night and by daybreak, every man had tears in his eyes,” he said. Fifteen years of his life were turned into rubble in one night (L Colney, personal communication, November 14, 2023).

Bawngchawm was regrouped in the Serchhip grouping centre, where the former residents remain till today. However, there are many who have never found a home elsewhere.

Until his passing in 2023, Lalchansanga had lived in four states of India and travelled to over 30 countries. Yet, every year without fail, if his health permitted, he made it a point to hike up the barren hill that was once Bawngchawm and find home again, even if only for a few minutes.

For Rosiamliana, taking an annual hike was not enough. His sister told me, “He never wanted to stay anywhere else. He returned to our old village, which was now empty, and built a hut there. Even when he got ill, I had to force him to come to the hospital for medical care. After he got out of the hospital, he was intent on returning to his hut(Rothangi, personal communication, December 09, 2024).”

Rosiamliana got ill again, and this time he had to leave his hut in Bawngchawm for Zoram Medical College in Falkawn. Seeing that he needed care, his family in Aizawl took him in and in 2017, he breathed his last.

Figure 19: Lalchansanga Colney and his family in Bawngchawm used as his laptop screensaver

Another resident of Bawngchawm, Remmawia, 92 years old at the time of this interview, had served as a soldier in the Myanmar Army for five years before the *rambuai*.

He returned home in June 1957. By then, his family, who originally resided in Cherhlun village, had moved to Bawngchawm village. During the *mautam*, they had a plentiful harvest and were one of the few fortunate families to have rice on their plates.

“We were able to harvest around 80 tins of rice. We had the most plentiful harvest in our village. Some of our neighbors could only harvest 5 tins of rice,” he explained. At the time, rice was measured by how much could fill an oil tin can, which would consist of around 12 to 15 kilograms of unmilled rice with husks (R Colney, personal communication, May 14, 2025).

While the *mautam* famine did not deprive the family of their daily meals, it was the *rambuai* and the subsequent forced grouping that followed which left their shelves empty, with their only option being to rely on wild leaves.

“Our homes were razed to the ground. As we were aware that our village was going to be set on fire, my father dismantled our house so that he could rebuild it from scratch at our new location. He assembled the parts near our village, but the soldiers stole everything. Since we dared not say anything, we just watched them load their vehicles with our house parts and drive away(R Colney, personal communication, May 14, 2025).”

In the village where he was relocated, Remmawia said they received rations and he was able to tend to his farm from time to time. However, his worst experience, he said, was being forced to serve as a coolie.

“As the forces were afraid of ambushes, they would travel at night on foot. During these times, they forced us to carry all their belongings, their household goods, blankets, clothes, and rations. They paid us a meagre five rupees sometimes. But we were employed by force,” he said.

Remmawia explained that one person from each household would be forced to serve as a coolie by turn. Fortunately, he found employment in a post office and said he tried to avoid encounters with the armed forces by identifying himself as a government employee.

Speaking about the atrocities committed by the armed forces, he said the worst acts were the raping of women. “The officers were the worst. They would capture women and keep them in their houses so they could rape them as they pleased. There was a tactic they used,” he said. “Women would be accused of being volunteers, and even if they denied it, the officers would say they were not satisfied with the response and keep them for a week to do as they pleased with them(R Colney, personal communication, May 14, 2025).”

Remmawia recalled one incident in which, he said, an army Major was shot dead near Maite village. In his diary, they found a list he had written of Mizo women he had raped. The list contained 18 names.

Bringing up the regrouping and PPV scheme in Mizoram is not difficult. Every Mizo who was born between the 1930s and 50s has a story to tell, but often, it is not easy to tell. There is pain in their eyes, and many of their words remain unspoken, caught in their throats.

“For those who have not experienced it, it is hard to explain and it is hard to make you understand the hardship we went through during that time,” Rokunga, a resident of Lunglei, told me.

Figure 20: Rokunga Ralte, resident of Lunglei

In 1967, Rokunga was just a 13-year-old boy, but he remembers exactly how his village, Pukpui looked like on a winter morning. “There were clouds all around, and Pukpui had the views of a perfect, serene hill station.”The government had

distributed tin roofing sheets to each family, as Pukpui had been designated a model village. As a result, all the houses were constructed in uniform sizes to match the standardised roofs provided(R Ralte, personal communication, December 06, 2024).

While they were living in peace, their lives were suddenly turned upside down one day.

“They shoved us together like animals in a vacant area of the village. All around, our houses surrounded us. And then, they started lighting the village up in flames. It was scorching hot, and people were crying and screaming. Everyone was helpless,” he said. The flame was so hot that the people would be moved around so they did not faint from the heat (R Ralte, personal communication, December 06, 2024).

In a few hours, over 300 houses built of wood and bamboo stilts were reduced to ashes. There were no cameras to record the aftermath, no reporters talking about it in the news the next day. Like every other family in his village, Rokunga and his parents and five siblings were left with a handful of belongings and the history of their lives, erased.

“We stayed in the jungle for about a month,” said Rokunga, who was 70 years old at the time of this interview. They walked for the whole night carrying their belongings in woven bamboo baskets and built a temporary shelter in the jungle.

This was not the first time that their village had been attacked. Rokunga said, the first attack was on March 9, 1966, when jet fighters fired on the village, damaging some houses, “only because they got the word that this was Laldenga’s village.” Laldenga was an individual who had spearheaded the MNF movement.

He recalled one particular incident where a woman was giving birth to a baby. “The security forces were waiting to burn the village, but a woman was giving birth, so they waited. As soon as the baby was born, they pulled out the mother and child and burned the house.”

“Their strategy was so foolish,” Rokunga said of the Indian government. “The main intent of the grouping was to ensure that the rebels would have no source of food,

and they would surrender out of hunger. But that would never be the case because the jungle was our kitchen in those days. Every kind of food we eat can be found in the forests. Moreover, people who harvest rice keep it in farm huts near the paddy fields because they cannot carry it all at once. So these rice stocks would be available for the rebels (R Ralte, personal communication, December 06, 2024). ”

Rokunga’s family stayed for around one year in the grouping centre.

“The grouping centre was like a concentration camp. We did not receive any kind of rations. The famine we faced during this time was worse than the *mautam* famine. Only when Mizo district became a Union Territory in 1972, we started having enough food to fill our stomachs.” Explaining how difficult it was to survive, Rokunga said that to be able to buy a bar of soap, they had to work and earn money for three days (R Ralte, personal communication, December 06, 2024).

Rokunga returned to Lunglei, now a town near Pukpui in the year 1971. In the year this interview was held in 2024, his former village was just a few kilometres away from his new house. Where his village once stood, there are now buildings for new residents. There are no photos for Rokunga to look at, but the sight of his village stays on in his reveries, and when he talks about it, there is a sparkle in his eye.

For those who had been separated from their identity, their village and their community, the most difficult terrain was to build a home from scratch again when there were no jobs and a scarcity of food.

Ronald Sapa Tlau, a former MP of the Rajya Sabha from 2014 to 2020, was also one of the victims of forced relocation:

“In January 1967, our village was set on fire. Our family used to have a small shop where we sold everyday goods, and my father also sold clothes as he was a tailor (R S Tlau, personal communication, December 05, 2024).”

While his family was not wealthy, they were comfortable and had enough to live well in the village. They had built a wooden house, with walls and floors made of timber, which was a rarity in the area. They often hosted *sap* (foreigner) guests

during the colonization of the Lushai Hills. Near their village of Hualtu, there was a location that served as an MNF hideout, from which the MNF would shoot at the security forces. In retaliation, the security forces frequently threatened to burn down the villagers' homes, and eventually, their threats were carried out.

Figure 21: Ronald Sapa Tlau with his wife

The village of Hualtu had around 400 houses, and they were forcefully relocated to Baktawng. The entire village was set on fire. Like Rokunga and Rothangi, Tlau who was then 12 years old, clearly remembers the echo of wailing in his ears. People, young and old crying as they held on to whatever belongings their hands and backs could hold and the dust building up as the people walked on foot, crossing the Tuirini river. Sapa had nine siblings, and the youngest was just a few months old.

“I carried my three-year-old brother on my back, and we walked for the entire day and night. We were filled with so much fear. We were scared that the security forces would shoot at us, and we were also scared that the MNF would attack us. When we moved to Baktawng, we did not have enough food to sustain us, so we would dig the ground for wild roots (R S Tlau, personal communication, December 05, 2024).”

Though Tlau's family escaped from Hualtu, their terrors did not end when they came to Baktawng. The army unit in their village had a feared commander.

"They would gather the youth and ask us to draw water. Sometimes, they would threaten us for no particular reason and say they would beat us up. On one night, the MNF decided to attack the security forces. They informed the villagers to be ready for the attack by digging trenches to stay safe from the bullets. However, the security forces came to know about this and they were very angry. After the MNF launched an attack, the next morning, they called together all the youth of the village. I can still recall how the forces were lined on both sides of the path and beat and tortured all the youth who fell to the ground from the lashes from bamboo sticks. They lay on the roads like pigs, unable to move at all (R S Tlau, personal communication, December 05, 2024)."

Every time there was an encounter between the security forces and the MNF, the security forces took revenge by burning down the nearest village or gathering all the male members of the village who were non-MNF members and beating them up. If a villager reported the wrongdoing of a security force, they took advantage of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, giving them the right to arrest under suspicion and, arrested the civilian who complained against them, saying he was a suspected MNF sympathiser (Hluna, 2025).

There were very few intellectuals in Mizoram at the time of ***rambuai***. Any graduates of colleges were worthy to become news at the time, education was prioritised, but it was still new, and the people were very poor. Only a few could afford to pursue higher studies beyond their villages. Tlau believed that since no one could speak on behalf of the people or bring their suffering to the media, the security forces, fully aware of this, acted without restraint, targeting civilians without a second thought.

Tlau remarked on the Indian army, saying:

"They treated us like enemies so we looked at them like enemies. There were no educated youth so we were just shoved around as they pleased. Only when Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo came into the picture, the army respected him and started

behaving better. Without him, we could not stand in the face of a soldier with even one star. He was the saviour we could see (R S Tlau, personal communication, December 05, 2024)."

Brig. Thenphunga Sailo, was a hero to the people. He was an Indian military officer and went on the become the 2nd Chief Minister of Mizoram when it was a Union Territory. However, according to accounts from interviewees, his legacy is not one of an army man or of a politician, but of one who helped end the miseries of his tribesmen.

Brigadier T. Sailo, who was serving in the Indian Army, began receiving reports of the atrocities committed by the Indian Army on the Mizo people. His moment of reckoning came in May 1966 during a visit to Mizoram with a Corps Commander. What he saw and heard during those two days shook him. "I have been in the army for 32 years, but the Mizo people are my brethren," he later wrote. Despite voicing his concerns to military leadership, he was met with silence and disapproval. After retiring in December 1973, Sailo intended to settle in Shillong. But the ground realities of his homeland called him back. A letter from Lalkhama, Mizoram's first IAS officer, urged him to act. Following an MNF attack on the Lt. Governor's vehicle, innocent villagers in Zanlawn were tortured and relocated. "Now that you have retired, the people of Mizoram are in great distress and need to be saved. Come to Mizoram and find a way to help them out," the letter read (Sailo, 2013).

Sailo responded. He sold his car, bought a more rugged second-hand Ambassador, and returned to Mizoram. Soon, people gathered at his house. They were afraid, frustrated, and looking for hope. Out of this gathering emerged the Human Rights Committee of Mizoram.

The committee's focus was clear: to challenge the forced relocations and ensure protection of individual rights in the face of unchecked military power. Public meetings were held across villages to raise awareness. Villagers were instructed to take note of regiments, companies, and officers posted in their areas. A "Form A"

was created, guiding victims on how to document abuses: names, dates, locations, and witnesses. Booklets were distributed detailing the limits of military authority.

On October 16, 1974, Brig. Sailo wrote a memorandum to the Prime Minister. It was a scathing but measured appeal. “Since my retirement... I have been increasingly depressed and disturbed... the Indian Army, in which I still feel so proud to have served, has now achieved [this reputation] in my home state,” he wrote. Attached were 36 handwritten accounts of atrocities committed by the army, along with a detailed report on civil-military relations in Mizoram (Sailo, 2013).

Lalkhama, a retired IAS from Mizoram and one of the signatories of the Peace Accord that was signed between Mizoram and the Union government, was instrumental in appealing for Brig T Sailo to return to his homeland. Though he was under the service of the government, Lalkhama had a deep love for his homeland and was not in favour of the government’s activities. In his book, he writes, “The principal victims of long years of conflict and violence in Mizoram were the civilians. Hundreds of innocent civilians were killed, wounded, permanently incapacitated, or arrested and detained in jails without trial for years. More than half of the total population was uprooted and displaced, some because of fear, most by force.”

I interviewed Lalkhama in his home in 2024. He was now 94 years old, but his brain was still as sharp as his youth.

Figure 22: Lalkhama at 94-years-old signing his book

“The grouping of villages was a clear breach of our fundamental rights. Also, the media never took any effort to show the cause of the Mizos and their suffering. There was no form of restraint, the army just did as they please. They would knock on the door of people’s homes at any time of the day and seize anyone they like. They would make the men lie on the floor and torture them. They could not differentiate between those who are from the MNF and those who are civilians, so without any proof, they would send men to the jail,” he remarked (Lalkhama, personal communication, January 12, 2024).

During rambuai, with the Armed Forces Special Power Act of 1958 in place, the armed forces could arrest any Mizo without a warrant on a mere suspicion that he had committed or was about to commit a cognizable offence. There was total security in place, with no questions of relaxation. The entire situation was enveloped in an air of national security. However, total security for India meant total sense of insecurity for the tribesmen. Who were they protecting and from whom was a question that was never answered (Nibedon, 2013).

5.3 In Their Own Words: Memories of March 5

At the time of this interview in 2025, Darleta was elderly, his skin marked by age and illness. Yet he remembered, as clearly as daylight, the day jet fighters dropped bombs near him. Originally from Darzo village, he had joined the MNF as a youth and had relocated to Sangau along with other recruits.

“We were preparing a pork feast with Lalmura and Chaubuanga when a (jet) fighter flew past us, we hid beneath the bed. There was also the grafting of machine guns; my friends were scared to be in the house, so they ran out, and I followed them as the house where we had hidden had started catching fire. I ran and hid in a ditch,” he said (D. Fanai, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

While the events of that day were enough to frighten a person to death, there were also comical moments that did not escape Darleta’s notice.

Figure 23: Darleta with his son at his son’s residence in Aizawl

As he talked about that fateful day, Darleta broke into laughter while recalling his friend, who was usually squeaky clean and hated dirt in any form, getting entangled in some pig manure. He also recounted another friend who, during the machine gun

fire, hid between the branches of a tree with only his head covered while his entire body remained visible. Darleta burst into fits of laughter as he recalled these scenes.

“Around half of the village of Sangau was burning that day due to the machine guns and bombs dropping on the houses,” said Darleta.

Darleta joined the MNF only for a short stint in the year 1966 when the *rambuai* first started. He later returned home to his village, Darzo, which was set on fire in the next year, 1967. Their village was grouped in South Vanlaiphai village.

“We had one son while we were grouped in South Vanlaiphai. During these years, we suffered torment in every form. We could not work as we were caged in the centre. We were like a herd of animals driven together, we needed a pass to leave or enter the centre. We were just like cows,” he said (D. Fanai, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

Darleta recalled that the worst experience during this time was the shortage of food. They often had to dig out wild yams from the fields, which also became scarce, because everyone was looking for them. “We would dig the entire day, lengths as deep as our heights, and be able to somehow collect wild yams enough for a meal. If we failed to find the wild yam, that meant we had to fast,” he said. He also recalled how illness of every kind was rampant during the time due to the lack of food, and also a herd of people being pushed together in a crowded location. He said there was diarrhoea, fever, and other illnesses which they could not even understand, “many people died,” he said(D. Fanai, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

In the year 1966, Kenneth Chawngliana was just a 19-year-old youth intent on completing his matriculation examinations. He later went on to become a member of the legislative assembly and a speaker in the Mizoram Assembly, but the events of this year and the years following would go on to change the course of his life and create a major turning point from the profession he had originally aspired to follow.

