

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MEDIA IN THE
AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCILS OF MIZORAM**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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PHILOSOPHY**

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**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MEDIA IN THE AUTONOMOUS
DISTRICT COUNCILS OF MIZORAM**

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



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **“An Ethnographic Study of Media in the Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram”** submitted to Mizoram University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication by **V.L. RUATPUH** bearing **MZU Regn. No. 1800020**, and **Ph.D. Regn. No. MZU/Ph.D./1172 of 26.10.2018** is a bonafide research work carried out during the period of 2021-2024 under my guidance and supervision, and that this work has not been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other university or institute of learning.

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DECLARATION
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I **V.L. RUATPUII**, 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 Mass Communication**.

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(V.L. RUATPUII)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PwC	Price water house Coopers
ADC	Autonomous District Council
MJA	Mizoram Journalists' Association
RNI	Registrar of Newspaper for India
AIR	All India Radio
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder
DDK	Doordarshan Kendra
DVD	Digital Video Discs
BSNL	Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited
SNS	Social Networking Sites
JMCQ	<i>Journal of Mass Communication Quarterly</i>
US	United States
RD	Radio Dhimsa
YMA	Young Mizo Association
MNF	Mizo National Front
DIPR	Directorate of Information and Public Relations
LIKBK	Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran
LADC	Lai Autonomous District Council
MADC	Mara Autonomous District Council
CADC	Chakma Autonomous District Council
PLRC	Pawi Lakher Regional Council
PRC	Pawi Regional Council
LRC	Lakher Regional Council
CTH	Chittagong Hill Tracts
MDC	Members of District Councils
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party

CEM	Chief Executive Member
KMMTTP	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project
BCM	Baptist Church of Mizoram
PLTU	Pawi Lakher Tribal Union
RNI	Registrar of Newspapers of India
PDF	Portable Document Format
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
INC	Indian National Congress
ICF	International Chin Forum
OBs	Office Bearers
UK	United Kingdom
YLA	Young Lai Association
LSA	Lai Students' Association
LIKBKTP	Lairam Isua Krista Thalai Pawl
Rbt	Rawngbawltu
PCI	Presbyterian Church of India
EM	Executive Member
LMG	Lairam Media Group
NEHU	North Eastern Hill University
LFG	Lawngtlai Future Group
DSLR	Digital Single-Lens Reflex
VC	Village Council
MSR	Mizo Special Report
MNF	Mizo National Front
CDF-KKG Gangaw	Chin Defence Army from Kalay Kabaw
TV	Television
DAS	Digital Addressable System
GAD	General Administration Department

DD	Doordarshan
DTH	Direct-to-Home
YCA	Young Chakma Association
IPRO	Information and Public Relations Officer
ECM	Evangelical Church of Maraland
MTC	Maraland Theological College
HSV	<i>Hnialum Star Vision</i>
NSV	<i>New Skylink Vision</i>
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
MDCC	Mara District Congress Committee
PBNS	Prashar Bharti News Network
CJA	Chhimtuipui Journalists Association
I&PO	Information & Publicity Officer
MTP	Mara ThyutliaPy
KTP	Krizyha ThyuthliaPy
KNP	Krizyhp No Py
HSV	Hnyaloom Star Vision

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Media plays a vital role in our day-to-day lives. It is integral to foster relationships with communities, disseminate information, and entertain. Coined in the 20th century, the terms mass media and mass communication refer to a structured and organised method of the production and dissemination of vast amounts of information and messages with large audiences within a brief time (McQuail, 2010). Cinema, radio, television, cable television, and the press are traditionally recognised as mass media. With the proliferation of internet communication technologies, online media has also diversified the nature of media (Curran, 2011). In a broader sense, not just the medium but also the producers, with the technologies they use and the content they create and distribute, are all universally recognized as media.

With the media's constant presence in our daily lives—from our personal to public spaces—it must have one of the most significant influences on our culture and society by which we live in a media culture and perhaps, media society (Hodkinson, 2016). The concept of mass media is based on the principles of industrial society: mass production and mass distribution. Media operation is mostly undertaken by institutions such as the government or well-funded private commercial enterprises that employ media professionals to manage and supervise the production, distribution, transmission, and ongoing maintenance of media content (Kumar, 2020).

From the invention of printing technology by Gutenberg in the 1440s, printing presses were mostly run as businesses, contributing to the growth of the capitalist economy. At the same time, these presses became powerful tools for influencing ideas. The rise of printing technology contested the control of information, which was mostly at the hands of political institutions and religious establishments, thus creating a new form of symbolic power (Thompson, 1995).

The media industry is a staggering multibillion-dollar global enterprise

contributing to the economy and mediates culture (Havens, 2012). A recent survey by PwC (Pricewaterhouse Coopers) Global shows that the entertainment and media industry grew to US\$2.8 trillion in 2023 and is set to grow to US\$3.4 trillion by 2028 (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2024).

An industry of such scale has a profound impact on society, shaping economic dynamics, cultural values, social identities, and public discourse (Hesmondhalgh, 2018). The press or news media especially serves an informal role as the fourth estate, signifying that open political power often lies in the hands of the press as it maintains a crucial relationship with its readers (Schultz, 1998). Through this relationship, the press can influence public opinion and act as a watchdog over governmental power. Scholars and philosophers alike agree that media is necessary for a democratic society to function properly because democracies need public forums for debate in addition to the availability of news and information, which the media traditionally offers.

The influence of media extends beyond mainstream audiences. In minority communities, media serves as a vital platform for representation and advocacy. Through vernacular and ethnic media, these communities not only stay informed about government policies but also use them as a tool for preserving their culture and traditions, representing local identities, and contributing to the cultural continuity and empowerment of marginalized groups (Matsaganis & Katz, 2010). This dual role of media underscores its power in both political grounds and cultural preservation.

1.2 Media and Society

McLuhan (1964) considered media "the extension of men" and that the Medium is the message because the scale and form of human association and action are shaped and controlled by the medium. Not simply the content of the television discourse- but the medium itself conditions human experiences, creating particular forms of psychological, social, and cultural ways of being. Radio is considered "The Tribal Drum" and is the extension of the human nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself. Television is "The Timid Giant" which demands high audience involvement and is unsuited to deal with hot issues.

Media plays an important role in society where it influences public opinion, provides a link between the government and the people, acts as a government watchdog, and affects socialization.

In the *Structure and Function of Communication in Society* by Lasswell (1948), it is mentioned that there are three main functions of mass communication -

1. Surveillance of the environment: To tell us what is happening around the world and to deliver information on important topics that impact society.
2. Correlation of parts of society: This function relates to how the media's selection of certain news and interpretation affects how society understands and responds to it.
3. Cultural transmission: Transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next.

Another scholar Whitney (1975), adds other functions to the list -

4. Persuasion: To persuade and convince the audience through reasoning and argument.
5. Education: To instruct or to teach with a systematic method to a new ideological stance.
6. Interpretation: To explain issues and problems in the form of commentary, features, and editorials so that people.
7. Entertain: To help relax people and create a means of escape from the stress of everyday life.

This thesis attempts to explore the vernacular and ethnic media landscape of a democratic society composed of ethnic minority communities in Mizoram.

1.3 Mizoram at a glance

Mizoram is one of the eight northeastern states of India and is perched at the southernmost region sharing its national borders with three states – Assam, Tripura

and Manipur and international borders with Bangladesh on the west, and Myanmar on the east. Like other Northeastern states, Mizoram was previously a part of Assam under the name Lushai Hills. In 1972, it was first separated as a Union Territory and, finally became a fully functioning state of India on February 20, 1987 (Nunthara, 1996). Lushai Hills was later changed to Mizo Hills District in 1954 till it was finally named Mizoram (Mizo land) in 1972 (Doungel, 2022).

According to the 2011 Census, Mizoram is the second least populous state in the country with a population of 1,091,014. There are 11 administrative districts and the capital Aizawl is overpopulated, inhabited by 37% of the state's total population. Mizoram has 95% of its population classified as Scheduled Tribe, making it the state with the highest concentration of protected tribal communities in India. The state is made up of different ethnic communities that have their own culture, tradition, unique lifestyle and distinctive language and dialect (Dutta & Ray, 2015).