On March 5, 1966, he was preparing to appear for his matriculation exams when the jet fighters dropped aerial bombs in Aizawl town. “After two days, I fled to Pukpui

as my elder brother was there and I stayed there for two weeks," he said. He later returned to appear for his exam and fortunately passed. However, while he was pursuing his further studies, his village, Hliakpui, was forcefully relocated to Changzawl and their village was burnt down (K. C. Chawngthu, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

Figure 24: Kenneth Chawngliana in his office in Aizawl

He lived in his village till he was 14 years old. "I can still see our village in my memories. The grouping made us so poor, our situation was even worse than the Rohingyas today. The government was negligent, especially due to the food shortage. There might not have been deaths due to hunger, but there were deaths due to the shortage of food, as there were various ailments, such as diarrhoea, and other diseases. More than the deaths in the hands of the security forces and the MNF, the higher number of deaths was due to the utter poverty," he recounted.

Commenting on how the Assam government handled the situation, Chawngliana commented, "They could see that there was going to be *rambuai*, but because they hated the MNF so much, they did not take any precautionary measures. The Assam

government was made up of Congress MLAs, and they patronised the Mizo Union. They did not even take any preparations for *Mautam* and it was that negligence that led to the rambuai (K. C. Chawngthu, personal communication, May 22, 2025).”

The grouping had one benefit, according to Chawngliana, that the smaller villages were relocated and resulted in bigger towns along the highway. However, the disadvantages were bigger according to him:

“The grouping scheme penetrated through the close-knit ties of the community as we started living with non-locals. There was no source of livelihood, and education came to a standstill in many parts. Mizoram had never faced any kind of famine other than when the bamboo flowering took place. Each village was self-sufficient and helped each other, people were hardworking and independent. We had a beautiful society, but after the *rambuai*, our perspectives changed. It destroyed our morals, it resulted in unfaithfulness and brought a downfall to the essence of tlawmgnaihna (selflessness). The armed forces hired informers, which led to killings between the Mizos themselves.”

Chawngliana became one of the founding members of the Human Rights Committee led by Brigadier T Sailo. The committee was responsible for being the first and only organisation to collect information on the atrocities of the armed forces and write letters to the Indian government and MPs of the country.

"What we did was document the army's brutality and high-handedness and submit it to members of parliament, opposition leaders, and even the Prime Minister," he said. "After we took this step, the Indian Express wrote about us, and the media began to take notice of our suffering. Prior to this, we were never mentioned in the newspapers. India only portrayed us as being under control, claiming it was all under their leadership." He emphasised that the media's intervention came only after the Human Rights Committee took this initiative, which played a crucial role in raising awareness and ultimately contributing to the dismantling of the armed forces' brutality (K. C. Chawngthu, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

As Chawngliana had completed his Master's degree and pursued a Phd, he had planned to become a professor. But, there was pressure from the public to turn the Human Rights Committee into a political party to lead the people. “We decided to continue to have the Human Rights Committee as an organisation, but form a political party called the People's Conference party, and I became a youth leader,” he said. After joining politics, they visited various grouping centres, and the sights he saw remain in his memory to this day. “They were in pitiful conditions, living in cramped spaces. They were given two bundles of tin roofs, and atta would be distributed in the rations, but since people were not used to this food, they would fall ill. Poverty was rampant, and most of the male youth who were not part of the MNF were caught by the security forces for various reasons. There was also numerous cases of rape,” he said (K. C. Chawngthu, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

As the government denied bombing Aizawl and its surrounding areas on March 5 and 6, 1966, and since there was a lack of an independent agency to prove the same, there have been debates on the topic. However, one person in Mizoram, JV Hluna, keeps the remains of a mortar shell safely in a room in his house. As a historian, he is one of the most prominent publishers of books on the topic of *rambuai*, both in English and Mizo. He has authored 10 books, 5 in Mizo and 5 in English. When I met him in his house in Aizawl, he was resting on a sofa in his home office, surrounded by books and a view of the streets. Now seventy-nine years old, Hluna is known for many things, he is an academician, a heritage preservationist, a Mizo Historian and a politician. But he is also a man who has lived to see a town burn while children cried, who had to hide while his father was tortured by men in uniform.

Figure 25: JV Hluna at his residence in Aizawl

Hluna has authored books on the bombing in Aizawl, and is the only one to author books in English which talk about the incident. He was also one of those who saw firsthand, bombs dropped by the fighter jets. In March 1966, Hluna was preparing for his matriculation examination and had collected his admit card for the same. However, when tensions started brimming between MNF and the security forces from March 1, he had set out to help a relative transfer their store goods to a safe place from the main market area when the machine gun firing and bombing started.

“We ran to Zokhawsang (around 5 kms from Aizawl), the town became empty. There were four fighter jets hovering in the sky,” he recalled. During the night of terror, he remembers a few things, how the kitchen of a family well known to him was bombed, and a night of crying in Zokhawsang. With all the people who had fled to Aizawl cramped in people's houses in the hilly locality, he said, people were watching Aizawl burn to the flames, and there were sounds of crying in every corner (J. V Hluna, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

Thirteen people died as a result of the bombing in Aizawl on March 5 and 6 (Hluna, 2012). Hluna traced the graveyards of the thirteen people and came to know that they were buried in Mission Veng graveyard, by the students of Aizawl Theological College and a missionary.

Hluna recalled that a member of the Assam assembly, Prof J J M Nichols Roy and G.G. Swell, a member of Parliament, had come to assess the damage. They found the empty shells and the damage done to the town. They also conducted interviews to collect first-hand knowledge.

While the night of bombing and crying was a harsh memory to hold, a harsher memory remains in Hluna's mind, where security forces hung his father upside down. "My elder brother had joined the MNF, and the security forces wanted to know where he was, so they tied a rope around my father's feet and hung him upside down from a pole. Then they lashed his feet. I dared not watch the sight and hid away," he said. The security forces, he recalls, burnt the church where his father was a ministering elder. They also singled out Hluna's house and set fire to it.

"They did not allow us to take a single piece of our belongings. My father used to collect magazine editions of Kristian Tlangau, and all of that, along with all the pictures of my parents, everything was burnt to ashes. That evening, the only property we had were the clothes we were wearing," shared Hluna (J. V Hluna, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

There is a shared memory that each interviewee had in common - the atrocities of the Indian army. "They were brutal," said Hluna, recalling how the army men would spend the night drinking and conduct raids in the early dawn. In their drunken rage, they would surround a village and call together all the men from the village and search the houses for signs of MNF members. "Just being a Mizo was a crime, so people would say they are from non-Mizo tribes and speak in other dialects to confuse the forces.

Due to the atrocities of the army, Hluna said, if they were from the army and if they were *vai* (from the plains), we were afraid of them, no matter who they were. Even if

they were road construction workers, we were afraid of them (J. V Hluna, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

In one of his books, Hluna writes that a pamphlet was distributed by the Ministery of Information, Broadcasting and Publicity of the MNF Party, Lianzuala in June 1966 where he wrote, that in the north Mizo district, the Indian Army burnt down 21 villages and gutted 2,133 houses. He wrote of the rape incidents, saying, “They raped 54 women, out of which 2 adult women and a minor girl died due to excessive copulation by a number of soldiers.” The churches were occupied by the army, where they cooked and slept, while the villagers were not permitted to worship. The book also mentions another author, Tlangchhuaka who in his book, Mizoram Politics, wrote of Indian soldiers raping women, both virgin girls and married women while the men were driven away to jails. According to the author, some girls were even raped inside the churches (Hluna, 2025).

In our interview, Hluna revealed that he had once taken a survey to collect data on the number of Mizo women that were raped by the Indian Army but never got to the point of publishing it due to the sensitivity of the matter. “However,” he said, “they raped almost all the women in the villages of Kolasib and Chhingchhip, it is hard to specify the numbers, but thousands of women were raped. There was an army major who would keep two women just to bathe him and sleep with him.”

When asked about the presence of media persons, Hluna compared the rambuai in Mizoram to the ethnic conflict in Manipur that broke out in 2023 and said, “There were no journalists at that time, there were no helicopter services and the only way to reach Aizawl or any place in the district was through the accompaniment of a convoy. The only information the media received was through the Brigade Major’s PRO, and whatever information they shared was not in support of the people. If there had been media coverage, we would not have faced the scale of atrocities we faced. Comparing our situation to Manipur, Manipur has a high court, they can speak up against AFSPA and have English news representatives. As for us, the only place where we could go to complain was to the army commanders. So our suffering is not the same.”

Reflecting on the *rambuai* and how the Indian government had handled the situation, Hluna said, “Indira Gandhi was vile. She took charge on February 16, 1966, and maybe she suspected the involvement of Bangladesh or Pakistan, maybe that is why she acted so harshly on the Mizo people. If it was going to support her cause, she was ready to wipe out the people.” He said from what he heard, the leaders of the Union government were planning to distribute the Mizo people in states across India so they would lose their culture and identity, however, they held back from it (J. V Hluna, personal communication, May 22, 2025).

Hluna believes there was injustice done to the Mizo people and that India should ask for forgiveness. He has been working hard to spread the word since 2008. “I decided that I have to put it on record that we were bombed. Every time someone says there was no bombing, I show them the remains of a bomb I have stored safely in my house,” he said. Hluna had an opportunity to meet the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 12, 2016, in Allahabad, “I told him they need to ask for forgiveness. I said he must come to Aizawl and ask the people for forgiveness, and he just listened. Modi mentioned the bombing for the first time in 2023, but it was for a political attack on Congress (J. V Hluna, personal communication, May 22, 2025).”

Hluna was referring to Modi’s reply to a no-confidence motion in Parliament in August 2023, Here, Prime Minister Narendra Modi referenced the 1966 bombing of Aizawl by the Indian Air Force to criticise the Congress party. He said, “On March 5, 1966, innocent civilians were attacked by the Indian Air Force. Imagine using our own air force against our fellow citizens. Was their security not the responsibility of the Government of India? Who was in power at the time?” he asked, before answering himself: “Indira Gandhi (India Today, 2023).”

5.4 The Rambuai Reporters

Nirmal Nibedon was one of the first jouranalists to document the independence struggle in Mizoram according to politicians and journalists I interviewed. In his book, The Dagger Brigade, he mentions one person, Zirliana, who was shot four times by the security forces near Biate vilage and yet was found alive by the

villagers. He writes of their recovery of Zirliana's injured body, saying, "Thus ended the career of, perhaps, the shortest guerilla in the MNA."

At the time of this interview, Zirliana was the editor of Mizo Aw, a vernacular daily newspaper. After he was shot, he was left for dead by the security forces but was pardoned when they came to know he survived, mostly due to his young age as he was just 15 when he had joined the Mizo National Army. "It was a shame not to join the MNA during the time, if you loved your land and your people, it was something that was expected of you. It is not that I supported the policies of the MNF but I stepped out because of our people," he said (D R Zirliana, personal communication, May 19, 2025).

After his recovery, Zirliana attended a morning high school and earned pocket money by distributing the newspapers Mizo Arsi and, later, Tawrhbawm.

Figure 26: D R Zirliana in front of the Aizawl Press Club

However, in 1970, when he completed his matriculation examinations, which was a rarity during the time, he started working, not as a newspaper delivery boy, but as an employee in the *Tawrhbawm* office.

After his experience at Tawrhbawm, Zirliana and a few friends decided to start their own newspaper, Zawlkhawpui. He became one of the first journalists from the then Lushai Hills, now Mizoram, to participate in a press tour of India.

However, despite the perceived benefits, from what Zirliana recalls, the life of a journalist was akin to a press in a prison cell during the rambuai.

“There were a lot of restrictions on the press, the army brigade had a Public Relations Officer, they would translate and analyse all our news reports. We could not write any thing bad about the armed forces or their movements. We could not write about any army officers, neither their operations. Even just writing a security officer’s name was a crime. The only information we were allowed to publish were officials government press releases,” he said (D R Zirliana, personal communication, May 19, 2025). The translations were done by JF Laldailova, a man who went on to be revered as a ‘Mizo William Shakespeare.’

Zirliana said he had many cases against him due to the news reports published in his paper. “It was hard to recall the reasons or how many cases I had but I had a lot of cases against me,” he said. He was later put in prison for five months by the PC party’s leadership for publishing pro-MNF reports.

While the armed forces were weighing heavily on mediapersons, on the other hand, the MNF also posed a threat to their lives. “We could not write about the atrocities of either the armed forcse or the MNF, our hands were tied,” he said.

During the 21-month emergency under Indira Gandhi’s leadership, even mediapersons in Mizoram were impacted, according to Zirliana. “We would type everything on stencil paper and hand over the carbon copy for assessment, but then the officials, would cut out a lot of our news, so we would have to redo the whole paper again,” he said (D R Zirliana, personal communication, May 19, 2025).

Zirliana remains an active member of the Mizoram Journalists Association, regularly attending press meetings and events. He always wears a warm smile and walks with a slight limp, an enduring reminder of the bullet wounds he sustained to his leg.

When asked about the government's handling of the Mizo National Front's fight for independence, he responded without hesitation:

"There are some perspectives of the armed forces that we can now try to understand. But the truth is, people were forced to leave the villages they had known their entire lives, often with nothing. They were sent to unfamiliar places, with no shelter, no belongings, nowhere to call home. This is not how human beings should be treated. At that time, there was no recognition of human rights. We had no space to speak up, we felt completely suffocated (D R Zirliana, personal communication, May 19, 2025)."

An India Today archive report published on September 30, 1979, headlined, "Government cracks down on press in Mizoram for 'spreading disharmony,' was one of the only reports available documenting the plight of the journalists in Mizoram. The report talks about the arrests of five editors and publishes, including Zirliana, within a span of two months. They were tried for publishing material that could have allegedly spread disharmony. Zirliana who was the editor of Mizo Aw, a pro-Congress paper, was arrested for publishing a letter by a President of an organisation.

The India Today reporter observed, "Mizoram is more or less neglected by the national press. No major newspaper has a staffer at Aizawl; only the Press Trust of India has a representative in Mizoram. With the reported new outbreaks of underground activities, and the consequent muzzling of the local press, the possibility of getting correct information on Mizoram is greatly reduced (Mitra, 1979)."

HC Vanlalruata, 64 at the time of this interview and a correspondent for The *Times of India*, began his career in journalism in 1982. He was just five years old when jet fighters dropped bombs on Aizawl, yet the memories of that traumatic time remain vivid.

"I was about five when the rambuai began. When the bombs fell, we ran out of fear. We were extremely poor, surviving on pumpkin leaves. Rice was too expensive for us to afford," he recalled.

Reflecting on the media landscape during the turbulent years of the *rambuai*, Vanlalruata underscored the deep silence that surrounded Mizoram during this period. As a correspondent who later chronicled events in the state, he recalled the near-total absence of journalistic presence and the deliberate lack of access imposed by the central government. His perspective highlights how the rambuai was not only a time of military and political upheaval, but also one of informational isolation, where critical voices and external scrutiny were systematically shut out:

"No one was allowed to enter Mizoram during *rambuai*. Indira Gandhi would not allow it. Human rights activists or journalists, neither were allowed. The human rights violations were also very bad. The only journalist who came was Nirmal Nibedon, towards the end of Rambuai in 1984. There were no journalists from Assam either, only politicians came. If there had been media coverage of human rights abuses from both sides, from the MNF and the forces, people would have known. But no one knew about it. There was a complete blackout from the outside. The BBC had covered Mizoram claiming independence and other topics, but regarding these events, there was a total blackout, including the village grouping (H. C. Vanlalruata, personal communication, May 13, 2025)."

Figure 27: H C Vanlalruata on the far right on a reporting trip to the Indo-Myanmar border

Vanlalruata's quest for truth continued into the 2000s, especially regarding the 1966 bombing of Aizawl. At the Indian Air Force's 70th anniversary in 2002, he confronted an Air Marshal about the bombing:

"In 2002, when the Indian Air Force celebrated its 70th anniversary, I was the only one present from Mizoram. There were others from Meghalaya and Assam too. At that time, there was a press conference. The Air Marshal of Eastern Command was the convener. We asked him, 'What is your role during insurgencies?' and he said, 'We only provide logistic support, we drop supplies and take care of troop movement.' I said, 'But you dropped a bomb in 1966, 13 people died. It was March 5.' But he said he was not aware of it and that it was before he joined the Air Force. All my journalist friends were stunned, and they started writing about it. No one knows. The world doesn’t know (H. C. Vanlalruata, personal communication, May 13, 2025)."

CHAPTER 6

DEFENSIVE MEDIA AND ETHNIC FRAMING IN THE ASSAM-MIZORAM CONFLICT

6.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates whether the marginalization of media in the Northeast, particularly in Mizoram, has influenced local media's framing of the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border conflict. It explores the possibility that years of limited national media attention may have led local media to adopt a defensive stance, focusing on protecting their own community in the absence of broader support.

6.2 Conflict and Identity

The Assam-Mizoram border conflict is a historicitary conflict rooted in competing narratives of each state's historical interpretation of boundary demarcation. Both Assam and Mizoram assert their identity as rightful owners of the land, with each state presenting different territorial claims.

In Asia, cultural conflicts have been prominent in disputes since at least 1945. However, there has also been a noticeable rise in identity-based conflicts in the region since the late 1970s. Among the various thematic categories of cultural strife, historical issues are the most common, whereas conflicts solely related to language are relatively uncommon. More than four decades after ASEAN's founding, several conflicts between member states remain unresolved. These disputes primarily center on issues related to the proper demarcation of borders, such as those between Thailand and Cambodia or Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as competing territorial claims. They found that Asia is particularly prone to conflicts, with domestic disputes over identity, especially historicitary conflicts, predominating in the region. The conflict landscape in Asia is marked by enduring domestic conflicts of low intensity, often centered on identity issues rooted in the past (Croissant & Trinn, 2021).

Samuel P. Huntington, in his "Clash of Civilisations" thesis, posits that conflicts between groups from different civilisations have become the central and most dangerous dimension of emerging global politics. He argues that cultural differences are a primary driver of these conflicts. However, certain studies critique this thesis. For instance, Bell (2002) counters that there is an emerging global ethic, where shared values promote coexistence, though he acknowledges that some universal traits, like loyalty to one's group and human capacity for rage, persist.

According to Gartzke and Gleditsch (2005), instead of speculating on how differences lead to conflict, we should examine why differences often coincide with peace. They argue that some actors can develop a sense of community and "we-ness" through shared ties, while others with similar cultural backgrounds fail to generate pacifying bonds. The authors emphasise that one of the state's key roles is managing tensions among identity groups with differing interests. Civic nationalism, along with formal and informal power-sharing mechanisms, are some ways to foster cooperative interactions and promote national stability.

6.3 The Root of the Mizoram-Assam Border Conflict

The states of Mizoram and Assam, which share a 165 km-long boundary, have seen frequent boundary disputes since the British era. The two states are located in the Northeastern corner of India. As per the 2011 census, the state of Assam has a population of 31,169,272 while the state of Mizoram has a population of 1,091, 014. The border districts in Assam are Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, in Mizoram the border districts are Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit (PTI, 2024).

When India became an Independent nation, Manipur and Tripura were princely states while the rest of the northeastern region fell under the state of Assam. In the year 1972, Mizoram was carved out as a union territory. After 15 years, in the year 1987, Mizoram became the 23rd state of India.

Borderlines drawn differently on two separate occasions have been cited to be the root cause of the border skirmishes. The Mizoram government accepts the border as drawn by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, a law restricting entry to

certain border regions to certain groups, by the British in consultation with Mizo chiefs. However, the region of Assam and the union government adhere to border demarcations established in 1933. The Mizoram government has stated that it was not consulted on the drawing of the second border and thereby, only accepts the demarcation of the first map. As per the 1873 regulation, Mizoram has a claim over 509 square miles of the inner line reserved forest area. However, the state of Assam which accepts the 1933 regulation strongly disagrees with the claim. Historians have blamed the British for drawing maps out of their vested interests in tea cultivation without consulting any of the parties (Colney, 2021). Several dialogues involving the Centre held since 1995 to resolve the dispute have yielded little result.

While the two states have had minor skirmishes in the border areas on various occasions, in 2021, it got violent, with bloodshed and casualties. On 26 July 2021, a major clash in Vairengte, a border village in Mizoram, between Assam Police and Mizoram Police left six Assamese police officers and a civilian dead. The Mizoram and Assam governments gave contrasting accounts of the events. The Mizoram government stated that the Assam Police crossed a post of the Central Reserve Police Force, a paramilitary force managed by the Union government, and a post manned by Mizoram Police personnel, attacking Mizoram locals with lathis and tear gas. It also asserted that the Assam Police opened fire around 4.50 pm. The Mizoram government said that this led to an intense gun battle between police personnel from both states that left six Assam Police personnel and a civilian dead and several seriously injured on both sides(Bharadwaj, 2021). The Assam government has denied these charges and argued that Mizoram first breached the status quo by setting up a new armed camp in the vicinity of the CRPF post. The tensions were widely covered in local and national media outlets. The leaders of the respective state governments also communicated their stands publicly on social media platforms, thereby making the media influence a deciding factor for the public at large. After a road blockade halting transportation of essential items for over till August 7, the tensions were defused after intervention from the central government.

According to Galtung's Peace Journalism theory (Galtung & Fischer, 2013), journalists have the power to influence the representation of conflicts by shifting the narrative toward peace and emphasising peaceful transformation. It is crucial for journalists to explore the root causes of conflict to have a significant impact on their audience. Galtung distinguishes between the low road and high road perspectives on conflict, with the former focusing on the conflict itself and its peaceful resolution, while the latter centres on the meta-conflict arising from the root conflict, often emphasising "who wins" in journalistic reporting.

This chapter employed a content analysis approach to its investigation. A purposive sampling method was applied over a one-week period, spanning from July 26 to August 1, 2021. These dates were chosen to encompass the clashes that transpired on July 26, and the subsequent events that unfolded hold crucial significance for an in-depth examination of media coverage and its central themes. Specifically, the chosen publications for assessment are *Vanglaini* from Mizoram, *Eastern Chronicle* from Assam, and *The Hindu.*

All elements, including articles, editorials, photographs, and letters to the editor concerning the border clash, will serve as units of analysis. The chapter focused on variables such as the sources cited within the articles, the language employed in the news, the frequency of news occurrences, and the prevalent themes. A thematic approach guided the assessment, concentrating on how the issue is portrayed in articles and news reports, as well as the nature and substance of these presentations.

6.4 Coverage in national and local vernaculars

Table 6: Frequency distribution of Assam-Mizoram border conflict coverage

Newspaper	Frequency Days = 7	
Vanglaini	59	4.13%
Eastern Chronicle	55	3.85%
The Hindu	4	0.28%

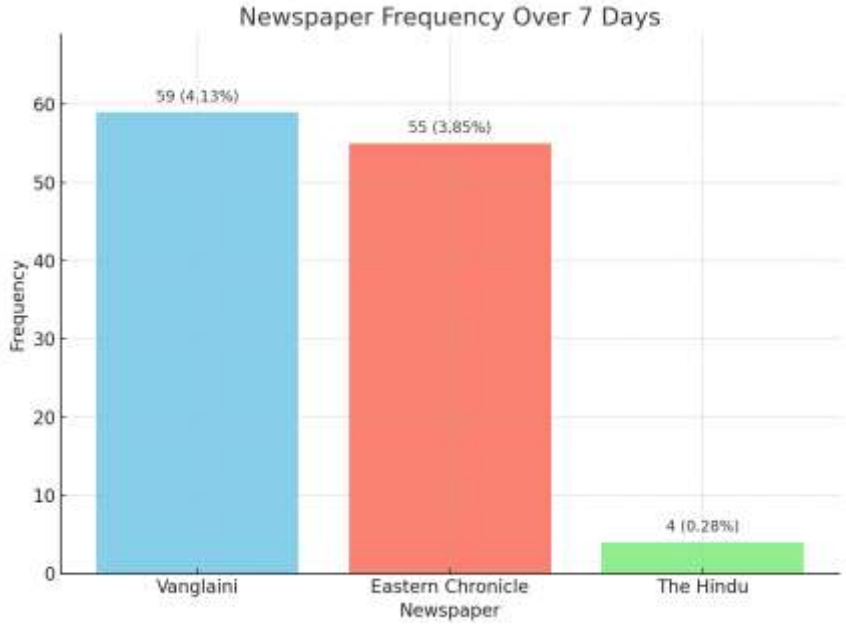


Figure 28: Frequency distribution of Assam-Mizoram border conflict coverage

Table 6 demonstrates a marked disparity in coverage levels regarding the Assam-Mizoram border tensions across the respective states of Assam and Mizoram, in contrast to notably limited coverage within the national newspaper. The proportional extent of coverage stands at 4.13% in *Vanglaini*, 3.85% in *Eastern Chronicle*, and merely 0.28% in *The Hindu*. Within The Hindu, coverage is confined to succinct accounts ranging from 150 to 250 words, providing concise overviews of the situation.

Table 7: Placement of news related to the border clashes

Placement	Vanglaini		Eastern Chronicle		The Hindu	
Page 1	20	34%	35	63.63%	4	100%
Page 2	19	32.2%	1	2%	-	
Page 3	-		17	31%	-	
Page 4	5	8.47%	1	2%	-	

Page 5	-		1	2%	-	
Others	15	25.4%	-		-	
Total	59		55		4	

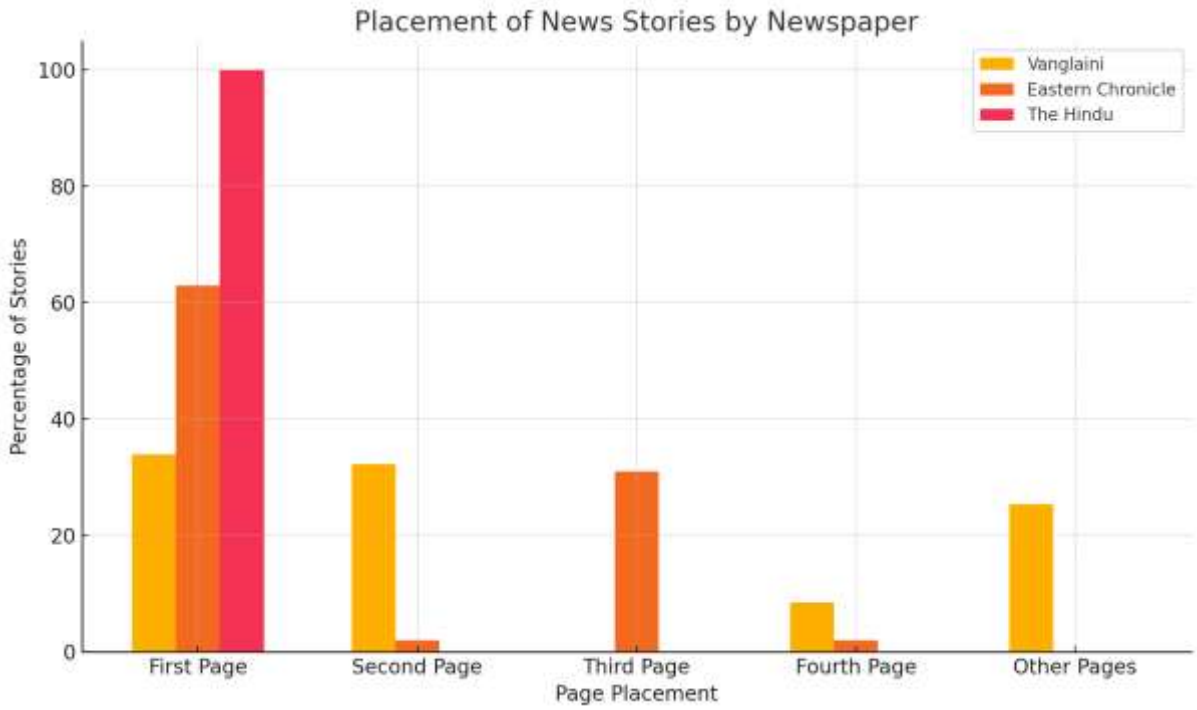


Figure 29: Placement of news related to the border clashes

Table 7 reveals a distinct pattern wherein prominence is accorded to the border clashes, as evidenced by the predominant placement of reports on the front page across all three daily newspapers during the specified study period.

Table 8: Origin of Source: Analysis of News Content Attribution

Sources in the Reports	Vanglaini		Eastern Chronicle		The Hindu	
Source from Assam	2	3.63%	56	87.5%	3	75%
Source from Mizoram	38	69%	8	12.5%	1	25%
Multiple Sources from both states	-		-		-	
Op-Ed	15	27%	-		-	

Table 8, aims to identify if the sources are taken from both sides of the conflict parties. Notably, the prominent Mizo daily, *Vanglaini*, featured news quotes from citizens of Mizoram in 69% of the news reports, while merely incorporating two sources from Assam. Similarly, within the reports disseminated by *Eastern Chronicle*, citations from citizens of Assam amounted to 87.5% instances, whereas quotes from sources in Mizoram were limited to 12.5%.

The national newspaper, *The Hindu*, which reported on the incident four times, included 75% sources from Assam and 25% from Mizoram in its coverage.

Table 9: Gender and Social Status of Sources

Sources in Report	Male		Female		Civil Society/Witness		Government officials	
Vanglaini	54	45.3%	1	25%	9	75%	45	41%
Eastern Chronicle	61	51.2%	3	75%	3	25%	61	55.45%
The Hindu	4	3.36%	-		-		4	3.63%

Within Table 4, from the perspective of gender and societal standing, an intriguing observation can be noted. Specifically, *Eastern Chronicle* showcased three female sources, whereas *Vanglaini* featured only one female source.

In the category of civilian and civil society perspectives, *Eastern Chronicle* exhibited a presence of nine such sources, in contrast to *Vanglaini's* meager three, with the remaining sources being government officials. Meanwhile, *The Hindu* solely relied on sources from government officials.

Table 10: Angle of Coverage

Angle of Coverage	Vanglaini		Eastern Chronicle		The Hindu	
The story suggests solutions to the problem	9	15.25%	5	9.09%	-	
Escalation of Conflict	-	-	-	-	-	
The story has a single focus on the conflict	50	84.75%	50	90.91%	3	75%
The story refers to two or more sides of the problem	-	-	-	-	1	25%

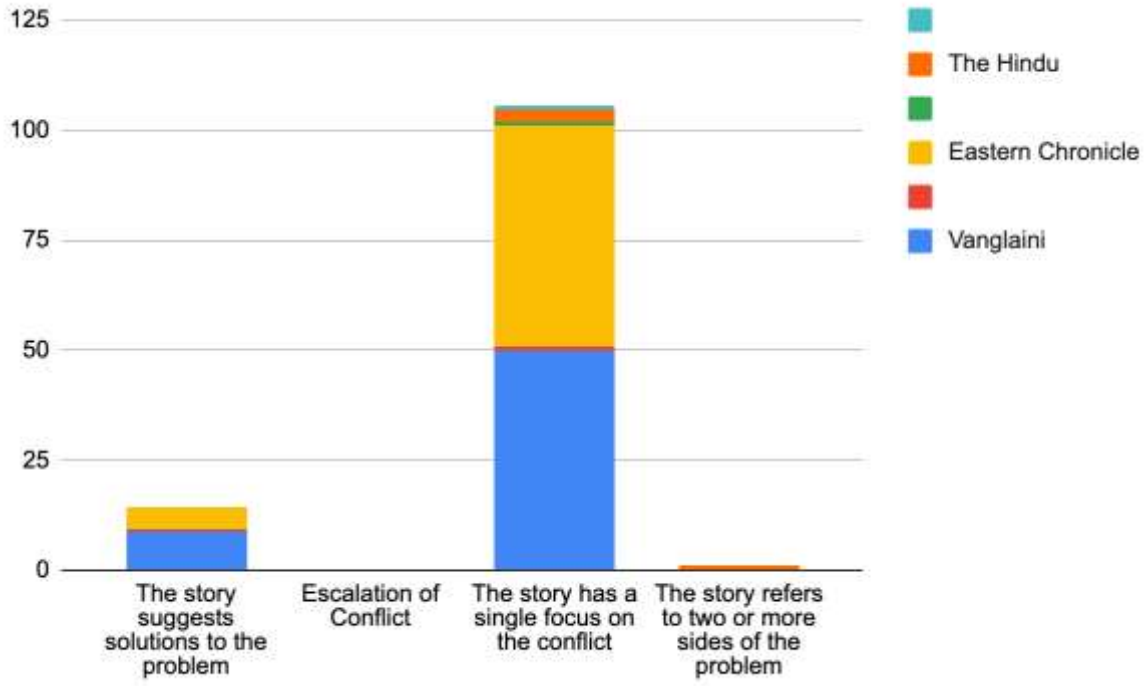


Figure 30: Angle of coverage

In Table 10, an examination of the data reveals that in *Vanglaini*, a significant 84% of the news reports are solely centered around the conflict, while a minor 15% propose potential resolutions or solutions to the issue at hand. Similarly, within the *Eastern Chronicle*, a notable 90% of the reports exclusively address the conflict, with a mere 9% delving into potential remedies. As for *The Hindu*, 75% of their stories singularly focus on the conflict.