Mizoram has a literacy rate of 91.33 % and among all the districts, Lawngtlai District has a literacy rate of 65.88%, the lowest in Mizoram and below the national literacy rate of 74.04%. Mizoram's 87.16% of its population hold Christianity as their faith. Buddhists form the second highest followers with 8.51 % (*Mizoram Population Census 2011, Mizoram Religion, Literacy, Sex Ratio - Census India*, n.d.) The two southern districts of Lawngtlai and Siaha host the tribes of Lai, Chakma and Mara. Historically, the Lai were known as Pawi and the Mara were known as Lakher but these names were later changed in 1988 as they were considered derogatory. (Pachau & Schendel, 2015). Under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, these three tribes are safeguarded by providing them with their Autonomous District Councils (ADC) namely the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) on 29th April 1972. The LADC and the CADC form Lawngtlai District and the whole area of Siaha District falls under the MADC.

These tribes or ethnic constitute the Lusei, Hmar, Paite, Lai, Mara and others who for the most part refer to themselves as Mizo. Most of the Mizo hold Christianity as their religion. Other minority tribes such as the Chakma and the Bru

do not identify themselves as Mizo and this sentiment is also shared by the Mizo (Pachua & Schendel, 2015). While the Mizo are found to populate all eleven districts of the state, the Chakma live mostly in Lawngtlai, Lunglei and Mamit districts. There are also other ethnic groups such as the Gorkha who form a minority (Roluahpuia, 2016).

Aizawl, the state capital, is the centre for development and administration. It is located in the northern part of the state.



Figure 1. Map of Mizoram as per Statistical Handbook of Mizoram 2020.

1.4 Background of the Study

Mizoram, situated in Northeast India, is home to ethnic minority groups including the Lai, Chakma, and Mara tribes, predominantly residing in the southern

districts of Lawngtlai and Siaha. These regions are governed by the Lai, Chakma, and Mara Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to protect their cultural identities, languages, and traditions.

In this diverse socio-political context, media plays a vital role not only in informing and entertaining but also in preserving ethnic identities and fostering communication. While much of Mizoram's media is centred in Aizawl, the ethnic media in the ADC regions functions differently, focusing on local cultures and languages. The proximity of the three tribes, each with distinct languages, makes this area a unique subject for media research, emphasizing how media can support cultural preservation and community engagement.

This study aims to fill the gap in research on media in the ADCs by examining the role media plays in the daily lives of the Lai, Chakma, and Mara communities. It focuses on mapping media outlets, understanding media production processes, and analyzing media consumption patterns to gain insights into how media fosters cultural identity and autonomy in these minority regions.

At its core, the study explores the full media landscape—including print, broadcast, and digital media—and its role in maintaining ethnic identities within a minority democratic society.

1.5 Media in Mizoram

The Mizoram Journalists' Association (MJA) was formed on 23rd 1972 by local journalists and is a welfare body of print and electronic media personnel in Mizoram. The founding president of MJA Lal Thanhawla went on to become the Chief Minister of the state and took the materialization of Aizawl Press Club which opened on September 10, 1996 (Lalkhawliana, 2012). As of 2022, there are 153 accredited journalists spread across all 11 districts of Mizoram (Directorate of Economics & Statistics Mizoram, 2022). The MJA has 11 branches across all districts of Mizoram (Zirliana, 2012).

1.5.1 Print Media

Print media or journalism in Mizoram could be considered one of the legacies brought by the Christian Missionaries from Britain. From their arrival in the 1890s and with the Romanization of the Mizo script, Christian literature – Bibles, tracts and pamphlets were introduced. Such literature was the inspiration for the earlier print media. Before the arrival of printing machines, most of the literature was printed elsewhere or was handwritten or typed with a typewriter (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015). *Mizo Chanchin Laisuih*, published in 1898 by the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills District (modern Mizoram) Captain J. Shakespeare is considered to be the first handwritten newspaper in the Mizo language (Thirumal & Lalrozami, 2010). The handwritten cyclostyled tabloid *Mizo Chanchin Laisuih* was later substituted by *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, a monthly journal published by Captain J. Shakespeare again. However, this was edited by Makthanga from 1911 to 1936 (Dutta & Ray, 2018).

The establishment of *Loch Printing Press* in 1911 which was later changed to *Synod Press*, marked the emergence of the production of print media in Mizoram. Publications by the church and community-centred publications soon emerged, laying the foundation of the print media landscape in Mizoram (Dutta & Ray, 2018).

As per the 66th Annual Report of the Press in India by the Registrar of Newspaper for India (RNI), the number of registered newspapers and periodicals in Mizoram is 206. Out of these, 58 are Dailies, 15 Tri-Bi-weeklies, 44 Weeklies, 3 Fortnightlies, 65 Monthlies, 8 Quarterlies, 2 Annuals, and 11 publications of other periodicities. It is recorded that a monthly newsletter published by the Synod Literature & Publication Board under the name *Synod* is the leading print media with a circulation of 1,50,000 copies per publishing day. However, in the June 2023 issue of *Synod*, the circulation is mentioned as 1,35,000 copies. *Vanglaini*, a vernacular daily newspaper established in 1978 is the highest-circulated daily newspaper in the the state (Lalruatkimi, 2015). Other major publications are *The Aizawl Post*, *The Zozam Times*, and *Zalen* which are all published in Mizo and are based in Aizawl.

1.5.2 Radio

There are two radio stations and one community radio station in Mizoram –

Akashvani Aizawl, Akashvani Lunglei and Akashvani Siaha.

Akashvani Aizawl, previously known as All India Radio (AIR) Aizawl, started functioning as an auxiliary station in May 1966 with a 150-watt medium wave frequency. Due to its affordability, radio proved to be a popular source of information, education and entertainment all across the state – for both rural and urban audiences (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015). In 1995, A 6 KW FM radio station was started in Lunglei which catered more towards the southern Mizoram population. A community radio station is operated at Siaha to cover interior places (Mizoram.nic.in). FM Radio also entered Mizoram in the early 2000s. *Red FM* which was launched in 2002, *Big FM* launched in 2006 and *FM Zoawi*, which was launched in 2007 are three FM Radio available in the state. These FM Radio operations are all based in Aizawl (Lalnunpuii, 2018).

1.5.3 Television

The 1980s saw the arrival of television sets in Aizawl. It was limited to rich families and mere ownership was seen as a depiction of social status. *Doordarshan* channels and Bangla channels tuned in through antennas were the only channels available but people would flock together in their neighbour's homes to watch television together (Laldinfeli & Vanamamalai, 2016). In 1982, *Doordarshan* transmitted the Asian Games which heightened the interest in television but channels were limited. Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) became the next best thing resulting in the creation of video library businesses. Almost a decade after the broadcast of the Asian Games, in 1991 *Skylinks Cable Network* became the first cable television operator not only in Mizoram but also in Northeast India. Local television channels were introduced and by 1992, *LPS Vision Production* joined the business followed by *Zozam* in 1994 (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015). Both *Skylinks* and *Zozam* have ceased to exist today.

In the modern day, the Mizo television industry has prominent players – state and privately owned. *Doordarshan Kendra* (DDK) has an Aizawl station and there are 29 cable television operators across the state. As the same goes with print media, Aizawl-based cable television operators *LPS Vision Production* and *Zonet Cable TV Private Limited* are the frontrunners and trendsetters in the creation of local cable channel content in the state by providing cable networks (Lalruatkimi, 2015). These two cable operators also act as production houses for local dialect-oriented Mizo channels. Such contents are sent to cable operators in other districts via digital video discs (DVD) through daily sumo services. The local channels are mostly Mizo songs – love songs and gospel, English, Hindi, Korean, and Turkish movies and serials dubbed in Mizo, documentaries, interviews, video on demand and so on (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015).

1.5.4 New Media

New Media or online media, media powered by the internet emerged in the early 2000s in Mizoram. With a limited dial-up connection, internet connectivity was limited to the capital city. *Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited* (BSNL) was the sole provider of the Internet for a long period. Broadband networks eventually came into play when several cellular companies like *Airtel*, *Vodafone*, *Jio* etc. and private Internet Service Providers like *Net Surf* delved into the market. Today, Internet connectivity is accessible in most urban areas with at least 4G or 5G networks. According to the Mizoram Statistical Abstract 2021, there are 1,483,213 mobile phone subscribers in Mizoram. New media especially social networking sites (SNS) are widely used. *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *Twitter* are some of the most popular SNSs used.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity, facilitating communication, and fostering political engagement. However, in the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) of Mizoram, which are home to the Lai, Chakma, and Mara ethnic minorities, the media landscape remains largely underexplored. There is a lack of comprehensive media mapping which means it has been excluded in the

Mizoram media landscape narratives.