Table 11: Frequency of attributions of responsibility

Attributions of responsibility	Vanglaini		Eastern Chronicle		The Hindu	
Assam Government	51	86.44%	7	13%	-	
Mizoram Government	-	-	38	69%	2	50%

Assam Chief Minister	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mizoram Chief Minister	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others/None	6	11%	10	18%	2	50%

Within Table 11, an examination of the data discloses distinct attributions of responsibility for the clashes. In the *Vanglaini* daily, a substantial 86% of the responsibility is placed on the Assam government, while in the *Eastern Chronicle*, 69% of the responsibility is ascribed to the Mizoram government.

In *The Hindu*, 50% of the responsibility is attributed to the Mizoram government, while the other 50% remains silent on any culpable party.

Table 12: Tone of coverage

Tone of Coverage	Vanglaini		Eastern Chronicle		The Hindu	
Responsibility	-		4	7.27%	-	
Human interest	-		1	2%	-	
Violence/Conflict	47	79.66%	42	76.36%	4	100%
Morality	5	8.47%	4	7.27%	-	
Economic Consequences	7	11.86%	4	7.27%	-	

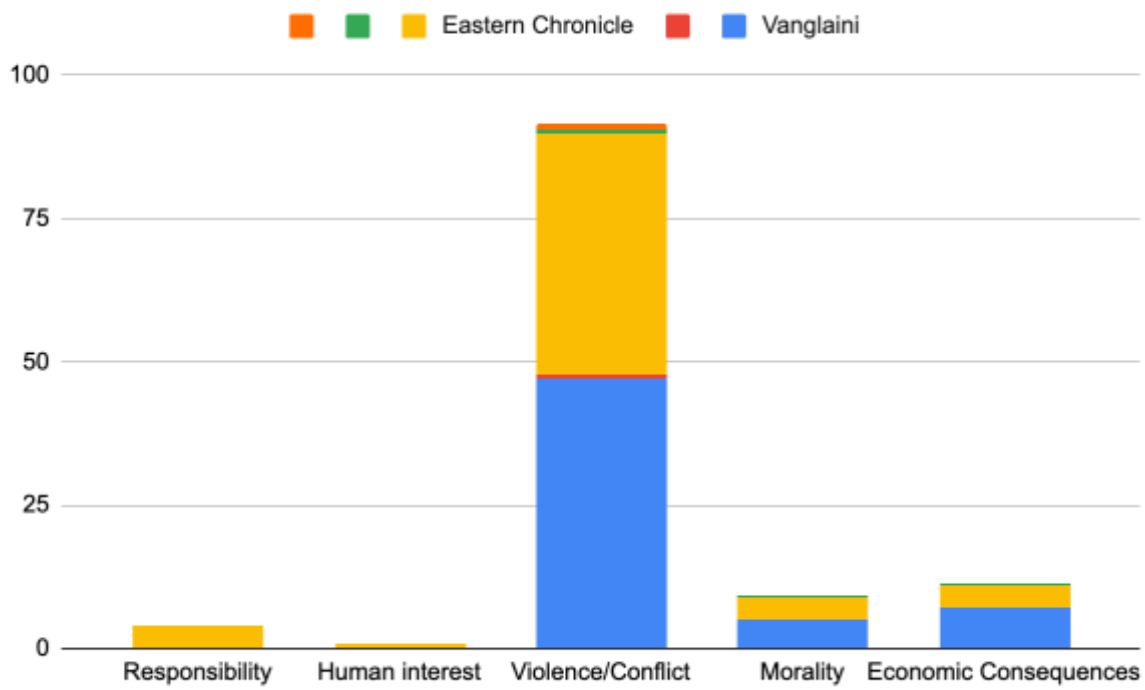


Figure 31: Tone of coverage

Examining Table 12, it becomes apparent that the majority of reports, specifically 79% in *Vanglaini*, 76% in *Eastern Chronicle*, and a full 100% in *The Hindu*, center their coverage on the theme of violence and clashes.

Interestingly, out of the combined reports from the three newspapers, only one human interest story is featured within *Eastern Chronicle*. Human interest narratives have the potential to elicit empathy from the involved parties, offering a shared human perspective to contemplate the ramifications of violence.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the results in relation to the literature reviewed and the objectives outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It includes a summary of the key conclusions drawn from the thesis.

7.2. Findings of Objective 1

In a purposive sampling conducted over a 15-day period from March 1 to 15, 1966, to examine the coverage of the bombing of Aizawl, including its pre-incident and post-incident reporting from three newspapers: *Times of India, Statesman,* and *The Hindu*, it was found that

i. The uprising of the Mizo National Front, which will be referred to as *rambuai* and issues related to it were covered a total of 10 times in *The Hindu*, 13 times in T*he Statesman* and 13 times in the *Times of India*. Media narratives from the period notably omitted any reference to the bombing, indicating a significant coverage gap.

ii. In regards to the placement of news stories, in *The Hindu*, 80% of the issue related to *rambuai* is mentioned on the front page and 20% in the 'Others' category, which suggests page 3 and onwards. In the Statesman, 69% of the news is put on the front page and 30.7% in others, while in the *Times of India,* 46% of the news is placed on the front page, while 53.8% is in the others category.

iii. In regard to the theme, the coding used was rebel framing, humanitarian aspect, political elements and military power. In *The Hindu*, 77% of the news comes under the theme of rebel framing and military power, while 33% comes under the theme of political elements. In the *Statesman,* 60% of the news comes under rebel framing, 30% under political elements and 20% under military power while in *Times of India*, 30% comes under rebel framing, 7% under politics and 54% under military power.

iv. Regarding the tone of news headlines and the keywords used –

A) In *The Hindu*, an analysis of the headlines found that the most common keyword used was rebels. The racial framing elements found were

a. Mizo Resistance as Terrorism

b. Portraying Mizo violence as extreme actions

c. Lack of direct reference to the Mizo issue

d. Focus on military actions, not on civilian suffering

e. Framing Mizo resistance as a threat to be defeated

f. Ignores Mizo cultural or community implications

B) In *The Statesman*, the most common keyword used was rebel. The racial framing elements found were –

a. Framing Mizos as violent "others"

b. Dehumanising portrayal of rebels

c. Portrays Mizos as a threat requiring a response

d. Military framing of Mizo resistance

e. Mizo resistance framed as an insurgent threat

f. Poverty is framed as contributing to violent revolt

g. Framing Mizos as needing external military intervention

h. Reinforcement of Mizo as a threat requiring containment

C) In the *Times of India*, the most common keyword used was army. The racial framing elements found were –

a. Focus on criminality, no mention of the political context

b. Portraying Mizo actions as harmful to the local population

c. Highlighting military force over Mizo autonomy

d. Framing Mizo actions as rebellion to be controlled

e. No mention of Mizo civilian impact, focus on military movement

v. Regarding, frequency of coverage related to famine and food shortage in the year of the Mautam Famine, the total number of coverage was zero.

7.3 Findings of Objective 2

This section will provide the findings of an analysis of PPV or forced relocation in the eyes of the international and national media as compared to the local vernacular media in the time frame 1966 to 1970.

i. PPV in the eyes of the international media

a. *The Daily Telegraph* showed 26 results with the keywords mentioned, out of these 26, Protected and Progressive Villages and Grouping are mentioned in two reports, one talks about the Indian Army starting a massive operation in the Mizo hills to regroup villages in the rebellious tribal belt, while the other one talks about 50,000 people resettling in protective hamlets.

ii. PPV in the eyes of national media

b. In the *Hindustan Times*, there were 82 results that show up with the keywords entered. Protected and Progressive Villages and Grouping are mentioned 9 times out of these 82 results. These reports talk about the initiative as –

- *A place where people spend most of their time singing hymns*

- *Not a single case of forcible evacuation*
- *Mizo families move into their new and safer homes*
- *They will now live in peace and security*
- *The response from the Mizos has been magnificent, according to the security office commander*
- *New townships were selected carefully bearing in mind three main points, availability of water, open spaces and of jhoom lands in the vicinity.*"
- *The villagers were allowed to bring all their belongings, including building materials and grains*
- *They received free rations, medical aid, and essential facilities to help them settle into their new homes*
- An initiative taken for their good, which they are ignorant of: "*They have yet to realise that this action has been taken by their own government in their own interest with due regard to their own needs. This is largely because there is no civil administration anywhere in the district, except perhaps on a limited scale in Aijal town.*"
- One report mentions the burning of houses, saying, *'Punitive measures adopted by the security forces are drastic. Villagers harbouring hostile elements are burnt to the ground with their treasured stocks of paddy*
- *Daily necessities of life were scarce before the army's arrival there*
- *Villagers were helped by the army in replenishing their stocks*

c. In the *Times of India*, 84 results showed up with the keywords. Out of these, 8 reports talk about the grouping scheme. Lines of the report that describe the PPV are quoted below.

- *Away from our familiar turmoil, a novel experiment is being conducted in the Mizo Hills district to resettle a group of unsophisticated, tradition-bound people in a way of life more prosperous than they had ever known*

- *The reporter talks about robust rations that would make the inhabitants of the centres, "the envy of most people in the country*

- *The operation has brought the Mizos out of their seclusion without interfering with their social and religious traditions."*

- *The living standards in the PPV by the yardstick of rural India seem high, every one of the 228 families has a spacious stilted hut of bamboo matting and thatched roof to itself, with a kitchen garden*

- *The immediate impact of such over-administration on the minds of the locals is difficult to gauge. Are they grateful for so much spoon-fed welfare or merely pick up on the Government's minor lapses to laugh and to criticise."*

iii. PPV in the eyes of local media

This study analyses three local papers in print during *rambuai*, particularly focusing on the impact of Protected and Progressive villages on the people of Mizoram. It focuses on *Mizo Arsi*, *Hmar Arsi* and *Remna Palai* as these were the oldest editions of newspapers available for analysis in the Mizoram State Central Library.

a. In *Remna Palai*, 84 reports include the keywords mentioned. Some of the reports are quoted below –

- *Our poverty has increased for many reasons. Even today, many villages are restricted from practising jhumming, and extensive community volunteer work prevents us from tending to our fields*

- *We are often required to work as labourers without pay, which strains us further. Grouped in villages, our fields are far away, and we aren't allowed to stay*

overnight to tend to them; by the time soldiers finish checking our permits, the day has passed.

- *The leaders tried their best to avoid regrouping, including Mizo Congress officials. The people were very afraid that they would be regrouped, especially as the place suggested did not have water or any field for jhumming. Some people had moved to the assigned village, but now they will return.*"

- *The Congress assembly resolution decided that the government should stop regrouping, as it brings death, destruction, poverty, and hardships in all aspects. While it has not been successful in Malaya, Vietnam, and Nagaland, and despite some potential benefits in Mizoram, the negative effects far outweigh any positives."*

- *"They should cease making people spend entire days searching for relatives of MNF members and then punishing them when they cannot be found."*

b. In *Mizo Arsi*, 234 reports mention village regrouping, insurgency, famine, curfew and *rambuai*.

- *The Council called on the government to take immediate action to bring rice and other essential supplies to areas like Aizawl, PPV, and surrounding regions, and to increase the stock to ensure people's survival.*

- *The greatest achievement of independence had been the reduction of beggars in India, but in Mizoram, the government's failure had left people with no choice but to beg*

- *Due to the government's failure to prepare adequate food and essential supplies, Aizawl, Lunglei, and PPVS have been suffering since July 1968. We do not want this to continue, so we urge the government to ensure the availability of food*

- *While India had harvested an abundant rice crop, totalling 96.5 tons , enough to sustain the country for three months , and Assam had also experienced significant agricultural success, Mizoram's harvest was barely enough to last three months due to the impact of the rambuai*

- *The entire village was forced to abandon their homes, leaving only with their clothes and basic belongings. They sought refuge in Khawhai village, where they began the difficult task of looking for food and clothing.*

c. In *Hmar Arsi*, a total of 94 publications were assessed, with 34 mentioning the keywords that are mentioned earlier. Some of the reports mention –

- *The way Assam has looked after us is worsening. It is not the same as before; things are getting worse and worse*

- *We live in fear, fear of the underground, fear of the security forces. We have no proper living spaces and no means to earn a livelihood*

- *If they are forced to relocate, they will not only endure significant distress but also lose the opportunity to prepare for the next planting season. In despair, they have expressed, "We will not be able to survive next year."*

- *When there is rice, other shortages become more bearable. If they could support us in continuing our work instead of preventing us from working, it would make a significant difference*

- *I think back to the days when we would gather with family and friends to sing together. Those times are now just a distant memory, replaced by silence and sorrow. I try not to dwell too much on the pain of our land, but it is overwhelming. Our wise leaders, the "white men," have turned their backs on us. We need God to save our dying, lonely land."*

7.4. Findings of Objective 3

1. This section will examine how oral histories of Mizoram's people align with or contradict media narratives, exploring the ideological constructs that shape public understanding of these events.

a. Ten people were interviewed, including two senior journalists, six victims of forced relocation and two former politicians.

b. All ten people expressed a negative experience of the forced relocation

c. Out of ten, eight people's houses were burned down by Indian Army in front of their eyes

d. They had to walk on foot to other villages, sometimes taking shelter in the jungle as minors

e. There was a media blackout with the district inaccessible to non-Mizo journalists

f. The journalists expressed a lack of media freedom, explaining that their news would be translated and monitored by the army

g. One journalist was arrested for the news reports he published

7.5 Findings of Objective 4

This section details the results of the media's coverage of the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border clash.

a. In the frequency distribution of the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border clash, it was found that the issue coverage was 4.13% in Vanglaini, 3.85% in Eastern Chronicle, and 0.28% in The Hindu.

b. In the news placement of the border clash, it can be seen that, in Vanglaini, 34% is on the front page, in Eastern Chronicle, 63% is on the front page and in the Hindu, 100% is given coverage on the front page.

c. In the identification of sources, the Mizo daily, Vanglaini, featured news quotes from citizens of Mizoram in 69% of the news reports, in the reports disseminated by Eastern Chronicle, citations from citizens of Assam amounted to 87.5% instances. The national newspaper, The Hindu, which reported on the incident four times, included 75% sources from Assam and 25% from Mizoram in its coverage.

d. From the perspective of gender and societal standing, Eastern Chronicle showcased three female sources, while Vanglaini featured one female source. In terms of civilian and civil society sources, Eastern Chronicle exhibited a presence of nine such sources, while Vanglaini took sources from three such persons. The Hindu solely relied on sources from government officials.

e. In terms of angle of coverage, in Vanglaini, a significant 84% of the news reports are solely centred around the conflict, while 15% propose potential resolutions. In Eastern Chronicle, 90% of the reports exclusively address the conflict, with 9% delving into potential remedies. In The Hindu, 75% of their stories singularly focus on the conflict.

f. An examination of the data discloses distinct attributions of responsibility for the clashes. In the Vanglaini daily, a substantial 86% of the responsibility is placed on the Assam government, while in the Eastern Chronicle, 69% of the responsibility is ascribed to the Mizoram government. In The Hindu, 50% of the responsibility is attributed to the Mizoram government, while the other 50% remains silent on any culpable party.

g. In an analysis of the tone of coverage, 79% of the reports in Vanglaini, 76% of the reports in the Eastern Chronicle, and a full 100% in The Hindu centre their coverage on the theme of violence and clashes. One human interest story is featured in the Eastern Chronicle.

7.6 Discussions and Conclusion

"We did not have pens, we hardly had a language, but now we do."

Van Dijk(2000) penned an article on News Racism: A Discourse Analytical Approach, where he talks about new racism and old racism. He mentions that old racism pertained to slavery, segregation, apartheid, lynchings and systematic discrimination, however, the New Racism, which is democratic and respectable, denies that it is racist. In this new racism, minorities are not inferior but different. This new kind of racism, which is discursive, is expressed through text and talk. Since their existence, the Mizos have been fed with a history penned by the colonialists and academic writers. These authors often write from the perspectives of their class and caste. From the findings, it can be seen that racist discrimination is expressed through text in the form of newspapers during *rambuai*. The only version of the citizens is available through the local newspapers, which were the first organ of the people since they learnt to read and write, as there were very limited options for publishing books at that time.

7.6.1 Racial Framing – the Mizo as Terrorists/Rebels

In objective 1, an analysis of the news reports that signal the start of the Mizo Independence movement is followed by a flurry of reports positioning the Mizos as a "rebel." The reports analysed, which were from the night of February 28/March 1 to March 30, 1966, form a crucial part of the independence movement, as it was the events of this month that continue to shape the nationalist ideologies of the people till the time this study was being done. Within these thirty days, the MNF declared independence on the midnight of February 28, 1966 and took over Assam Rifles Garrisons and Border Security Force posts. Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force dropped bombs on Aizawl on March 5 and 6, Khawzawl on March 6, Hnahlan on March 7, Sangau on March 8, Tlabung on March 9, Pukpui on March 13, and Bunghmun on March 23 (Hluna, 2012). Reports of the movement of MNF were covered regularly; however, the Mizos, who had only been known as tribesmen to the journalists in Kolkatta, Mumbai and Delhi, were positioned as "the other" in the reports.

Regarding the theme, the coding used was rebel framing, humanitarian aspect, political elements and military power. In the Hindu and the Statesman, 77% and 60% of the news reports come under the theme of rebel framing. Not a single report mentions the reason why the uprising was started or gives a reference to the *Mautam*. For people to understand why the uprising was started, they would have to be familiar with the Mautam famine the ravaged the hills, however, there was no possibility of the rest of the country or the rest of the world to be aware of the famine, when there was no coverage of it. The papers sampled for this study in the year 1959, the year of the famine show zero reports on the famine in the Mizo District Council.

In Van Dijk's ideological square, media framing reinforces existing prejudices and shapes broader societal attitudes that legitimise the marginalisation of minority groups. The reports frame Mizo resistance as terrorism and, there is a major focus on military actions, while the cultural or community implications are ignored.

7.6.2 The Day Aizawl Burned in Silence

There are also zero reports on the bombing of Aizawl in the content analysed. The issue was heavily debated in the Assam Assembly; even then, there was no coverage of the debates in the media. On April 5, 1966, the speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly received a Notice of a Motion to discuss the situation in the Mizo Hills. Here, Stanley D. D Nichols Roy spoke on the reports of a parliament member and an Assam MLA who had been commissioned to go to Aijal to assess the situation. He said in the assembly session, "On the 5th and 6th of March, the Air Force was brought into play and was used for straffing and machine gunning, and as far as we can understand, bombing Aijal town (Hluna, 2020)." However, the issue was silenced in the media. A quick search through the Google News archive, which stores web content from 2003, reveals that one of the first reports of the bombing in Aijal in recent times was only in February 2013 by The Economic Times. Since then, there have been nine other reports which covered the bombing and programmes held in commemoration of the day by the Mizo apex student body, Mizo Zirlai Pawl. One news report by the web portal, Northeast Now specifically mentions how a Toofani

fighter jet, which was used to bomb Aizawl, was put on display as a trophy of valour at an airbase in Silchar (Roy, 2019). In Chapter 5, journalist H. C. Vanlalruata, interviewed as part of the oral history research, revealed that during the 70th anniversary celebration of the Indian Air Force in 2002, he questioned an Air Marshal about the bombing of Aizawl. Neither the Air Marshal nor Vanlalruata's journalist colleagues, who had gathered from across India, were aware of the incident. This event remains a contested truth, largely because, as this research demonstrates, there were no news reports at the time documenting the bombing. It is also a contested truth because no leader of India has officially acknowledged the incident. Despite Professor J.V. Hluna, while serving as the Mizoram BJP President, appealing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to seek forgiveness on behalf of the nation for the atrocities committed by the government, the Prime Minister remained silent. It was only in 2023 that he referenced the issue, not to offer an apology, but to criticize the opposition Congress party. At that time, many newspapers wrote about the issue, however it was done without context and with a focus on the politics in play. The Mizo Zirlai Pawl which has been observing Zoram Ni every year from 2007 on March 5 to commemorate the day of the bombing of Aizawl has repeatedly demanded an apology from the government(Khojol, 2019). At the time of this study, the year 2025, there was still continued silence from the government. Hluna (2025), ends his book, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram* with the paragraph,

"While Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has apologised for Operation Blue Star, that magnanimity has been lacking when it comes to the Mizos. Since 2007, March 5 is observed as Zoram Ni or Zoram Day under the initiative of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl, a students body. Peole gathered together and marched to the street to commemorate the day; prayers are held all over the State and the people are urged to forgive the perpetrators of the crime. The Mizors are willing to forgive, but India has to ask for it, which hasn't happened even after almost fifty years. How long do the Mizos have to wait for it so as to reconcile themselves with their suffering? Is India too proud to offer apology for its own action, or the Mizos too insignificant to be treated as Indian?"

Since no printed or published document fully revealed the truth of the bombing of Aizawl and its surrounding areas during *rambuai*, the voices of the people recorded in this study, as part of the oral history chapter, and in other studies that have documented, and will continue to document their accounts must stand as the truth. Because then, the only narrative the world heard and read was the "masked truth" presented by the perpetrators.

7.6.3 The Manufactured Consent of Displacement in National Discourse

Journalists I interviewed repeatedly mentioned the near impossibility for reporters from outside the Mizo hills to access the region during the period in question, due to both the challenging terrain and the restrictions imposed by security forces and the Union government. However, in early 1967, a small team of journalists was brought into the district to witness the situation firsthand and report their observations directly. So while the reports on the grouping scheme and first-hand observations of the same are few in national media outlets, the reports that are there, paint the Progressive and Protected Villages as a safe haven flowing with milk and honey for the residents. It talks about free ration and education and medical facilities.

In the three vernacular reports assessed, in Remna Palai, 20 out of 92 reports mention the resettlement, with others discussing the famine resulting from the rambuai (forced migration) that accompanied the resettlement. Similarly, Mizo Arsi features 79 reports that mention the PPV. However, the tone in local newspapers is overwhelmingly negative. Out of 99 reports that mention the resettlement, none present a positive view; instead, they focus on food shortages, famine, and the spread of diseases as direct consequences of the resettlement, highlighting the severe difficulties faced by those affected.

Taking the national news houses analysed into context, out of 26 reports in The Daily Telegraph, only two mention the forced resettlement, the Hindustan Times and The Times of India show similar trends, with eight and seven out of 82 and 84 reports, referencing the resettlement.

Taking the total of all three reports in the national media outlet, there are 17 reports which mention the forced resettlement. One report talks about how the response from the Mizos who are migrating from villages sprawled over 4000 square miles has been magnificent, according to the security office commander and that, not a single case of forcible evacuation was reported. From this report alone, it can be observed how the point of view of the security forces was given priority. Despite the report saying not a single case of forcible evacuation was reported, all the vernacular reports in the three local dailies analysed mention the hesitancy of the people to leave their villages and regroup. Also, all the people interviewed for the documentation of their story in chapter five, only remember tears and poverty when they were forced to leave their villages.

Another report mentions, how new townships were selected bearing in mind three main points, availability of water, open spaces and of jhoom lands in the vicinity. However, the people interviewed as well as the vernacular reports analysed present another picture. The biggest problems faced by the people was the loss of agricultural land as they could not travel to their villages for farming due to the long distances they had to travel as they were under strict curfew. There was also unavailability of land as residents of sometimes three or four villages were grouped in one centre. In chapter five, one interviewee, Darleta mentioned how due to the cramped spaces and shortages of food in the grouping centre, many people died due to vairous diseases and ailments. Another interviewee, Dr. Kenneth Chawngliana mentioned how the deaths due to poverty were higher than the deaths in the hands of perpetrators, as a rseult of the grouping and food shortage.

There is one report in The Hindustan Times that says the villagers they spoke to said they did not leave their villages willingly, but continues to write that authorities say no force was used. The complaints of the people are noted down but are given a response by the reporter himself to give the impression that they were not aware of how “fortunate” they were. For example, the reporter says they were unenthusiastic about their new homes “despite receiving free rations.” He further goes on the say that they received the highest ration in India, even higher than those given to

Pakistan refuees in 1947. He goes on to write that "*They (the villagers) have yet to realise that this action has been taken by their own government in their own interest with due regard to their own needs.*"

7.6.4 The Rhetoric of Belonging: Media and the Marginal Other

Van Dijk (2008) wrote about how the media's role extends beyond merely reflecting the interests of dominant groups saying, it is deeply embedded within the societal power structure. In this model, the media serves as an integral component of this structure, achieving their influence through professional and ideological norms of "newsworthiness." These norms prioritise narratives that align with the interests of power elites, while simultaneously marginalising minority voices.

Taking Van Dijks theory into this report, it can be observed that what is considered news worthy is the perspective of the authorities. Despite the villagers interviewed talking about their negative experience, the reporter only highlights the positives he is shown by the authorities and goes on to conclude that these villagers in question were not aware of their luck. This further reinforces the stereotype of the "tribesman" as an ignorant man whose views are not to be taken seriously.

Another report also in *Hindustan Times* says the operation brought the Mizos out of their seclusion without interfering with their social and religious traditions. However, people interviewed and the vernacular news reports analysed, talk about a high incidence of beggars due to the shortage of food. They also talk about how the morale of the people were destroyed. An interviewee, Kenneth Chawngliana had mentioned in chapter five how the grouping scheme penetrated through the close-knit ties of the community as the people started living with non-locals which created distrust. He said Mizoram had never faced any kind of famine other than when the bamboo flowering took place. Before, each village was self-sufficient and helped each other, people were hardworking and independent but after the *rambuai* and the grouping, the morale was destroyed resulting in unfaithfulness and brought a downfall to the essence of *tlawmgnaihna* (selflessness).

Hluna (2020) also highlights that Mizoram was once a land where widows and orphans were never without support, where dacoit gangs were unheard of, and where the sense of security was so strong that village homes had no need for locks. Before the Rambuai, there had never been a single instance in the region's administrative history where a curfew had to be imposed on the population. The invasion of the security forces especially through the grouping scheme, where entires lives and homes were uprooted, broke the morale and the spirit of the Mizo people. As per the vernacular reports analysed, while there were a lot of organisations and churches as well as individuals who lended a hand to those who were in greater need, there was also for the first time, the emergence of beggars and cases of theft. The thieves reported mostly ransacked kitchens out of hunger.

7.6.5 Language as a Tool of Displacement and Control

In this critical discourse analysis of the resettlement coverage in various media, there is a clear contrast between the language and framing used in mainstream and vernacular outlets, as well as between the official narratives and the lived experiences of the local population.

The official discourse surrounding the resettlement, as represented in certain mainstream reports, employs a language that emphasises the benevolence and rationality of the resettlement process. For instance, phrases like "a large number of migrants feel they will be safe in the new townships" and "a majority of the councillors were convinced that the operation was in their own interest" present the resettlement as a positive development, framed as an opportunity for the displaced people to improve their livelihoods. The language used in such reports positions the resettlement as a "novel experiment" in creating a more prosperous life for the resettled people. The use of terms like "availability of water," "open spaces," and "Jhum lands in the vicinity" suggests that the relocation was carefully planned to ensure that the new environments would be conducive to the community's traditional way of life, further reinforcing the idea that the resettlement is not only well-intentioned but also well-suited to the needs of the people.

However, this official narrative clashes with the experiences expressed by local villagers, as reported in the vernacular media. It may be suggested that there was a form of embedded journalism, with the reporters being closely linked with the military units. Usually, these kind of journalists are only shown what the army wants them to see (Ayyoub, 2023). In stark contrast to the official discourse, the language of the local reports is filled with expressions of hardship and disillusionment. The villagers' testimonies highlight the multiple challenges they face after resettlement, such as the loss of access to traditional agricultural practices, poverty, and a lack of basic necessities. Phrases like "our poverty has increased for many reasons," and "we are often required to work as laborers without pay" point to a discrepancy between the promises made by the authorities and the reality on the ground. The repeated emphasis on "food is poor," "sickness is rampant," and "we lack medicine" conveys a picture of a community struggling not only with material deprivation but also with a lack of essential healthcare.

The tension between the official narrative and the local accounts is further heightened by the language of victimhood and resistance in the vernacular reports. The villagers express a sense of powerlessness and betrayal, as seen in their statements about being "restricted from practicing jhumming" and being "forcefully grouped together in villages" far from their fields. This contrasts sharply with the government's portrayal of the resettlement as a means of improving their lives.

The analysis reveals a stark contrast between the optimistic, state-driven narrative of resettlement and the harsh, critical accounts from the local communities. This disparity in discourse reflects not just a difference in perspective, but also an unequal power dynamic where the voices of the resettled people remain marginalised and their struggles largely ignored in mainstream accounts.

7.6.6 Seventy-Five Years of Silence: Northeast India and the National Media

In examining the media landscape of Northeast India, it becomes evident that local media outlets are often forced to amplify their voices due to the marginalisation they face. In the case of the Assam-Mizoram border clash in 2021, the findings showed

that the local media in Assam and Mizoram were biased and only cited sources from their own states. It was also seen that national media, *The Hindu*, only published four reports on the issue where all four reports relied on government sources. This reflects the broader issue of media marginalisation, where the voices of minority communities are largely unheard or given less prominence in mainstream outlets. In this context, I argue that John Galtung's peace journalism theory, which advocates for balanced and impartial reporting, is not fully applicable to a marginalised state like those in the Northeast, where communication is not centralised by mainstream media. Minority communities must represent their own voices because, in many cases, no one else will speak for them.

Drawing on my eight years of journalistic experience, I contend that media marginalisation in the Northeast persists, much as it did during the time of *rambuai* and India's independence. Despite the passage of 75 years, the region's media landscape remains fragmented and underrepresented. One stark example of this is the allocation of a single reporter to cover all eight Northeast states, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya. This approach is problematic because it overlooks the distinctiveness of each state and tribe. As I experienced firsthand, covering the entire Northeast, with its diverse cultures and languages, is a near-impossible task. Unless the narrative surrounding media representation in the Northeast changes, mainstream journalism theories that apply to more centralised regions cannot be effectively implemented here. The continued marginalisation of the media in the region supports Van Dijk’s theory on media marginalisation, where minority groups are systematically excluded from the dominant discourse.

On September 30, 1979, a news report was published by India Today highlighting how the government cracked down on press in Mizoram. After talking about the incidents that happened, the reporter continues to write, “Mizoram is more or less neglected by the national press. No major newspaper has a staffer at Aizawl; only the Press Trust of India has a representative in Mizoram. With the reported new outbreaks of underground activities, and the consequent muzzling of the local press,

the possibility of getting correct information on Mizoram is greatly reduced (Mitra, 1979).” This situation has not changed in 2025 while this study was being done. The state continues to be neglected by the national press. This report in 1979 mentions how no major newspaper has a staffer at Aizawl, and how getting correct information on Mizoram is greatly reduced. What has changed from 1979 to 2025 today, is that there continues to be a Press Trust of India representative, other than that, there are only two more national media outlets that have a permanent representative in the state, which is the UNI and the Times of India. When national news outlets seek information from the states, local reporters are often burdened with the task of sharing contacts and providing contextual background. In some cases, a story is commissioned specifically for the incident in question. There are also instances where local journalists accompany national or international media teams to the site of the event, assist with translation, and facilitate meetings and interviews. Despite their significant contributions, these local reporters are rarely given proper credit, often compensated with only a small payment and no formal acknowledgment. For example, in 2024, the BBC produced a documentary on the crisis in Myanmar, which went on to win an Emmy in 2025. A local contact who played a crucial role by guiding the team to the site, establishing key connections, and assisting with interviews received no public recognition for his efforts.

7.6.7 Can the Subaltern Speak?

In subaltern studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s influential essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1994) challenges the notion that marginalised groups can effectively voice their concerns or influence policy. Spivak argues that the subaltern, or those on the margins of society, are often denied the agency to speak for themselves, and she critiques the role of Western intellectuals and academics who attempt to speak on their behalf. This theoretical framework resonates strongly in the context of the oral histories presented in Chapter Five. While the struggles of the Mizo people have been documented in various media, including newspapers and books, the oral histories present a starkly different narrative. In contrast to the media representations discussed in Chapter Three, which portrayed the PPV as a success

and the army as a savior, the oral histories, presented in Chapter Five, depict a much darker reality, one of fear, horror, death, and the complete loss of homes. All ten individuals interviewed rejected the government's decision to impose grouping, seeing it as an unjust act that further oppressed the people. Spivak's central question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is thus directly addressed, revealing the gap between mainstream media portrayals and the lived experiences of the marginalised communities themselves.

The people of Mizoram endured over fifty years of colonial rule, and when they became part of Independent India, they faced a form of settler colonialism. This historical trajectory, particularly within the context of media, continues to have lasting repercussions. During *rambuai*, the media played a pivotal role as a propaganda tool. Interviewees have shared how their news reports were translated and analysed and any reports on the security forces, even a mention of the name of an officer was akin to a crime. The same threatening agression was faced by the journalists from the MNF as well. As Lalkhama (2006) highlights in his book, the press in Mizoram could not be considered free during the MNF insurgency. The violence and repression faced by journalists, such as the bombing of printing presses and assaults on newsmen by MNF rebels, underscore the fraught relationship between the media and state control during this era.