So far, the media in Mizoram has always been concentrated on what Aizawl offers. Given the geospatial location and ethnic identities of the ADC regions, there are bound to be different sets of realities in terms of challenges faced by local media practitioners, and there is insufficient understanding of the complex relationship between these factors. Lastly, looking at the history of the MJA, there has always been a good relationship between the media and the government and the ADC being a democratic government, it is important to navigate their relationship.

The dwelling of the three diverse ethnic tribes of Lai, Mara and Chakma using different languages within proximity makes it an interesting and unique area for media research which is essential for comprehending the dynamics of media in Mizoram.

1.7 Scope and Significance of the Study

The scope of this study is to explore the media landscape within the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram—LADC, CADC, and MADC. It focuses on understanding the different forms of media that operate in these regions, including print, radio, television, and digital media. This includes a detailed mapping of the existing and obsolete media infrastructure in some areas to know why some media failed prematurely. The study also aims to identify the media creators and producers involved in content creation, distribution, and maintenance and an exploration of the challenges faced by local media producers in these regions.

Furthermore, the study examines how these minority ethnic communities engage with their locally produced media, analyzing their media consumption patterns, and preferences. The research is limited to the southern districts of Lawngtlai and Siaha, focusing specifically on the media related to the Lai, Chakma, and Mara communities.

This study contributes to the knowledge of the broader discourse of media studies primarily on the ethnic and vernacular media industry. It also addresses a research gap in the media landscape of Mizoram, especially in the Autonomous

District Council Areas, an area that has been unexplored in academic literature. This research offers insight into the workings of media and into how people make use of such media. The study also highlights the working conditions of the journalists and other media content creators and suggests practical recommendations to improve their work environment, such as providing better access to resources, training opportunities and digital strategies that could help boost their revenue.

1.8 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Media: Media is a plural term of medium from which content is communicated from an origin to a destination. Communication mediums include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and online-based mediums like social media – social networking sites, websites etc. Media here encompasses both vernacular (language-specific) and ethnic (culture-specific) outlets.

Lai, Mara and Chakma: These are the names of the tribes living in the LADC, the CADC and the MADC. The Lai use a dialect called *Lai Holh*, the Mara use *Mara* and the Chakma use *Chakma* as their means of communication. In this thesis, the names Lai, Mara and Chakma are used simultaneously to address the tribe and their languages.

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs): The ADCs in India are sovereign bodies established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to provide administrative and legislative autonomy to regions with sizeable indigenous tribal populations. In Mizoram, tribal groups such as Lai, Chakma and Mara are given these autonomies to preserve and maintain their culture and tradition.

Media Mapping: Mapping in media studies generally means locating and identifying the communication channels available in the region.

Media landscape: Media landscape is the totality of the environment in which media – print, broadcast and social media exists and functions within a particular context.

Media Creators: The individuals or organizations responsible for the making and distribution of media content. These include journalists, radio operators, cable television operators, online news writers etc.

Media Production: The logistics and process behind the creation of content.

The location, the timing, the assembly the behind-the-scenes of the actual content.

Media Usage and Preferences: Audiences' use of media – why they choose to use it, how they use it and what factors influence the reasoning behind their usage. It is essentially to understand why and how particular media is used instead of the other.

Vernacular Media: Vernacular Media refers to the media that is culturally suitable for a specific demographic. It includes media that centres on the daily experiences and concerns of people within local communities. It focuses more on the language of the media rather than the audience they cater to.

Ethnic Media: Media produced for a particular ethnic community is called ethnic media. Newspapers, radio, cable television operators and internet-based media can all come under ethnic media. Unlike vernacular media, ethnic media does not necessarily be published in the local language to serve the ethnic community.

Most media in Mizoram falls under vernacular and ethnic media.

1.9 Objectives of the Study

1. To map the various mass media operating within the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram.
2. To identify the media creators and the process of media production and distribution.
3. To study the media usage and preferences of the people - Lai, Chakma and Mara in the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram.

1.10 Research Questions

1. What are various types of mass media that are operational in the Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram?
2. How does the media function and operate in the region?
3. Who are the media producers, and how do they manage the day-to-day media production?
4. What kind of media and how do the three tribes - Lai, Chakma and Mara use media in their everyday lives?

1.11 Structure of the Thesis

Although the study has three research objectives, an attempt has been made to address all the objectives in one chapter for each study area rather than dedicating the objective to separate chapters. This approach is used to convey a more cohesive narration of events and contextualize the data based on the specific cultural, historical and political setting of each region.

Chapters IV, V & VI are also accompanied by photographs of the study site to offer better insight into the ground realities of the study area.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction, providing an introduction to the relationship between media and society, a glance at media in Mizoram, and the backdrop of the study to give an overview of the thesis.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The second chapter delivers an exhaustive review of several studies on media and minorities, ethnic media and media culture in Mizo different regions to identify

the research gap that the study aims to fill.

Chapter III: Area of Study and Methodology

This chapter offers two purposes: a detailed overview of the methodology – Ethnography and the background –geographical, social and cultural information of the study area.

Chapter IV: Media in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC)

The fourth chapter details a thick description of media in LADC – mapping of media (print, broadcast media) along with photographs; the media players and also the preferences and consumption of media by the Lai people.

Chapter V: Media in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)

The fifth chapter delves into media in CADC – mapping of media past and present, the condition of the media industry and how media is consumed and utilized by the Chakma people.

Chapter VI: Media in the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC)

The sixth chapter offers an overview of the media landscape in the MADC and what and how the Mara people choose to use media.

Chapter VII: Findings and Conclusion

The last chapter of the thesis discusses the study's key findings along with the concluding statements. It also comments on the shortcomings of the study and highlights the prospect of media studies in the peripheral regions and marginalized people of Mizoram.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of multiple literatures from various sources on media and minorities, ethnic media and vernacular. It emphasizes minority, ethnic, vernacular, and regional media while examining themes related to media landscapes, production and management, media producers, ethnographic studies, and media usage and preferences. This approach aims to provide a thorough understanding of past studies and the existing body of literature. Additionally, studies on media in Mizoram are also reviewed to get an in-depth perspective on the media sphere.

2.1 Global Media Landscapes

Media landscapes across the world vary significantly due to a myriad of factors, including cultural, political, economic and technological influences. These factors are also ever-changing over time. For instance, the Dutch media system was closely linked to the nation-state's development, particularly through the concept of pillarization, which organized society into religious and political communities where these communities maintained their own media outlets and institutions. However, external pressures and commercialization broke down the structure in the 1970s. The most remarkable shift was the introduction of commercial television in 1989. Although commercialization changed the trajectory of the media landscape, remnants of pillarization remained, leading to the disappearance of party political newspapers and increased concentration of media ownership (Puustinen et al., 2008).

2.2 Media Ethnography

An 'ethnography of news production' study in Darjeeling Hills by Roy (2021) uses intensive field research and participant observation to study the everyday life of a stringer by employing emic and etic perspectives, the paper offers a detailed examination of stringers' everyday experiences. The researcher contends that the acknowledgement and value assigned to stringers are disproportionately distributed, as they remain positioned at the lowest level of the journalistic hierarchy, resulting in

a broader socio-professional paradox. Despite being cultural figures and preservers of community memory, stringers continue to be marginalised within journalism.

Jena (2021) examines community radio as a form of ethnic media for safeguarding ethnic-cultural identities. This is an ethnographic study of Radio Dhimsa (RD), a Desia (indigenous) community radio station in the eastern Indian state of Odisha. By drawing upon the existing literature in the domain of ethnic community media, this study adds a more nuanced understanding of how ethnic community radio plays a key role in safeguarding ethnic-cultural identities while countering majoritarian identities. This study is important because few studies have dealt with how community radio engages with ethnic-cultural identities in the Global South. RD challenges the popular conventions of broadcast journalism while being positioned as a community radio station.

In a detailed ethnographic study of a Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*, Stahlberg (2013) present a thick description of *Dainik Jagran* newsroom in Lucknow. study of newsroom culture, routines, beat systems and the macrostructure of news layout, described in the book with the use of a metaphor, ‘cartography of news’, in the context of the Lucknow edition of *Dainik Jagran*. The study shows the newsroom hierarchy of *Dainik Jagran*, and how the beat reporters working for the newspaper, daily, negotiated fragments of society in Lucknow and over some time socially constructed a representation of the city and state on pages of the newspaper.

2.3 Scope and Role of Ethnic Media

Media that serves a particular cultural or racial group is commonly known as ethnic media. It is generally created for and by immigrants, as well as ethnic and language minority groups. Ethnic media is understood and defined in various ways across different regions of the world (Budarick, 2019). Geographical location, size, ownership and language are all considered when describing ethnic media (Johnson, 2010). Depending on the context, ethnic media is also referred to as

community media, minority media and diasporic media; however these meanings are not mutually exclusive. Ethnic media is known as community media due to the involvement of non-professional, local volunteers and residents in its ownership and production, which differentiates it from mainstream media (Deuze, 2006). According to Riggins (1992), ethnic minority media supports minorities' inclusion into society, ethnic harmony, and cultural preservation. It is tailored to reflect the linguistic and cultural needs of their audiences.

Caspi and Elias (2011) proposed a paradigm that differentiates between two types of ethnic minority media: *media-for* and *media-by* minorities. They categorized this into three areas: the first category is medium initiative and design, the second is medium functioning and the third is media control.

The study of media and marginalized groups is not a new concept. The *Journal of Mass Communication Quarterly* (JMCQ) has chronicled the ongoing challenges marginalized groups face in their pursuit of equal treatment in media content and careers. This analysis by Moody-Ramirez et al. (2023) highlights how the journal's century-long archive reflects significant historical changes in the representation and treatment of women and minorities in media contexts. Many articles focus on limited career advancement opportunities, management challenges, and systemic inequities reinforced by media content and practices. However, fewer articles address the experiences of students and faculty within academic institutions.

2.4 Ethnic Media in a Global Context

A panel study on ethnicity and media use with various ethnic groups – European, Middle Eastern, and Hispanics, from 1976-1992, conducted by Jeffres (2000) focuses on how ethnic media use relates to ethnic identification. The study examines the role of ethnic media – newspapers, radio and television in strengthening ethnic identity over time and finds that ethnic media is positively correlated with stronger ethnic identification. This media helps individuals maintain cultural traditions and connections while navigating the dominant culture. In contrast, mainstream media shows a weaker or negative relationship with ethnic

identity, often leading to assimilation into the broader culture. Factors such as language use, participation in ethnic organizations, and celebrating ethnic festivals also contribute to stronger ethnic identification.

A more recent study by Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) examines how ethnic and mainstream media impact ethnic minorities, specifically Indian Americans. This research highlights that mainstream media often underrepresents or stereotypes ethnic minorities, negatively affecting their self-esteem. In contrast, ethnic media tends to portray these groups more positively, enhancing ethnic pride and cultural expression. The study reveals that exposure to mainstream media is associated with lower self-esteem, whereas engagement with ethnic media increases ethnic pride and the expression of one's ethnic identity. This research underscores the importance of ethnic media as a tool for fostering positive self-concepts and cultural pride within minority communities.

Yu et al. (2017) in their mapping of online English language, ethnic media in the United States (US) explore the role of ethnic media within a multicultural society, emphasizing the need for an "intercultural media system" to facilitate dialogue across communities. The study uses Charles Husband's concept of the "multi-ethnic public sphere" and, examines the accessibility of ethnic media to broader audiences, particularly focusing on media that operate in English or bilingually online. The research shows that 50% of ethnic media outlets provide content in English, making them accessible to a broader audience. It further highlighted the importance of accessible ethnic media in a multicultural society and suggests that their integration into the broader media system is necessary for fostering meaningful intercultural communication.

2.5 Media Production and Management in Minority Contexts

An ethnographic study of Radio Dhimsa (RD) – a community radio station in Odisha, India, as a form of ethnic media for safeguarding ethnic cultural identities (Jena, 2021), shows that RD plays a vital role in preserving the Desia community's cultural identity, through indigenous-language programming and traditional

storytelling. RD's community-centred approach not only strengthens ethnic pride but also provides a platform for voices often marginalized by mainstream media. By positioning itself as an alternative to majoritarian media, RD challenges the conventional norms of broadcast journalism, prioritizing the cultural and social needs of the Desia people.

Minority ethnic media is not without its challenges. Using Taiwan's Hakka television channels, Tsai (2022) emphasizes that traditional outlets like television and print media are experiencing declining viewership due to competition from online media. Traditional ethnic media has found it challenging to gain support from the target ethnic audience. Shrinking audiences and competition from new media have caused trials for the ethnic media industry worldwide.

Apart from the problem of under-representation in mainstream media, ethnic media itself is marginalized within the media industries and public discourse. A recent issue is the "instrumentalization of ethnic media," where it is used strategically to serve the interests of certain stakeholders rather than addressing the needs of the general public. This shift raises concerns and highlights the need for more research and policy interventions to ensure that ethnic media fulfils its role in representing minority voices and fostering inclusive public discourse (Yu, 2016). For ethnic media to flourish in the construction of ethnic identity, Greenland and Wilmore (2017) argue that minority media should avoid homogenizing experiences, particularly of women, as it erases marginal voices.

Media production teams from various linguistic minorities have undoubtedly played an important role in negotiating the use of their languages in their professional practices. Jongbloed (2016) draws on interviews and participant observation of radio producers from three Colombian minority groups; Wayuu, Nasa, and Creole—and television and multimedia producers from the Welsh-speaking minority in Wales. This study highlights how these media teams navigate the complex task of expressing their multi-layered identities, working to preserve their languages and cultures while upholding professional standards and challenging negative stereotypes that persist in their communities.

There is a scarcity of gender and ethnic diversity in media production as studied by Vandenberghe et al. (2020) on how the Flemish press functions. Based on 16 in-depth interviews with print journalists, five key perspectives emerged. Two arguments suggest that diversity is either conceptually irrelevant or incompatible with the idea of universal equality. The third argument views representing diversity as a fundamental part of a journalist's mission, requiring active effort. The remaining two arguments attribute the lack of diversity in news reporting to practical challenges such as professional practices that hinder diverse source selection, or the limited visibility of women and ethnic minorities in society, resulting in fewer diverse sources.

2.6 Media and the Marginalized Groups

Ramasubramanian (2016) examines how racial minorities (in the U.S.) are adapting to, resisting, and challenging mainstream media practices in the current convergence era. By engaging in collaborative, community-based transmedia storytelling projects, these groups are developing new critical media literacies and becoming more active in digital citizenship. Racial minorities are using these transmedia platforms to create more inclusive and participatory forms of storytelling, offering alternative narratives that challenge mainstream media representations.

Yimchunger and TJPRC (2019) explore how Naga youth perceive their representation in mainstream Indian media. Through focus group discussions with Naga youth, the study reveals a sense of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and marginalization in the way mainstream media portrays Nagas. The media often emphasizes conflict, insurgency, and outdated stereotypes, such as the portrayal of Nagas as "savages" or "headhunters," while neglecting the rich cultural diversity and positive aspects of Naga life. The study further highlights how Naga youth negotiate between their dual identities as both Nagas and Indians, often feeling alienated from the national narrative due to cultural and political differences. It argues that media representation plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these feelings of alienation.

Alam et al. (2024) examine how media portrayals influence tribal communities in Jharkhand. There is a practice of oversimplification and stereotyping of indigenous issues in mainstream media, often focusing on conflicts over land and resources while neglecting the complex socio-economic challenges. The paper argues for ethical journalism and nuanced media representation to address tribal issues effectively and promote sustainable development. It also explores the media's role in shaping public opinion, influencing policies, and fostering social justice and community empowerment.

A study of media perception among the tribal Gujar community in Kashmir India by Mufti and Hashim (2016), reveals that despite the massive proliferation of internet facilities and social media, for the Gujar tribes, radio is still the most accessible and widely used medium with television trailing in the second. Due to the low literacy rate and lower socio-economic condition of the tribes, print media and internet usage are also minimal. This shows that literacy and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in determining media access and usage among marginalized communities. The lower literacy levels limit their engagement with print and digital media, while the affordability and accessibility of radio make it the most relied-upon medium. This emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive media strategies that consider the educational and economic conditions of such communities.