It was only in 1974, that a fragment of the people finally heard the cries of the people from the grouping centre through the media. In that year, Brigadier T Sailo, whose initiatives are given in detail in chapter five, wrote to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi seeking the restoration of justice and decency in the Mizo Hills. Attached with the letter were thirty six annexures - letters from thirty six people highlighting the atrocities they faced in the hands of the army. The letters mention how the civilians who have written them - were tortured, sometimes naked and, locked up with their hands tied, with no food and no arrangements for a toilet. They had to sit in their feces and urine, only because they suspected that these civilians knew the whereabouts of MNF soldiers. One man writes how the soldiers bound his son on his legs and wrists as they carried him like a dead animal with a bamboo stick, he was

heavily wounded, and later kept in the hospital. However, his family was not allowed to visit him or give him food and he succumbed to his injuries. If anyone was able to escape the hands of the officers or laid an attack on the officers, revenge was taken on the first people they saw. One letter talks about how a suspected person was able to escape with a boat, and the officer took revenge on the boat owner, members of the Village Council and any villagers he could set sight on. He tied them up and tortured them to a point where some of them were left with a permanent disability. Out of the 36 letters to the Prime Minister, six letters mentioned rape and molestation of women. According to these letters, the men of the Indian Army teased pregnant women, touched womens breasts and raped married women. One woman who was raped by multiple soldiers died as a result of it. The rape cases during *rambuai* while undocumented, were a persistent fact stated by every interviewee and by most people who have experienced the turmoil of *rambuai*. It is a pain that is buried deep within their eyes, something they do not like to talk of, but their voices echo the pain while they utter the few words they can, that rape was rampant in every corner of the state.

The saddest letter in the 36 annexures, mention how in June 1967, the village of Hnahchang was set on fire and burnt down, the villagers had to scatter all over the jungle. While they were hiding, a major named Major Bakshi came across nine villagers who were hiding, made them sit in a line and shot them dead. Among these was a three year old girl named Aithangi.

I mention these reports in detail because they have never been heard of by the outside world. The letter detailing these atrocities were sent to Indira Gandhi with Brigadier T Sailo mentioning that he was ready to go to Delhi to hold further discussions on actions that could be taken. He did not receive a response, but after a reminder, he was finally given a response by the Joint Secretary to the Prime Minister who said he should not go to Delhi as “there is no need for a personal discussion with her,” and asked him to discuss the matter with the Governor. Fortunately, these letters were given to the Secretary of the Press Council of India. Kenneth Chawngliana, an interviewee, mentioned how, it was only then that the press got hold of the atrocities

faced by the people and published the same in news outlets such as The Indian Express.

7.6.8 Do the subaltern voices make a difference?

It took over eight years for the situation to come to light because it had to take an experienced army official, Brigadier T Sailo to make the people understand that they were being treated against their fundamental rights and that, their suffering had to be shared on a larger scale. How could John Galtung's peace journalism theory be applied in a situation such as this when the subaltern were not aware even, that their voices were being silenced. How can the subaltern speak when they were neither given the words nor the space to speak. And when they finally did speak, what was the outcome of it. Did the rest of the nation protest to support the atrocities faced by the people? Did the Prime Minister punish those guilty of rape whose names and army unites were specifically mentioned in detail in the letters? It was neither the people of the country nor the leaders of the country that raised their voices to end of the suffering of the Mizo people but a court case filed by a Mizo man, that challenged the grouping scheme that led to the end of the superior hand of the army on the people. I wish to argue that in the case of the *rambuai* in the then Mizo District, the subaltern were silenced, they were not given a space to speak, but even when a voice was raised on their behalf, it did not help their cause. The subaltern here, have no other choice but to stand for their cause themselves. Even in times of border conflicts between Assam and Mizoram what choice do the people have but to give a biased representation of the state's suffering when no one else will mention their suffering?

Some theorists have suggested that Gayatri Spivak pointed out the dangers of assuming it is simply a matter of allowing the subaltern (oppressed) groups to speak, without recognising that their essential subjectivity has been, and continues to be, constrained by the discourses that have constructed them as subaltern (Ashcroft et al., 1999). In a similar vein to Spivak's argument that Indian women's voices are doubly oppressed, first by the patriarchal society in which they are raised, and second by colonial discourses, this framework can be applied to the Mizo people. Their

history is predominantly shaped by the narratives of British colonisers, and their voices continue to be marginalised as a minority within the Indian state.

7.6.9 Hunger as a weapon of control

While Anderson (1983) talked about the unity that was born out of a print culture plays a central role in shaping the idea of a nation. What united people in Mizoram to start an Independence movement was hunger. It was a shared pain of hunger and neglect. However, when the movement for Independence started, hunger became the main tactic to control the masses and catch hold of the MNF soldiers. Interviewees in chapter five mentioned how, the *mautam* famine was bearable, they could help their neighbours and survive on shared food, but they had never experienced a level of famine as bad as what they experienced during *rambuai* particularly during the forced relocation. The situation was such that the paddy of rice that they had stored was burnt to ashes by the Indian army, and whatever fields they had was inaccessible due to the forced relocation.

Almost 90% of the interviewees and the maximum news reports in the three vernacular media analysed mention how the people had to resort to jungle yam as their only food source. To get jungle yam enough for one meal, they had to dig the ground the length of their heights. Since the Roman times, hunger has been used as a tactic to influence people to surrender. In the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the Roman forces captured the city and deprived them of their food aiming surrender through starvation (Perry, 2022). The Khmer Rouge weaponized hunger by dismantling traditional farming systems and enforcing radical agrarian policies that led to widespread food shortages. Forced labor camps and inefficient resource distribution deepened the crisis, turning hunger into a tool of control and oppression. This man-made famine became a central instrument of the regime's brutality during the Cambodian genocide (Kiernan, 2012). In the Israel-Palestine conflict, hunger has been weaponized as a deliberate tactic, escalating an already severe humanitarian crisis. The blockade of Gaza and restrictions on vital resources have led to extreme food insecurity and widespread malnutrition among Palestinians. By intentionally obstructing access to food, hunger is wielded as a powerful means of control,

underscoring its devastating role in contemporary warfare (UNRWA, 2024, as cited in Rodríguez Álvarez, 2024).

Reports from 1968 reveal the haunting extent of hunger in Mizoram, where food shortages dragged on for months. A Mizo Arsi article published in November noted that Aizawl, Lunglei, and regrouped villages had been suffering since July due to the government's failure to provide adequate supplies. The famine's severity eclipsed even past disasters like Mautam and Thingtam, residents began to fear death by starvation. One report starkly stated, "There is no food to be found anywhere… only those who can eat leaves are surviving." Interviewees recalled that while direct starvation deaths weren't recorded, hunger-related illnesses were widespread, and hospitals lacked food for patients. A July report described how even civil hospital contractors failed to supply rice, while medicine shortages deepened the crisis. In Sihphir, where seven villages were regrouped, malnutrition and illness surged; in August alone, 13 people died, while only three births were recorded. The social fabric began to unravel, crime rose, and one report grimly noted that while India was growing richer, beggars multiplied in the hills, with thieves ransacking kitchens for want of rice.

7.6.10 Nationalism, media, and the politics of belonging in India

Belonging to a nation becomes fundamentally fractured when the state neither acknowledges the existence of its marginalised communities nor represents their experiences. In the context of Mizoram, the persistent silencing and misrepresentation of subaltern voices reveals that national identity is often constructed through exclusion rather than inclusion.

The Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) was heavily misused by the Indian Army, interivewees in chapter five related how, using AFSPA, the army would torment and terrorise youth across villages. Brig. T Sailo (2014) and Hluna(2025) have both written how a simple complaint against an Indian army personnel would land the complainant up in jail, because using AFSPA, the army personnel would say the complainant was a suspected MNF seccessionist and put him in jail. One

interviewee described the experience of being Mizo as akin to committing a crime. The notion that one's tribal identity could be perceived as criminal within the very nation to which one belongs reflects a profound and deeply unsettling form of marginalisation, and one of the most dehumanising fears an individual can endure. The grouping of villages, the airstrikes, the murder and rape in the hands of the army and the airstrikes which has only ever targetted one uprising in India, which is the Mizo uprising, hardened the hearts of the Mizo people. While the conflict was started because the people felt 'othered,' the events of the *rambuai* led them to feel more on the periphery and 'profoundly different and 'other' from the states of India (Lalhriatpuii, 2025).

Marshall McLuhan connected the dots between the printed word and nationalism, calling typography the "architect of nationalism" (Mc Luhan, 1987). Anderson also identified the link between nationalism and print media, saying that print media has revolutionised the state of belonging and the fight for one's "nation" (Anderson, 2006). The findings of this study, drawn from an analysis of key case studies, including the print media coverage of the outbreak of the Rambuai in 1966, the forced relocation schemes between 1967 and 1970, and the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border conflict, alongside the author's own journalistic experience in the region, reveal that the role of print media in constructing a shared sense of nationalism and belonging remains deeply compromised by unequal representation. While the printed word has historically played a significant role in shaping national consciousness, this study finds that when marginalised regions such as Northeast India are consistently underrepresented or misrepresented, the capacity of media to serve as an architect of nationalism is severely limited. The imbalance in coverage is not merely a logistical issue, but a structural one: despite advances in communication technologies and the collapse of geographic barriers in the digital age, Northeast India continues to receive peripheral attention in national media. This is evident in the institutional practice of appointing a single journalist to cover all eight northeastern states which is a reflection of entrenched marginalisation rather than geographic constraint. Geoffrey Blainey's (1983) concept of the tyranny of distance, originally used to describe the effects of physical remoteness on visibility and access, may no longer be

technologically relevant, yet its ideological residue persists. Today, distance functions not in kilometres but through editorial priorities and representational hierarchies. In such a context, the promise of national belonging through media remains unevenly distributed, and print journalism risks becoming a tool not of unity, but of exclusion.

7.7 Recommendations

1. Investment in Journalistic Training and Capacity Building: There is an urgent need to train journalists from the region who are well-equipped to handle the unique challenges of reporting in Mizoram and the Northeast. Training programs, particularly those supported by developed countries, should focus on empowering young journalists from indigenous and marginalised backgrounds with lack of better opportunities.

2. Documenting *rambuai* archive: Two individuals interviewed for the chapter on oral history have unfortuanately passed away during the course of this research. They were two individuals who witnessed their homes turn ablaze during *rambuai*, they went on to witness the birth of the state of Mizoram and experience its progresses and failures. As the elders of our community who experienced the turmoil of *rambuai* are nearing the last stages of their life, it has become increasingly important to document their narrative voices and to rewrite the history that had been forcefully handed over to us. To compile and document such experiences it is recomended that a *rambuai* archivery should be created.

3. Decentralisation of Media Reporting: Media organisations should stop viewing the Northeast as a monolithic region and begin to recognize the diversity within it. For a more accurate representation, it is essential for national media houses to have correspondents in each state within the Northeast, including Mizoram. This would not only allow for better coverage of local issues but also ensure that the voices of each state's unique communities are reflected, rather than relying on generalized or stereotypical narratives.

4. Promotion of Inclusive Editorial Practices: News outlets should prioritise inclusive editorial policies that actively combat casteism, racism, and other forms of discrimination that continue to permeate the media landscape. Editors and journalists must be sensitised to the potential biases in their reporting, and there should be ongoing training to foster a culture of inclusive, unbiased reporting.

7.8 Limitations

1. Limited Newspaper Records: The study is constrained by the availability of newspaper records, with many publications having restricted dates. This limitation reduces the comprehensiveness of the data and restricts the ability to track long-term trends or developments.

2. Gender Representation in Interviews: The oral history was limited to male participants, resulting in a lack of women's perspectives. Women's stories are often more difficult to access, as they may involve deeply personal, embodied experiences that are harder to share. This gap highlights the need for future research focused on creating safe and supportive spaces for women to tell their stories.

3. Clarity of Print Materials: The clarity of some print materials was problematic, as certain documents were unclear or faded, leading to potential misreading or misinterpretation of the content.

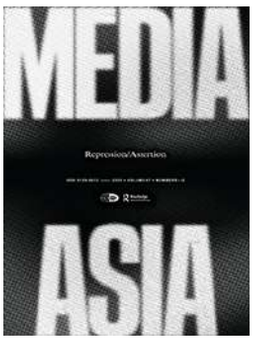
4. Narrow Scope of Content Analyzed: The analysis is limited to a small sample of content. Expanding the scope to include a larger dataset would provide a more representative and thorough examination of the issues at hand.

7.9 Scope of Further Study

1. Recording More Oral Histories in Mizoram: A key area for further study would be the collection of additional oral histories from diverse individuals within Mizoram, from both men and women as this study could only take the interviews of the male population. This would provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of local experiences, struggles, and perspectives.

2. Analysing National and International Media Coverage of Mizoram: Future research could involve a comparative analysis of how Mizoram is represented in national and international media, focusing on race, identity, and discourse. This would help uncover how external narratives influence or misrepresent the experiences of the people of Mizoram.

3. Expanding Digital Media Analysis in Mizoram: As digital media becomes more influential, further studies could analyse how social media platforms and online publications in Mizoram contribute to the local discourse. This could reveal how these platforms are being used by marginalised communities to assert their voices and challenge mainstream narratives.



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Media and marginality in modern Mizoram

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Media and marginality in modern Mizoram

V. RATNAMALA, AMY FELICIA DANIELLE and LALNUNKIMI COLNEY

Media content shapes our perceptions of the world. The media are a vital source of information for people to learn about their country, and what the media define as public awareness shapes our attitudes and beliefs. Media content is the only form of depiction that some people see, and it may not be accurate. The erroneous and negative stereotypes about minorities can promote misleading narratives and hinder their opportunities. News coverage can be considered important because it mirrors what is significant to a society. The media play a large part in the construction of positive and negative images and self-images of minorities. News representing minorities can certainly be relevant to the entire society (Dijk, 2000).

Mizoram, located in the North-eastern tip of India, became the 23rd state of India in 1986. The Mizo Hills is in the Southeast Asian massif of Zomia, a name derived from *zomi* or highlander in many Chin, Mizo, and Kuki languages spoken in Burma, India, and Bangladesh (Schendel, 2002, p. 653). Diversity, more than homogeneity, is the hallmark of Mizoram, the hilly Zomia. Scott's (2009) description of Zomia presents a perfect image of Mizo hills. Mizoram, including the North-eastern population, is much more scattered and culturally diversified than mainland India. The social structure of Mizoram is more fluid and egalitarian than that of hierarchical, rigid caste-ridden mainland India. Mizo hills have actively resisted integration into the classical state, colonial state, and independent nation-state frameworks. The Mizo hills are not only a place of political resistance but also a place of cultural defiance (Scott, 2009). It is therefore fascinating to investigate how Mizoram, which is in the periphery of Indian state, represents its own marginal ethnic communities in media.

The Mizo is a generic ethnic tribe that encompasses members of subtribes like Mara, Lai, Hmar, Zomi, and Chin and are grouped under the umbrella term *Zo-fate* (Zo family). Orality is the essential feature of Zomia. Colonial modernity standardized Mizo language with a script. The advent of print led to the construction and strengthening of Mizo identity. The missionary magazines were not meant for any particular tribe or village; their target readership was the entire hnam or minam variously called "Zo," "Zofate," or "Mizo" (Zou, 2010). Print technology therefore led to the imagined Mizo hnam nation. The communities that are not part of this Zofate (especially the Chakma, the Bru, and the Gorkha) form a minority population in Mizoram but are considered non-indigenous (Pachuau & VanSchendel, 2015). This means that communities outside Zofate are not part of the imagined Mizo hnam nation.

The Mizos have ousted the differences created by the significant other (i.e. the Indian state) and

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turned them into agencies of identity creation. The Mizo identity, intricately associated with territorialization and vernacular Christianity, has become a tool to resist the views of the Indian state and organize their ethnic identity (Pachuau, 2014).

Christians constitute 87.16% of Mizoram population. The collective consciousness of the Mizos strongly promotes a Mizo Christianity. "Mizos are not just 'Mizos', but *Mizo Kristian* or 'Christian Mizos'" (Pachuau, 2019, p. 295). Religion plays a major role in the formation of Mizo identity. Hardly any scheduled tribe working journalists can be seen in mainstream Indian media but the scheduled tribes in Mizoram own and run the entire media in Mizoram.