In a study of the same tribe, but in a different Indian state - Himachal Pradesh, Kumar and Rabindranath (2017), highlight the generational divide in media use within the tribe. Older generations are more reluctant to adopt modern technologies and prefer traditional media or religious and social programs. They also express concerns about the potential negative impact of media, such as cultural erosion and exposure to inappropriate content. In contrast, the younger generations show more curiosity towards modern media, particularly mobile phones, which they use to access social media, entertainment, and global trends. Despite their nomadic lifestyle, the younger Gujjars are more open to modernity and technological advancements.

A study on the media usage profile of the Gujjar tribe located in Haryana by Garg (2018) found that only a small percentage of Gujjar only a small percentage of Gujjar households access traditional media like newspapers (2.5%) and television (4%). These low figures are attributed to low literacy levels and cultural beliefs, particularly in Muslim households, where television is often viewed as haram (forbidden). Mobile phones are found in 90% of households and are the most accessible medium, bridging geographic, social, and economic boundaries for this community. Men have more access to media compared to women, and elders exhibit more resistance to modern media out of fear of negative cultural impacts. Youths have been the fastest adopters of new media technologies in most cultures.

Not just among tribal communities in India, Kamran et al. (2023) in their study on the impact of global media exposure on the cultural identity of tribal men in the Dera Ghazi Khan district of Pakistan found that from a sample of 420 men, those who are young and educated spend over three hours daily consuming global media. The study reveals that increased global media exposure leads to a stronger inclination toward adopting global cultural identity among younger men, while older men are less exposed to global media and maintain a preference for local cultural identity.

Subramanyam and Mohan (2006) highlight that many global and tribal issues can be addressed through better communication. In tribal communities, especially in the Visakha agency area, transport, communication, and mass media help integrate isolated tribes into the mainstream media by navigating the globalized world and playing a significant role in their development and cultural change. Cultural exclusion has been linked to new media usage among youth, and in this context, Chattopadhyay and Mohanty (2022) have found in a study of Lodha tribals in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha, that digital media accessibility is affecting the social and cultural life of youth. Using interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, the study focuses on five villages with a Lodha population of over 70%. The results reveal that increased new media consumption is leading to cultural disconnection among Lodha youth, moving them away from traditional cultural systems and transitioning them into a more urbanized lifestyle, unlike the life of

previous generations.

The most effective form of communication differs based on many factors and cannot be generalized based on different tribes. Bhadra and Amin (2022) examine the role of mass media in the socio-economic development of the Sabar tribal community in Galudih, Jharkhand, and the study reveals that mass media exposure, including radio, television, print, and social media, is extremely limited among community members. The study further shows that less than 7% occasionally read newspapers and none have social media accounts or access to television. The traditional media and Gram Sabha are the most effective communication channels in the Sabar tribal community and the study results indicate that the lack of media exposure contributes to low awareness of livelihood opportunities and government developmental schemes among the Sabar people.

Depending on the availability of various media types and their associated demographics, different ethnic communities develop distinct perceptions and usage patterns for communication media. These preferences are shaped by factors such as cultural relevance, accessibility, and the specific needs of the community, leading to varying levels of engagement with platforms like television, radio, print, and social media (Krogstad, 2015).

Sharma and Ahmed (2022) in their study of the role of ethnic media in preserving cultural identity found that different ethnic groups in Assam, such as the Bodos, Mishings, and Rabhas utilize media for both traditional and modern communication purposes. The Bodo tribes preferred television followed by newspapers and online media. The Mishings too preferred television followed by online media especially *WhatsApp*, *Facebook* and newspaper as the least preferred. Similarly, like the Bodos and Mishings, the Rabha community preferred television over online media followed by newspapers. These results indicate that while television remains the dominant media across all three communities, social media platforms like *WhatsApp* and *Facebook* are also widely used, particularly by the younger demographic, while traditional media like newspapers still have significant usage, especially among older generations.

In a study of social media use and distractions among agricultural students in India's North-Eastern Hill states by Pandey et al. (2020), it is revealed that there is widespread social media usage, especially *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*. Most students spend a significant amount of time on these platforms regularly which perceived negative impacts, such as included time wastage, health issues due to irregular sleep, and eye strain. However, social media also holds the potential for positive contributions to higher agricultural education by facilitating information sharing and socialization. Talukdar and Mete (2021) in their study also mention how social media is impacting the lifestyles and cultural practices of tribal communities in West Bengal. Their research, conducted across four districts, indicates a significant relationship between social media usage and shifts in tribal customs, including language, festivals, food, and dressing habits. Social media also plays a role in occupational changes, as tribes adapt to modern professions. The findings highlight modernization and social media's role in reshaping traditional tribal life.

Mass media has a profound effect on tribal practices as evident from the study on the Singpho tribe of Tinsukia, Assam. Lakhendra (2014) explored how mass media has influenced their culture and tradition. Despite being in a rural area, the tribe has access to television, DTH services, and mobile phones, though internet usage remains limited. The introduction of media like television and mobile phones has connected the Singpho community to the outside world, leading to cultural changes, including a shift away from traditional norms like naming practices, marriage customs and lifestyle. However, most Singpho people continue to prioritize regional news and are well aware of government schemes through media and local panchayats.

2.7 Media Mapping of Northeast India

A report by Kaisii (2008) provides an overview of the print media landscape in the northeastern states of India, which include Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. The study highlights

the region's diversity, both in terms of ethnic groups and languages and examines the state-wise distribution of newspapers and periodicals. It emphasizes that the print media industry in the Northeast is still nascent, with no pan-Northeast daily newspaper, and most publications are state-specific. Assam leads in the number of publications, while smaller states like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have far fewer.

The document underscores the importance of vernacular publications, which dominate in states like Mizoram, Manipur, and Assam, while English is more prevalent in Nagaland. It also highlights the challenges faced by the print media in the region, such as low circulation and readership, particularly in rural areas, despite high literacy rates. Additionally, the absence of a unified media voice across the region contributes to the region's fragmented identity and hinders broader representation of its issues on a national level.

A paper by Charvak (2015) investigates the emergence of print media in Northeast India by concentrating on seven of the eight Northeast states (Sikkim excluded). Using primary and secondary data, it provides a central study of the history of print media with geographical, demographic and historical contexts. It also emphasizes the role of colonialism, missionary initiatives, and sub-national identity formation in shaping the media landscape.

2.8 Media in Mizoram – A Historical Overview

Before Mizoram's independence, each village had its autonomous institution led by a hereditary Chief, who, along with his council of elders *Upa* appointed several officials who were entrusted with different duties to aid the Chief's rule. These officials were typically compensated, mostly in kind by the villagers. Among them, the village courier or crier *Tlangau* is the one appointed to play a key role in communication between the Chief and his subjects (Prasad, 1983). The *Tlangau* serves as an Indigenous form of mass communication from the pre-colonial times that continues to prevail today. In modern democratic Mizoram, every local council or village council appoints *Tlangau*, to convey notifications from the council and

government to the public, traditionally by loudly announcing information from a designated spot or around the village perimeters. With time, the appointment of the *Tlangau* has also changed. Today, they are appointed by village councils and the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and its counterparts. Public address speakers like horn speakers installed at various points in a locality, have replaced the traditional method of shouting information (Chawngthu & Lalruatkimi, 2022). The *Tlangau*, in addition to announcing government information began the task of announcing deaths in the locality sometime between 1985-1990 (Ralte, 2023).

The first Mizo dialect journal, *Mizo Chanchin Laisuih* edited by the British official Captain J. Shakespeare in 1898. This handwritten newspaper was reproduced in cyclostyle and did exist for a long time. Later, in 1902, Captain J. Shakespeare published another monthly journal *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu* from Dina Nath Press, Sylhet, which is part of modern Bangladesh. They contain mainly human interest stories and government stories. The readers were of the elite literate circles who had received education from the British and could not reach the common folks (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015).

For the Mizo, the introduction of the first printing press (a small hand press) by the Christian missionaries in 1911 during the colonial rule marked the beginning of the print phenomenon that significantly altered the Mizo identity, shifting from oral traditions to visual forms. *Kristian Tlangau*, (formerly *Kristia Tlangau*), a religious magazine originated in the press among other publications. Printed in Aizawl by the Presbyterian Mission, it became the first platform for the Mizo people to write and read about their own culture on their terms and is still the highest-circulated monthly magazine (Lalrintluangi, 2020).

The Christian community played a crucial role in expanding print materials. A monthly magazine, *Kohhran Beng* published by the Baptist Church of Mizoram in 1947, is still in publication today. Newspapers and Magazines serving as community mouthpieces also saw significant growth over the years. In 1939, the first Mizo daily newspaper called *Ni tin Chanchinbu* (literally translates to everyday newspaper) was published by A.G. McCall, an ICS, and a British official in the Lushai Hills.