Minorities in Mizoram

In Mizoram today, non-Mizos are seen with scepticism. Concepts of citizenship and indigeneity marginalize and exclude minorities (Chakma, 2017). Minorities in Mizoram differ from the major Mizo tribe in terms of language and religion. The state has seen unabated tensions between the Mizo majority and the non-Mizo minority.

Sajal Nag's Mizo peace audit analyses the victory of the Mizo story and reveals the social costs of upholding cohesion as well as the cracks that continue. This fissure is obvious in intra-Mizo relations and the inclination toward xenophobic violence against the non-Christian tribes like Brus, Chakmas, the co-ethnic Myanmar-Chins, and other outsiders (Nag, 2015).

The hegemony of the "*Nexus of Patriarchy*" exhaustively dislocated women and the marginal from the space of power and authority. The continued victimization of women and the marginal echoes gendered biases and human rights situation in Zo/Mizo society (Chakraborty, 2008).

Chakmas are the second largest ethnic scheduled tribe of Mizoram (i.e. 8.46% of Mizoram's total population). They are ardent followers of Theravada Buddhism, and they speak Chakma that has adopted the Bengali script. The Chakma Autonomous District Council was formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India on 29 April 1972.

Ethnic tension between the Mizo and Chakma communities has steadily risen in dispute over indigenous identity of the minority Chakma community. The past policies implemented by the British differentiate the two communities along ethnic lines, simultaneously recognizing Mizo as indigenous and Chakma as foreigner or settler (Roluahpuia, 2016).

The Bru tribes, a non-Mizo and non-Christian tribal community, have faced the brunt of the majoritarian Mizo communities' exclusionary politics, social discrimination, and victimization (Nag, 2015, p. 175). The Brus are also known as Reangs but Mizoram refers to them as Tuikuk (a derogatory term). More than 40,000 Brus are living in the four districts of Mizoram, while about 32,000 internally displaced Brus from Mizoram are permanently settled in Tripura. Following clashes with the Mizos in 1995, the Brus were removed from Mizoram's electoral rolls. This removal sparked an armed rebellion by a Bru group and more than 40,000 Brus fled to Tripura as refugees. On 16 January 2020, a quadripartite agreement signed in New Delhi enabled 35,000 displaced Brus from Mizoram living in Tripura refugee camps since 1997 to settle permanently in Tripura (Karmakar, 2020).

Gorkhas have been a part of Mizoram since the colonial era. The Gorkhas were employed as soldiers by the colonial government and most of these soldiers stayed on, accepting Mizoram as their adopted home. Mizoram became largely ethnocentric, resulting in intolerance for the Gorkhas and other non-Mizo communities. The Gorkhas of Mizoram are fighting for their rights and demanding Other Backward Class status which will facilitate their increased representation in education and employment (Singh, 2012).

Media representation of minorities

The United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of

Minorities essentially defines minority as a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State. A minority is also said to be in a non-dominant position as its members are nationals of the State who have ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics different from the rest of the population (Capotorti, 1979).

Campbell (1995) said that one of the reasons for the negative image of African Americans in the media stems from the fact that the community was primarily covered by white reporters for white audiences. On the other hand, a study by Vergeer et al. (2000) revealed that exposure to a newspaper's negative reporting about ethnic crime encourages people to view ethnic minorities as dangerous.

Meanwhile, the Israeli press perceives Israel's Arab population from a Jewish perspective. The newspapers' headquarters in Tel Aviv, Israel's capital, have shaped peripheral coverage patterns. Avraham (2003) found a link between a group's social-political standing in the state and media coverage patterns. It appears that organizations with closer social-political closeness to power centers received more positive publicity.

Prejudice against any social group is a hostile or negative attitude toward that group and it results in discrimination. Muslims are underrepresented among the newsmakers, specialists, and citizens featured in the media. If and when they do get covered, they are portrayed negatively (Kumar, 2011). The lack of representation of various minorities leads to a kind of "groupthink" in the media with only the viewpoints of the privileged being projected (People's Democracy, 2016).

Yuval-Davis et al. (2017) examined the political and media discourses on Roma in Hungary, Finland, and the United Kingdom (UK). Studying the discourses of both "left" and "right" mainstream newspapers in these countries, Roma people in all three countries have been racialized and "othered." The most frightening but predictable conclusion is that racialization and criminalization are increasing exponentially, with more exclusion and less collective identity (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017).

An examination of news reports regarding Muslims and Islam in Chinese state-run media over a 10-year period reveals that Chinese news stories portray Muslims in a predominantly negative way. A non-Muslim Chinese populace was subjected to an implicit association test, which revealed negative prejudices toward Muslims. Furthermore, a survey of Chinese Muslims found that they perceive a negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in Chinese media, and that such unfavorable stereotyping may lead to real-life discrimination (Luqiu & Yang, 2018).

Jiwani and Al-Rawi (2019) studied the Canadian news reportage on Canadian youth of Somali origin. It appears that 56 news stories in *The Globe and Mail* are negative toward the Somali-Canadian community, concentrating on radicalization and terror, immigration and belonging, gang violence, and surveillance and safety. There are only a few positive stories. Images that do not represent everyone and uphold the power structure are worrisome because they legitimize the inequalities of society (Betancourt, 2020).

Galantino (2020) said that the rhetorical construction of causal relationships linking refugees and migrants to acts of terrorism is a crucial step during social construction of migration as a threat. This study enables a deeper comprehension of how migrants are socially constructed as threatening entities.

Sumra (2020) investigated Muslim/Islam antagonism which can be regarded as Islamophobia in the Indian English newspapers. According to the findings, the Indian media largely portray negative images of Muslims and Islam attempting to remold public opinion (Sumra, 2020).

Deb and Charvak (2015) found that the media coverage of *Tripura Times* and *Dainik Sambad* on Chakma migration from Bangladesh resulted in ethnic stereotypes that embrace great possibility of influencing the relationship between citizens and Chakma refugees.

A study also found that the Young Mizo Association (YMA) dominates all areas of Mizo society and the media are supportive of the NGO's

stance. The local media validated the YMA as an authority and did not critically analyze the organization's questionable activities (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021)

The study on the representation of Brus in the Mizoram newspapers found that Brus are stereotyped as illegal and negative. The media also depict Brus as problematic, outsiders, and different from the Mizo community and show subtle racism in the media (Ratnamala & Ralte, 2016). The study of Paul et al. (2020) on the Bru-Mizo conflict concluded that there is "othering" of the Bru community while legitimizing the Mizo identity in the news coverage.

The available literature reveals that the racial minorities, refugees, and immigrants are negatively portrayed by the media and excluded from the privileged spaces of newsrooms, decision-making, and media ownership. The social power of a group is inversely proportional to the attention they receive from the media.

Conceptual framework

Representation in the media world indicates social existence; absence' means symbolic annihilation. Being hit by events and victimized by people signifies social impotence; Molding the media world has a meaning on its own. The groups that dominate the social order gets a bulk share of representation. The social groups that can shape events about, to act freely, boldly, and effectively is a mark of dramatic importance and social power (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

The conceptual framework of the study is of pluriverse. It means "a world where many worlds fit." – "multiple, interconnected worlds and knowledges otherwise." It is "constructed on the basis of different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing and doing."

Part of it, media pluralism is considered significant in terms of media policy since an independent and accessible media landscape with multiple viewpoints and ideas is a vital feature of any democratic society. Pluralism in a broad sense refers to diversity. When discussing the concept of pluralism, two perspectives must be considered: internal and external pluralism. Internal pluralism refers to how social and political diversity is reflected in media content. External pluralism refers to the number of owners, media companies, independent editorial boards, channels, titles, or programs. This type of pluralism is also known as the "plurality" of suppliers (Media Monitor, n.d.).

The Media Monitor employs a model to study the media markets that consider all stages of the media production process to further break down media diversity. The value chain is shown as having five components: source (supplier), content in terms of content creation, content packaging and content delivery and consumer (audience) (Media Monitor, n.d.). The present study analyses the coverage of minorities in the Mizo media in terms of symbolic annihilation and media pluralism.

Research methodology

This study determines whether the print media in Mizoram give priority to minority communities and analyses how their issues are covered, how exactly are their issues portrayed, and how much space is given for them. The method of content analysis was employed to study the coverage of minority communities in the print dailies of Mizoram. To study the inclusion and exclusion of minorities in print media, both the English and Mizo dailies from Aizawl city were selected for the study. The English daily *Newslink* and the Mizo daily *Vanglaini* were selected as sample dailies for the study. They were selected on the basis of their popularity and large circulation. February 2019 was purposively selected as it fell on the Parliament election period. It was timely at the time to know how the minorities were covered during the elections. March 2021 was selected purposively to know whether conflict is a major theme of news coverage of minorities as the Bru Mizo conflict was solved in 2020. The content regarding the minority communities (i.e. Bru, Chakma, and Gorkhali) was identified for the study. All the

Table 1.
Frequency distribution of minority news stories in select Mizoram newspapers.

Newspaper	Frequency (Feb 2019) Days = 24		Frequency (March 2021) Days = 27	
Vanglaini	6	25%	3	11.11%
Newslink	6	25%	4	14.8%

articles, editorials, photographs, and letters to the editor regarding the minority communities of Mizoram were the unit of analysis. Five content categories were developed based on previous studies. The content analysis identified the content categories and variables. The content categories were frequency of news, space, placement, themes, and frequency of photographs.

Results

Table 1 shows that newspapers have given less coverage to minorities. *Vanglaini* and *Newslink* published only six news stories on minorities during February 2019. The coverage of minority issues was fewer in March 2021, with only three news stories published in *Vanglaini* and four in *Newslink*.

Table 2 shows that all newspapers have not published any article regarding Gorkhalis. *Vanglaini* and *Newslink* published four news articles on the Brus. Both *Vanglaini* and *Newslink* published two news articles on the Chakmas. March 2021 analysis shows that no news report was published on Gorkhas or Brus. The four articles in *Newslink* and the three articles in *Vanglaini* were concentrated on the autonomous district councils.

Table 3 shows that all newspapers have published most of the articles regarding minorities on the front page. *Newslink* published all six news articles on minorities on its front page. *Vanglaini* too mostly published on the front page and 33.33% of articles on the second page of the newspaper. March 2021 data show that while *Newslink* published all its articles on the front page, two articles in *Vanglaini* were published on the second page, and one article on the front page.

Table 4 shows that all newspapers have published most of the articles regarding minorities in 1 column and between 2 and 4 columns. Both *Vanglaini* and *Newslink* published only one article on minorities in 5 columns and above space. March 2021 data shows that the newspapers have published three articles in 1 column, three in 2–4 columns, and one in 5 columns.

Themes of the news stories

Five themes were listed for the category, namely – conflict, election, politics, repatriation, and reservation because after analyzing the media content, there was no need to add other themes. When it comes to covering minority issues in the Aizawl district of Mizoram, repatriation was the most covered issue, along with election-related contents followed by political contents (see Table 5).

Space given for photographs in news items

Out of the six news items in *Vanglaini*, it has published two colored photographs on the minority issues on the front page. *Newslink* published only one photograph during the sample period of February 2019. In 2021, there was only one photograph regarding minorities (see Table 6).

Conclusion

The content analysis reveals that minorities in Mizoram are underrepresented and largely absent from the newspapers. As Chakmas and Brus have ongoing conflicts, we can see few negative news reports on them.

As regards limited coverage, the Bru community got more coverage because of the parliamentary polls in March 2019. The issue then between

Table 2.
Percentage distribution of articles on minorities.

Newspaper	*Vanglaini* February 2019 (6)		*Vanglaini* March 2021 (3)		*Newslink* February 2019 (6)		*Newslink* March 2021 (4)	
Bru	4	66.66%	0	0	4	66.66%	0	0
Chakma	2	33.33%	3	100%	4	33.33%	4	100%
Gorkhali	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3.
Placement of minority news stories.

Placement	*Vanglaini* February 2019 (6)		*Vanglaini* March 2021 (3)		*Newslink* February 2019 (6)		*Newslink* March 2021	
Page 1	4	66.66	1	33.33%	6	100	4	100
Page 2	2	33.33	2	66.66%	0	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4.
Distribution of space given for minority news.

Space	*Vanglaini* February 2019 (24 days)	*Vanglaini* March 2021 (27 days)	*Newslink* February 2019 (24 days)	*Newslink* March 2021 (27 days)
5 column and above	1	0	1	1
1 column	1	1	5	2
Between 2 and 4 columns	4	2	0	1

Table 5.
Frequency of minority news themes.

Themes	*Vanglaini* February 2019	*Vanglaini* March 2021	*Newslink* February 2019	*Newslink* March 2021
Conflict	0	0	0	0
Election	2	0	1	0
Politics	2	3	3	4
Repatriation	2	0	2	0
Reservation	0	0	0	0

Table 6.
Frequency of photographs about minorities.

Newspaper	No. of photos February 2019	No. of photos March 2021	Color February 2019	Color March 2021	Black & White February 2019	Black & White March 2021	Columns February 2019	Columns March 2021
Vanglaini	2	1	2	1	0	0	3	2
Newslink	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0

the Bru and Mizo groups was whether the former living in the refugee camps of Tripura can vote in the parliament elections.

Among minorities, Chakmas have their own autonomous district councils and there was scant reporting. Elections, politics, and repatriation were among the themes of the reported news about minorities. As a result, Brus and Chakmas received little coverage in the press. It is disappointing to see that Mizo newspapers did not represent the Gorkhali minority. Many Gorkhalis live in and around Aizawl but there is not a single news report about them. Since there are no reported conflicts between Gorkhalis and Mizos, the Mizo society considers them as a non-threat and media do not give them much importance.

Based on the data, minorities are hardly seen through photographs in the newspapers. The Mizo newspapers neglected Brus, Chakmas, and Gorkhalis and rendered them invisible. There were no reported major conflicts during the period in review, a major reason for underrepresentation of Bru and Chakma. Past studies showed how conflicts between Mizo and minorities received more attention by the Mizo newspapers. Media in Mizoram are also predominantly of the Mizo, by the Mizo, and for the Mizo.

The study reveals that news about minorities is largely absent in the Mizo newspapers. Minorities in Mizoram lack social power and are at the margins of the Mizo social order. The media also ignore them. All media houses are stationed at Aizawl, the administrative and cultural capital. Chakmas live in the Chakma autonomous district council in the south of Mizoram. Brus are scattered in other districts of Mizoram. Gorkhalis are dispersed in and around Aizawl. The minority communities of Mizoram are thus located at geographical margins.

In the case of Mizoram, the content analysis confirms the absence of internal pluralism. The content regarding minority communities and their political aspirations is largely absent in Mizoram newspapers. The minorities of Mizoram do not have enough resources to run their own media and are thus missing parallel coverage. There is no daily newspaper in Chakma, Bru, and Gorkhali languages. There is only one bi-weekly newspaper in Gorkha language named *Nighalo*, and it is published from Lunglei. The word "*Nigalo*" means bamboo shoot. This newspaper serves as a messenger amongst the Gorkhali community of news and information within and outside Aizawl.

When it comes to content creation, all the journalists are Mizos. There is no single journalist from Chakma, Bru, or Gorkhali communities. Moreover, the public sphere has been deeply patriarchal since the pre-colonial period in Mizoram. The traditional Tlangau (village crier) and other communicators are predominantly men. The Gorkhalis and Brus do not have their own public address systems and they access YMA's Tlangau. In all three autonomous district councils, the Lais, Maras, and Chakmas have their own public address systems. The latter are therefore exclusive for the communities and the indigenous media are largely exclusionary.

During the colonial period, the Christian missionaries were men. Contemporary media persons are predominantly men as well. The main voices are almost always male. Mizo men continue to possess enormous control in news selection and

reporting. The data of the Mizoram Journalists Association show that only six women out of its 144 members are accredited journalists. At television and radio stations, women are working as news anchors, radio jockeys and news readers. Only a few female journalists are in the field. Men are the editors and owners of the media houses in Mizoram. We can infer that Mizo women are still a minority in media houses. A Mizo woman has limited access and participation in conventional media, including print, television, and radio. Additionally, the LGBTQ is also symbolically annihilated from the media. The content analysis reveals that there was not even a single article representing the women from minorities of Mizoram. Mizo women and minorities are marginalized in Mizo society.

The media should educate and empower all members of society irrespective of their gender, age, religion, and ethnicity. The news media should promote inclusive news coverage, recognizing problems of discrimination and marginalization of minorities, and ensuring equal human rights.