Although publications increased over time, some were short-lived due to several reasons. Many regarded it as a part-time profession, which hindered the cultivation of viable readership and led to financial constraints (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015).

Lalmuansangkimi (2015) further noted that the launch of All India Radio (AIR) as an auxiliary station in 1966 marked the emergence of electronic media in Mizoram. Radio was a more affordable device that catered to both the literate and illiterate populations. It was celebrated from its introduction as a source of information, education and entertainment by the Mizo people. The establishment of a Regional news Unit for AIR Aizawl cemented its role as a reliable source of news and information for the people of Mizoram. This development ensured that local, regional, and national news was accessible to the masses, further integrating the region into India's broader communication network.

Although communication technologies saw slow yet steady growth in Mizoram, the insurgent years *Rambuai* (1966-88) during which the Mizo National Front (MNF), a political party in Mizoram declared independence from India, halted its growth with 20 years of turmoil and mayhem. Lulam (2017) wrote that the Indian Government responded to the insurgents with harsh actions, including violence and censorship. This censorship curtailed the freedom of reading, writing and listening that the Mizo had previously enjoyed, leading to a revival of oral practices for communication and resulting in long periods of blank spaces in Mizo's memory of these years.

With growing distrust of print and radio, the traditional mode of communicator *palai* (mediators or negotiators) played a crucial role in peace-making. *Palai* is a trustworthy individual who, during the Mizo insurgent years, acted as a communicator between the Indian Government, the civil societies seeking peace, and the MNF. With the help of the *Palai*, Mizoram has one of the most successful peace talks in India (Lawbei, 2017).

In the later years of the insurgency, television arrived in Aizawl during the 1980s, initially limited to affluent households, where ownership symbolized social

status. The available channels included *Doordarshan* and Bangla channels, accessed through antennas, fostering communal viewing among neighbours (Laldinfeli & Vanamamalai, 2016). The 1982 Asian Games broadcast by *Doordarshan* significantly increased interest in television, although the channel options remained few. The Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) became a popular alternative, leading to the rise of video rental businesses.

The real boom in the popularity of television came in 1991 when *Skylinks Cable Network* became the first cable television operator in Mizoram and the entire Northeast. Skylinks introduced local television channels in Mizoram and *LPS Vision Production* joined the cable business in 1992, followed by Zozam in 1994. Both Skylinks and Zozam have since ceased operations (Lalmuansangkimi, 2015).

2.9 Media Culture in Mizoram

Currently, Mizoram's television industry is dominated by state-run and private players, including Doordarshan Kendra (DDK) Aizawl and 29 cable television operators across the state. These leading cable operators, *LPS Vision Production* and *Zonet Cable TV Private Limited* have set trends in producing local Mizo-language content and these cable operators act as production houses, distributing content such as Mizo songs, dubbed foreign movies and series, documentaries, and interviews to other districts via DVDs sent through daily transportation services (Lalruatkimi, 2015; Lalmuansangkimi, 2015).

According to Dutta and Ray (2015), a vast majority of the media in Mizoram is in the vernacular Mizo. Many newspapers are published from the home of the publisher or the editor's small home office. They noted that newspaper readership and subscription do not match the state's high literacy rate of over 90 per cent as the highest circulated newspaper, *Vanglaini*, only has 40,000 subscribers. The authors concentrated their study on Aizawl and described the two southern districts – Lawngtlai and Siaha as Chhimtuipui District - their former name that was changed in 1998.

Aizawl being the economic and administration capital means, is also the centre of almost all Mizo media production, especially commercial ones. In an ethnographic study of news production in Mizo media, Lallianpuii (2018) writes that media in Mizoram depends on the government for news and revenue. The government-owned departments such as the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), and political leaders are important influencers of news production and they have, to a certain extent influenced the position of Mizo newspapers. The researcher found a culture where journalists attend press conferences or events organized by the state or state actors. Only some larger media firms have the resources to produce investigative news, and most media organizations and political leaders have a co-dependency. The government generates and feeds news while the political leaders use it to seek the limelight and coverage.

The same researcher Lallianpuii (2017) also noted that Aizawl, Mizoram's capital, is the hub of news production, with a decentralised transport network mainly Sumo services (shared taxis/utility vans) delivering newspapers across the state. Lalmuansangkimi (2015) wrote that cable television network providers like *LPS* and *Zonet* have their production studios in Aizawl and produce Mizo-language programs which are broadcast under the name *Local Channels*. The contents of the local channels are local news roundups, video on demand, documentaries, music videos, vox populi, dubbed movies and serials, usually telecast around prime time hours of 5 pm to 10 pm. These are then sent to different cable television operators across the districts who subscribe to their services in the form of Digital Video Discs (DVDs) and pen drives. Each district cable television operator has multiple local channels from which they broadcast Aizawl-made programs and a few of their own, often made similarly but more localized. The production crew for the local channel content typically performs multiple roles, with a news reporter acting as a cameraman and so on. Local television operators are also mandated to carry at least two Doordarshan channels. The researcher concluded that cable television in Mizoram has drawn inspiration from Western and Indian television channels while still maintaining its Indigenous identity in terms of language, symbols, and cultural codes.

In a study by Ratnamala et al. (2021), it was found that media in Mizoram mainly catered to the majority Mizo tribe in both language and content. Minority tribes like the Brus, Chakmas and Gorkhas have not participated in media production, and their representation is often riddled with negative stereotypes. An analysis of *Vanglaini* and *Newslink* newspaper coverage of these tribes during a month found that minorities in Mizoram are underrepresented. The Chakmas and Brus receive little coverage, and the Gorkhas were not mentioned during the study period. This lack of media representation reflects their marginal social power within Mizo society and indicates an absence of internal pluralism at the production level.

Media in Mizoram is largely driven by cultural transmission, particularly from the Mizo Christian community. Beyond government influence in news-making, civil societies like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and its counterparts in other regions play a powerful role in shaping media narratives.

Ratnamala and Malsawmzuala (2021) highlight how journalists often rely on YMA's press releases without critical assessment, leading to media content that aligns with the perspectives of these civil organizations. This influence extends to traditional communication methods, reinforcing YMA's authority and limiting journalistic neutrality. Chuaungo (2016) examines how Mizo ethno-nationalism is portrayed in local newspapers. Despite Mizoram's history of political and social tensions, including insurgencies, the study finds that contemporary print media in the region largely avoids direct coverage of ethno-nationalist themes, instead focusing more on socio-cultural events and entertainment. This disparity highlights a gap between the everyday experiences of Mizo nationalism and its representation in the media. In a comparative content analysis study between Mizoram dailies (*Vanglaini* and *Newslink*) and two national newspapers (*The Hindu* and *The Times of India*), Vanamamalai and Vanlalruata (2023) assess the news flows between the regional and national media. The study shows that, while Mizoram's dailies provide consistent coverage of national news, national newspapers largely ignore Mizoram, with *The Times of India* featuring only a few stories and *The Hindu* covering none during the sample period. Mizo newspapers rely on translated content from national

websites for national news, but there is minimal coverage of local Mizoram events in Indian dailies. This highlights how geographical and cultural disconnects contribute to this imbalance, resulting in Mizoram being underrepresented in the national media landscape.

A research article by Vanamamalai (2020) explores the impact of globalization on Mizoram's media landscape, focusing on television's pivotal role in facilitating cultural exchange. Television in Mizoram has led to cultural hybridity, as global media content, especially Korean dramas and films, is adapted and dubbed into the local Mizo language. This process, known as 'glocalization' allows Mizos to engage with global culture while maintaining their unique identity. The growth of local cable networks and dubbing studios have been instrumental in this media transformation, highlighting how technology, particularly television, influences cultural and social dynamics in the region.

Agarwal (2024) explores the growing acceptance of Hindi media among Mizo youth in Mizoram, a state traditionally resistant to Hindi (Vai) culture due to historical and cultural reasons. While organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) have historically resisted Hindi media to preserve local identity, new media technologies have democratized access, leading to increased consumption of Hindi films, TV shows, and cultural influences, particularly in fashion and food. Despite language barriers and the dominance of Korean and Western media, Hindi media is gradually gaining influence, signalling a shift towards cultural hybridism among younger generations in Mizoram.

Lalmuankimi (2018) mentions that there is a rise in citizen journalism on *Facebook*, in Mizoram, using the group *Mizo Special Report* as a case study. The group, which has a large following, allows members to contribute posts on both political and non-political issues. While non-political posts (e.g., local news, entertainment, and sports) dominate, accounting for 80.3% of the content, political posts account for 19.69%, focusing on local politics. The findings show that citizens use the platform to discuss and criticize government activities, and the group plays a significant role in political participation in Mizoram.

2.10 Media Usage and Preferences in Mizo Context

Nongmaithem and Sharma (2022) explored the news media consumption among Mizoram University students using a survey questionnaire and found that there is a shift from traditional media to digital platforms. While local newspapers like *Vanglaini* are still popular, there is a noticeable preference for digital platforms, with students increasingly accessing news via mobile phones, laptops, and other electronic devices. Social media platforms like *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, and *YouTube* are also heavily used for news consumption and the findings suggest a shift in preference towards faster, more convenient digital media over traditional formats.

The Mizo online community is an active **virtual space** where members of the Mizo diaspora and locals interact, share cultural content, and engage in discussions about various aspects of Mizo identity, including language, politics, and entertainment. Lalmuanpuii (2017) describes that there are several instances of micro-aggressions in the form of racial comments, hate speech and threats based on three case studies taken from large *Facebook* groups. However, it is concluded by saying that by comparing the volume of participants in each group, the instances of micro-aggressions are low.

The study of internet use patterns among college students in Mizoram by Lallianzela and Devendiran (2018) highlights that the majority of students access the internet primarily for academic purposes, social networking, and entertainment. Social media platforms like *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, and *YouTube* are the most frequently used. The research also finds a significant correlation between access to the internet and increased academic performance, though excessive use for non-academic purposes can be a distraction. Overall, the study suggests that internet use is shaping the social and academic lives of students in Mizoram, reflecting a growing dependence on digital tools for both education and communication.

Social media is also used extensively by entrepreneurs and health professionals and in a study of media usage by a cosmetic medical practitioner, it was found that *Instagram* is used to influence client behaviour. The platform builds

trust with clients by featuring posts of real procedures and patient interactions. However, it also led to increased pressure on clients to conform to ideal beauty standards, contributing to body image issues (Khiangte & Lalramhmachhuana, 2020).

Lalramchhana and Khiangte (2021) conducted a quantitative study exploring the role of social media, particularly *WhatsApp*, in maintaining relationships among church youth members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research reveals that social media significantly increased participation in church-related activities and uplifted the faith of the members during this challenging period. The findings emphasize the importance of using digital platforms to keep the congregation engaged, with recommendations for church leaders to encourage even greater participation in online church activities.

Lalruatkimi (2018) emphasizes the importance of media for the preservation of the Mizo language, stating that media creators are responsible for the propagation of the language. Media can set agendas and practitioners are encouraged to use proper Mizo grammar and appropriate phrases to communicate with the masses.

2.11 Past Studies on Media in the ADCs of Mizoram

Lawngtlai district, home to both the LADC and CADC, has been the subject of study for several media researchers from Aizawl. Ratnamala and Lalrozawna (2018) appear to be the first researchers to examine the district through the lens of media studies. In their brief study, they identified that the media industry in Lawngtlai faces many infrastructural challenges such as poor electricity supply, inadequate internet connectivity, insufficient printing presses, and even the town's remote geographic location from Aizawl, which presents obstacles in the media landscape. Hmingthanzuala and Rinawma (2019) in their study of media penetration in Lawngtlai District, approached the area quantitatively to reveal that urban areas have better connectivity, such as internet, roads, etc., while rural areas lack basic communication facilities such as print media and the internet. They also noted that in the more remote part of the district, radio is the sole mass media available. The study

solidifies the connection between good transportation and mass media.

Lalramchhana (2024) briefly highlights the church media cell run by the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) in Lawngtlai, mentioning that it includes several small departments focused on media, print and broadcast media, literature, and a bookroom, primarily to promote evangelism.

A dissertation by Zomuanpuii (2015) briefly studies the media landscape in Siaha, the capital of the MADC, and finds that media in Siaha began before the formation of the MADC, originating from the work of Christian missionaries.

2.12 Research Gap

A study of media and minorities and the media industry has been the focus of many researchers over the years. This is indeed an important scope of research, as minorities- whether defined by gender, ethnicity, linguistic differences and other social categories- are often marginalized or misrepresented in mainstream media. From the literature review of Mizoram media, it is evident that only parts of the current study areas of the ADCs of Mizoram have been covered in scholarly literature. Moreover, the CADC has never been a part of any media studies. This poses a significant research gap in media studies, as a large portion of Mizoram has been excluded from the media narratives. This knowledge gap necessitates a doctoral study of media in the ADCs of Mizoram.

CHAPTER III

AREA OF STUDY & METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to give a detailed outline of the areas of study – the ADCs of Mizoram by highlighting the region’s political history and the cultural background of the Lai, Chakma and Mara tribes who are inhabitants of the ADC area. Discussion on the methodology – Ethnography is also given along with a description of methods used to collect ethnographic material and the justification of the methodology used. The various stages of research, from the selection of the study areas and participants to the data collection process, are also discussed. Ethical considerations taken during the research are also mentioned.

3.1 Selection of the Area of Study

To study the media in the ADCs of Mizoram, it was a clear choice to select the administrative capitals of each of the ADCs as the study fields. Hence, **Lawngtlai, Kamalanagar** and **Siaha** were selected initially. **Sangau**, a village in the northeastern region of Lawngtlai district was also selected at the later stage of the study. The area of study is the three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) of Mizoram - the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) and the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) which are concentrated in the two southern districts of Lawngtlai and Siaha. Lawngtlai district is divided into LADC and CADC and the whole district of Siaha comes under the MADC.

For the fieldwork, the respective administrative headquarters of the ADCs - Lawngtlai for LADC, Kamalanagar for CADC and Siaha for MADC were selected for their administrative relevance, economic significance and population density. Further into the research, it was felt appropriate to add Sangau Village from the LADC region for fieldwork as the general public is fluent in the Lai language, which is not the case in Lawngtlai. This is done to include the Lai language-speaking Lai community as most of the inhabitants of Lawngtlai could not understand the Lai language.

According to the **2023 LADC Village Council population report**, the population of LADC is 109,964 and the **2023 CADC Village Council population reports** a population of 63,796. According to the 2011 Census, the host district of LADC and CADC, Lawngtlai district has a literacy rate of 65.88%, the lowest in Mizoram and below the national literacy rate of 74.04%. As per the MADC Census 2015, the MADC region has a population of 62,829 and a literacy rate of 90.01%. This population census is believed to be more accurate than the dated 2011 Census.

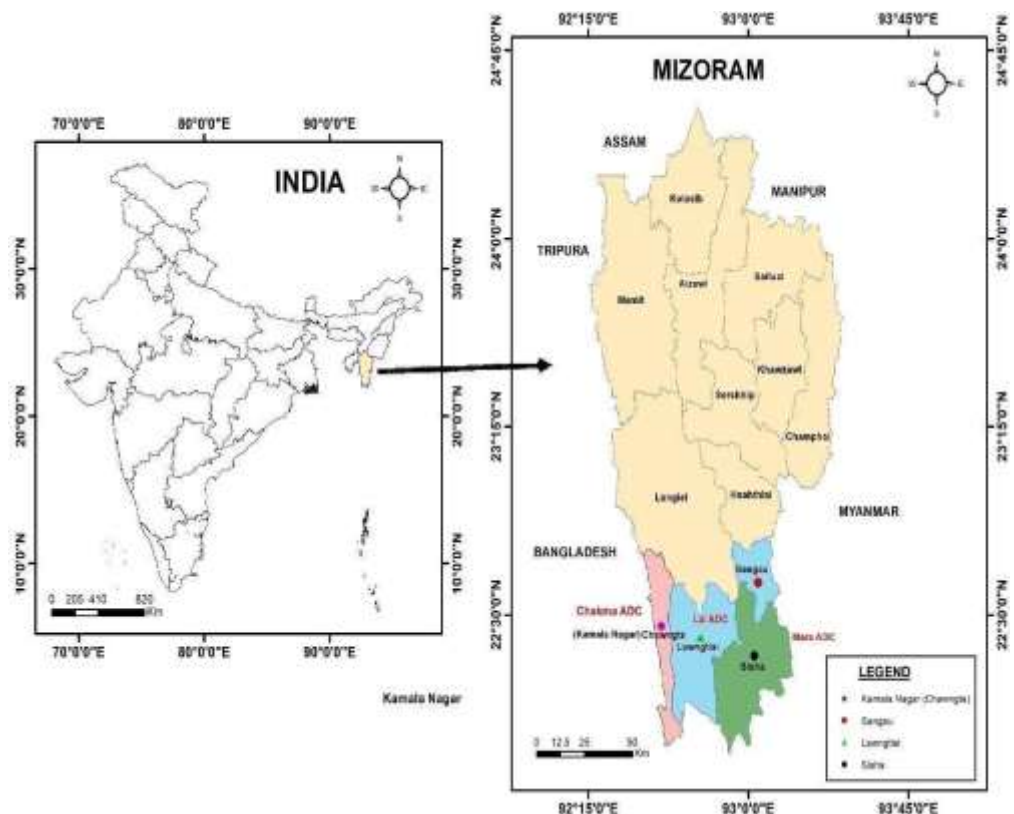


Figure 2. Map of India and Mizoram depicting the study areas – Lawngtlai, Kamalanagar, Siaha and Sangau (Source: Researcher’s own).