Disclosure statement

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Bachelor of Commerce (70 per cent)

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V. Ratnamala, Amy Felicia Danielle & Lalnunkimi Colney (2021): Media and marginality in modern Mizoram, Media Asia, DOI: 10.1080/01296612.2021.1953758

Colney, L. (2022). Need for cyber crime awareness in Mizoram with focus on women respondents. International Journal of Current Humanities &Amp; Social Science Researches (IJCHSSR) ISSN: 2456-7205, Peer Reviewed Journal, 6(1), 34–41.

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Book Chapter:

Colney, L. (2025). Representing conflict: A comparative study of Mizoram's relocation crisis. In N. Gogoi (Ed.), Contested histories, shared futures and the role of history in conflicts and peace in Northeast India (pp. xx–xx). North Eastern Social Research Centre.

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA, CONFLICT AND NATIONALISM: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN SHAPING MIZO NATIONALISM

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Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the background, significance, and research orientation of the study, beginning with a brief personal reflection on the motivations that led to this research. The chapter highlights the central focus of the entire study, which is to analyze and understand the role of media in shaping public discourse and perception around conflicts in Mizoram, with particular attention to the underreporting and misrepresentation of critical historical events such as the 1966 Aizawl bombing and the 1967 Relocation Crisis.

The literature review foregrounds the broader role of media in society and its power to construct social realities, including the creation and reinforcement of regional identities such as the Mizo identity. Special attention is given to how media often prioritises conflict as a news value, and how journalistic objectivity can be compromised when sensationalism or ideological bias overshadows balanced reporting. Drawing on Gouse et al. (2018), it is noted that conflict reporting often emphasises violence and loss, with little space for voices from the margins or alternative perspectives.

A historical context of conflict in Mizoram is also presented, spanning from pre-colonial tensions to colonial marginalisation and post-independence armed struggle. Central to this is the two-decade-long Mizo resistance movement against the Indian state, locally known as Rambuai, marked by widespread violence, village regrouping, and human rights violations perpetrated by both the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Indian Army. These events were largely underrepresented in national narratives, contributing to the silencing of Mizo voices in the mainstream media.

The chapter also traces the development of media in Mizoram, mapping its evolution from a peripheral outlet during colonial and post-colonial times to a more localised, culturally rooted form of communication. The study draws on two theoretical frameworks to meet its objectives: Subaltern Studies and Peace Journalism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" forms the foundation for understanding the subaltern condition of the Mizos, especially when

they were a small tribal population residing in a district of Assam before attaining Union Territory status. This framework is used to critically assess whose voices are amplified or erased in historical and media narratives.

John Galtung's theory of Peace Journalism is used to evaluate how media contributes to either conflict escalation or resolution. Galtung's emphasis on representing all sides of a conflict and promoting dialogue rather than division is particularly relevant to the way national media reported, or failed to report, on events in Mizoram. The theoretical frameworks thus help interrogate the ideological underpinnings of media representations and their broader impact.

This chapter highlights the research objectives, which focus on analysing national media coverage of key events in Mizoram's history, the 1966 Aizawl bombing, the 1959 famine, the forced relocation, and the 2021 Assam-Mizoram border clash, while comparing them with local narratives to identify ideological biases and patterns of marginalisation. The objective also includes examination of how oral histories and lived experiences challenge or reinforce official media narratives. The chapter outlines a triangulated methodology combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, including case studies, oral histories, and both critical discourse and content analysis to investigate media representation, silences, and power structures.

Chapter 2

This chapter explores the key themes of this study, drawing on perspectives from subaltern studies and Van Dijk's theoretical perspectives on the reproduction of racism in media. Through various perspectives and examples, it highlights how media narratives often overlook or distort the experiences of subjugated groups, shaping both public discourse and the broader societal understanding of these conflicts.

This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature supporting the study's objectives. These include analysing national media coverage of the 1966 Aizawl bombing and the 1959 famine; comparing national and local media portrayals of Mizoram's forced relocations; examining how oral histories align with or challenge

media narratives; and analysing coverage of the 2021 Assam–Mizoram border clash in the context of historical marginalisation. The literature discussed offers a foundation for understanding these events and the ideological frameworks shaping their representation.

This chapter reviews existing literature that forms the foundation of the study. It begins by examining how media narratives have influenced nationalist agendas in various global contexts, showing how the framing of conflict often serves state interests and reinforces dominant ideologies. Drawing on case studies from different countries, it explores how media has been used as a tool to legitimise political agendas, shape public opinion, and marginalise dissenting voices.

The chapter then discusses the key theoretical frameworks that guide the study's analysis of media discourse. These include Teun A. van Dijk's theory of the Reproduction of Racism, which examines how discourse subtly perpetuates racial and ethnic hierarchies through language and representation. It also incorporates the Subaltern Perspective, inspired by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", to understand how marginalised communities are often silenced or misrepresented in dominant narratives. Johan Galtung's Peace Journalism Theory is also introduced as a framework that challenges conflict-driven reporting and advocates for balanced, dialogue-oriented journalism that gives voice to all sides, particularly in regions of protracted conflict.

Additionally, the chapter provides a historical overview of Mizoram, highlighting its long-standing struggles—from colonial marginalization to the post-independence armed resistance, and how these events have been documented and remembered. It critically reflects on how media narratives have evolved alongside these conflicts, shaping both internal and external perceptions of the region.

Lastly, the chapter identifies a significant research gap: no prior study has critically examined the divergence between national and local media narratives surrounding key events such as forced village relocations in Mizoram. Nor has any research sufficiently explored how these representations reflect deeper ideological biases or

entrenched power structures, particularly those rooted in racial, ethnic, or political hierarchies. This gap underscores the need for a nuanced media analysis that centers subaltern voices and challenges dominant frameworks of understanding.

Chapter 3

This chapter discusses the origins of the Rambuai period in Mizoram, situating it within the broader historical and political context that began with the Mautam famine of 1959. It examines how the crisis unfolded following the flowering of bamboo, a phenomenon historically associated by the Mizo people with the onset of famine due to subsequent rat infestations.

It highlights how the inadequate response from the government deepened feelings of neglect and alienation among the Mizo people, setting the stage for a political awakening and the rise of a demand for self-determination. The chapter traces how this sentiment gradually evolved into a twenty-year-long movement for independence under the leadership of Laldenga, culminating in the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord at 9:15 p.m. in 1986 between Laldenga and a representative of the Indian government. It concludes this historical overview by noting that Mizoram attained statehood in 1987 and became the 23rd state of the Indian Union (Lalchungnunga, 1994).

In addition to tracing these historical developments, the chapter applies Teun A. Van Dijk's theory of race and racism in media to analyze how national and international newspapers represented the Mautam famine and the events surrounding the conflict in Mizoram. It focuses on how language, headlines, and framing were used in media coverage to reflect dominant narratives, revealing biases and the positioning of tribal populations within national discourse. The analysis includes a critical reading of press reports from three major English-language newspapers in India—The Times of India, The Statesman, and The Telegraph—and explores how their coverage shaped public perception of both the famine and the political unrest that followed.

The chapter draws from a purposive sampling of articles published between March 1 and 15, 1966, to assess media reporting before, during, and after the aerial operations

in Aizawl and its surrounding areas. It also includes a 12-day sampling from 1959 to evaluate how the Mautam famine was reported at the national level. The chapter further includes an assessment of international newspaper archives accessed through Google News Archive to understand how the secessionist movement was portrayed outside India.

Chapter 4

This chapter discusses the period between 1967 and 1970, during which village regrouping was implemented in Mizoram by the Union government as part of its counterinsurgency strategy aimed at controlling the movement of anti-state agents. It examines how these policies affected the lives of civilians and how those experiences were represented in both international and domestic media. The chapter provides a critical discourse analysis of selected newspaper coverage to uncover the narratives constructed around the forced relocation and to evaluate the differences in representation across various media platforms. By focusing on the lived experiences of the Mizo people during the regrouping period, the chapter aims to offer insight into how the state's strategies were perceived and reported.

The analysis includes three newspapers: one international daily, The Daily Telegraph from the United Kingdom, and two Indian national dailies, The Hindustan Times and The Times of India. Coverage from the years 1966 to 1970 was selected for this study, with 1966 marking the beginning of the independence movement, referred to in this chapter as rambuai. The period between 1967 and 1970 is considered critical for examining the tone and framing of the press coverage on the policy of Protected and Progressive Villages (PPVs), a euphemism for the forced village regrouping policy. The chapter details the keyword search criteria used to locate relevant newspaper articles, which included terms such as rambuai, Mizoram insurgency, Mizoram village regrouping, Mizoram famine, Aizawl bombing, Laldenga, Mizo National Army, Mizo nationalism, Mizo secession, and civil unrest in Mizoram. These keywords were applied to sources published between January 1, 1966, and December 31, 1976, in order to capture both immediate and extended coverage of the events.

In addition to the national and international press, the chapter highlights an analysis of local vernacular newspapers to provide a more grounded understanding of how forced relocation was experienced and reported within Mizoram itself. It focuses on three of the oldest known publications held in the Mizoram State Central Library—Mizo Arsi, Remna Palai, and Hmar Arsi. These newspapers were selected for their availability and relevance to the period of the rambuai, with particular attention paid to reports concerning village grouping, house burnings, killings, food shortages, famine, surrenders of MNF forces, and peace appeals. The chapter outlines that all forms of media content from these publications, including editorials, columns, and letters to the editor, were included in the analysis to obtain a comprehensive view of the public discourse.

The chapter explains that in Remna Palai, 102 editions from 1968 and 1969 were reviewed, with 84 containing relevant keywords. In Mizo Arsi, 161 editions were analyzed, and 136 were found to include the specified keywords. For Hmar Arsi, out of 94 editions, 31 matched the criteria. Each edition available during the selected time frame was examined systematically to allow for a detailed comparative study of media responses to the government's actions. By comparing the narratives constructed in both national and local media, the chapter seeks to identify disparities in representation and better understand the role of media in documenting or shaping public understanding of the rambuai period and the deeply impactful policy of forced village regrouping.

Chapter 5

This chapter examines the oral narratives of race and resistance within the broader context of Mizoram's conflict-ridden history, with particular emphasis on the forced displacement of communities during the implementation of the Grouping and Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV) scheme between 1967 and 1970. It delves into the lived experiences of individuals who were uprooted from their ancestral lands and compelled to relocate to designated regrouping centres as part of the Indian government's counterinsurgency strategy. The chapter also engages with the testimonies of those who witnessed the March 5, 1966 bombing of Aizawl, situating

these accounts within the larger framework of the Rambuai, a term used to refer to the period of unrest and armed resistance led by the Mizo National Front.

By analyzing personal narratives collected through oral history interviews, the chapter aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the long-term consequences of state-enforced displacement and violence on the identity, memory, and resilience of the Mizo people. It highlights how individuals make sense of their experiences of loss, dislocation, and survival in the aftermath of policies that sought to fragment their communities. In doing so, the chapter not only foregrounds the voices of those often marginalized in official historical accounts but also explores how these voices challenge dominant narratives surrounding national unity and internal security.

The oral testimonies of ten individuals who lived through the Rambuai and experienced forced relocation form the core of this chapter's qualitative inquiry. These narratives shed light on how people remember and interpret the trauma of being displaced, the conditions within regrouping centres, the impact on familial and communal ties, and the broader sociocultural disruptions they endured. Through these recollections, the chapter underscores the importance of oral history as a method for reconstructing historical memory, especially in contexts where written records are sparse, state-controlled, or insufficiently attentive to subaltern perspectives.

In addition to the oral accounts, the chapter reflects on the role of media in shaping public perceptions of conflict, displacement, and resistance. It examines how media representations either obscured or amplified the realities on the ground, contributing to the formation of racialized and politicized narratives during a volatile period in India's northeastern frontier. Through a critical lens, the chapter interrogates the intersections of race, resistance, and socio-political upheaval, offering insights into how state policies and media discourses collectively influenced the trajectory of Mizoram's history and the identity of its people.

Chapter 6

This chapter investigates the extent to which the historical marginalization of media in the Northeast, particularly in Mizoram, has shaped the framing of the 2021 Assam–Mizoram border conflict by local media outlets. It explores whether the longstanding lack of attention from national media has contributed to the development of a defensive posture within the local press, prompting them to focus on community protection and narrative control in the absence of wider support. The Assam–Mizoram border conflict itself is deeply rooted in competing historical interpretations of boundary demarcation, with both states asserting territorial claims based on differing understandings of colonial-era agreements and administrative decisions. These competing narratives have fostered a conflict that is not only territorial but also symbolic of identity and legitimacy.

To examine this issue, the chapter employs a content analysis methodology with a purposive sampling approach over a one-week period from July 26 to August 1, 2021. This timeframe was selected to include the events of July 26, when the most intense clashes occurred between police forces from the two states, as well as the immediate aftermath, which generated significant media attention. The analysis focuses on three newspapers: Vanglaini from Mizoram, Eastern Chronicle from Assam, and The Hindu, a national daily. These publications were selected to represent local perspectives from both states involved in the conflict, as well as a broader national media viewpoint.

All forms of coverage related to the conflict—including news articles, editorials, photographs, and letters to the editor—serve as the units of analysis. The chapter examines several variables to understand how the conflict was framed in each publication. These variables include the sources cited within the articles, the frequency and volume of news coverage, the language and tone employed in the reporting, and the dominant themes that emerged across the sampled materials. The thematic analysis is designed to assess the portrayal of the conflict, the substance and orientation of narratives presented, and the ways in which each media outlet constructs its version of events.

By comparing these dimensions, the chapter seeks to uncover whether local media in Mizoram and Assam have responded to national media neglect by centering their own communities' perspectives, potentially reinforcing regional divisions and identity-based solidarities. Through this examination, the chapter offers insight into how regional media systems respond to marginalization, how narratives of conflict are shaped in contested border regions, and how media discourse can serve both as a mirror of political tensions and as an instrument in the ongoing construction of collective identity.

Chapter 7

This chapter presents a discussion of the results in relation to the literature reviewed and the research objectives outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It synthesizes the key conclusions drawn from the study, offering insights into the broader implications of the findings. The discussion is organized around the four main research objectives, which are addressed through an exploration of several subtopics that emerged during the course of analysis.

The first subtopic, Racial Framing – the Mizo as Terrorists/Rebels, examines how national media discourses have historically racialized and delegitimized Mizo political aspirations by framing them through the lens of rebellion and criminality. The Day Aizawl Burned in Silence revisits the 1966 bombing of Aizawl and interrogates the silences in national media coverage, highlighting how selective reporting contributes to historical amnesia and the erasure of state violence. The Manufactured Consent of Displacement in National Discourse reflects on the portrayal—or lack thereof—of the mass forced relocation of Mizo villages under the Protected and Progressive Villages scheme, emphasizing how consent was implied rather than earned through public debate.

Further, The Rhetoric of Belonging: Media and the Marginal Other explores how media narratives have shaped who is permitted to belong within the imagined Indian nation, while Language as a Tool of Displacement and Control focuses on the

strategic use of language in reporting that reinforces hegemonic power structures and marginalizes indigenous perspectives. Seventy-Five Years of Silence: Northeast India and the National Media critically examines the ongoing invisibility of the Northeast in mainstream media coverage, even decades after independence. The chapter also questions whether subaltern voices make a difference by evaluating the impact and visibility of local oral histories and indigenous testimonies in shaping national narratives. Finally, Nationalism, Media, and the Politics of Belonging in India contextualizes the findings within broader debates around media's role in constructing national identity and the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Through these discussions, the chapter concludes that distance in the Indian media landscape is not merely geographical but editorial and representational. The uneven prioritization of stories from peripheral regions such as Mizoram reveals how the promise of national belonging remains unequally distributed. In such a context, print journalism has the potential to function not as a unifier, but as a mechanism of exclusion.

The chapter ends with several key recommendations. These include investing in journalistic training and capacity building, particularly in the Northeast; documenting a comprehensive rambuai archive to preserve lived histories; decentralizing media reporting to empower regional voices; and promoting more inclusive editorial practices that reflect the diversity of India's population.

The study also acknowledges certain limitations. These include the limited availability of historical newspaper records, the gender imbalance among interview participants, challenges related to the clarity and legibility of older print materials, and the relatively narrow scope of content analyzed due to constraints in archival access.

Looking ahead, the chapter identifies several areas for future research. These include recording more oral histories from survivors of the rambuai period, conducting further analysis of national and international media coverage of Mizoram, and

expanding research to include the role of digital media in shaping regional narratives and public discourse.