3.2 Formation of the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC)

To understand the context of the ADC in Mizoram, it is important to know the history of the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC).

Historian Vumson (1897) wrote that the Pawi (Lai) and the Lakher (Mara) occupied the southern part of the Lushai Hills and considered themselves as the

minority tribes dominated by the Lusei (Lushai). The Lai and Mara are tribes whom most Mizos consider to be a part of their ethnicity but who themselves deny the case. Although Lushai Hills became a part of the British India administration in 1891, the extreme south of present Mizoram inhabited by then Pawis (Lai), Lakher (Mara), Chakmas etc. was included under the British administration only in 1930 (Doungel, 2019). The Lusei call the Lai Pawi and the Mara Lakher with much disapproval by both tribes. There has always been a proclamation of separate identities from the Lusei and with the persuasion and demand for political autonomy in the form of a regional council led by political leaders Z. Hengmang from the Pawi (Lai) region and Vako from the Lakher (Mara) region, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was set up in August 23rd 1953 under Provision 1, Subparagraph (2) of Paragraph 1 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India (Pachau & Schendel, 2015).

The headquarters of the PLRC is at Saiha (present-day Siaha). The PLRC was unique in the sense that it was the only regional council of its kind in India, established under the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India (Doungel, 2005). As Lushai Hills was upgraded to Union Territory in 1972, the Mizo District Council was abolished. However, the three tribes Lai, Chakma and Mara were not in favour of the abolition of the PLRC. The PLRC, however, could not function smoothly due to inherent political differences and clashes of interests between the Pawis and the Lakher. The difficulties and problems that arose from the beginning kept lingering within and outside the Regional Council (Lalthankima, 1996). Differences in customs, culture, dialects and political views eventually led to the trifurcation of the PLRC into separate regional councils, namely, the Pawi Regional Council (PRC), the Lakher Regional Council (LRC) and the Chakma Regional Council (LRC). The most prominent difference was the language barrier in the usage of Mizo as the main language which was hardly known by the Chakma (Pachau & Schendel, 2015). Most of the Chakmas do not know the Mizo language to this day. The regional councils were later upgraded to full-fledged Autonomous District Councils as Pawi Autonomous District Council, Lakher Autonomous District Council and Chakma Autonomous District Council on the 29th of April 1972. The names Pawi and Lakher were later changed to Lai and Mara in the Sixth Schedule

provision of the Indian Constitution by the Indian Parliament in 1989 (Doungel, 2019).

The PLRC was entrusted with legislative, executive, financial and judicial functions. Accordingly, the PLRC was expected to uplift the tribal communities of the region in the domain of culture, customs, agriculture, health, village communication, education, sanitation, and economic and rural development (Doungel, 2022). The PLRC included all the areas of present-day ADC regions which was then called Chhimtuipui District which was then bifurcated into Lawngtlai and Saiha District in 1998.

Initially, the three ADCs of Mizoram – the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) and the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) were clubbed under the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC), a regional council where the three tribes were clubbed together but were soon trifurcated into separate ADCs where they were aptly renamed as Lai Autonomous District Council, Chakma Autonomous District Council and Mara Autonomous District Council.

3.3 Evolution of Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram

Modern-day Mizoram was a part of undivided Assam known as Lushai Hills and was changed to Lushai Hills District in 1954. It officially gained the name

Mizoram in 1972 with the declaration of Union Territory. It continues to be called Mizoram as it attained statehood on 20th February 1987 (Joshi, 2005).

During the eve of India's Independence, the tribals living in Assam were fearful of their fate with the exit of the Britishers from India. With a plea from tribal political leaders, the British Government sent a Cabinet Mission to set up an Advisory Committee on 24th January 1947. The Committee then appointed three sub-committees to meet with the concerns of the tribals and one such committee was

called the Bordoloi Sub-Committee. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee visited Aizawl and met several Mizo representatives to know the interests of the people. This report by the Sub-committee recommended the establishment of District Councils and Regional Councils for the tribal areas of Assam and ultimately, the Sixth Schedule was enacted in the Constitution along with articles 244(2) and 275(1).

After India's independence, the Indian Government set up an interim advisory council for the tribal in Assam and such, and the Lushai Hills Advisory Council was established in 1948 and later changed to the Lushai Hill Advisory Committee in 1949. The advisory committee consists of 12 members out of which two representatives were from the Pawi-Lakher Region (21). After its first election in January 1952, the Lushai Hills District Council was inaugurated on 26th April 1952 at Aizawl. The Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was later changed to Mizo District Council with the name change of Lushai Hills District to Mizo District in 1954.

3.4 Brief look into the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC)

The LADC is an autonomous administrative unit in Mizoram established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It was established in 1972 to safeguard the cultural identity of the ethnic Lai people living in Lawngtlai District. It has its own legislature, executive and judicial powers. At present it looks after 18 subject departments. The people of the Lai Autonomous District Council area enjoyed a special safeguard granted by Article 371-9 of the Constitution of India. The headquarters of the council is situated at Lawngtlai which is also the headquarters of Lawngtlai Administrative District. It covers more than half of the area of Lawngtlai district. The common languages of the LADC area are Mizo and Lai. As per the Village Population under the LADC 2023-2014 list, there are 109,964 people from 23,535 households.

3.4.1 The Lais

The Lai people are a tribe largely scattered in different parts of the world but are mostly found in the southern regions of Mizoram. Lai is an ethnic identity to

determine all the tribes of Chin, the Pawi, and the Bawm. Historians and anthropologists believe that the Lai community belongs to the Tibeto-Burman tribe who are of the Mongoloid stock (Pachau, 2014). Colonial writers and administrators often named ethnic groups based on administrative convenience rather than the traditional names used by the people themselves. For instance, the Lai people, currently residing in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India, have been referred to by various names such as Chin in Myanmar and Pawi in India. These external labels have led to confusion and disunity among the Lai. However, since the 1980s, there has been a conscious effort by the Lai people to revert to their original ethnic identity, aiming to unify under the name "Lai." As a result, the use of "Pawi" and "Chin" is gradually declining among the community (Chhuanawma, 2020). The lingua franca of the Lai people in Mizoram and the Chin Hills of Myanmar is Lai (Pachau 2014).

The Lai have never embraced the nomenclature Pawi as they were recognized by the Government of India. Eventually, the name Pawi was changed to Lai in 1988 upon the request of the people. Lai society is fundamentally a patriarchal society and the father is the head of the family but the women also were given significance and appreciation (Pachau, 2014).

The Lai belong to the Scheduled Tribes of India and are predominantly Christians. The Lai language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Lai dialect is considered the richest among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups in Mizoram due to its extensive vocabulary, idioms, phrases, and grammatical features. Many expressions in the Lushai language, or Mizo language originate from Lai, and several Mizo folktales have parallels in Lai culture. Despite its richness, the Lai language is now endangered in Mizoram, as most of the population has adopted Duhlian/Mizo Tawng as their primary language. Currently, Lai is mainly spoken by older generations and people in isolated villages, with an estimated 85% of Lai people using Duhlian for daily communication. Only a handful of villages use Lai as their lingua franca. Sangau is one such village (Shyamkishor & Lalrempuia, 2024). Efforts to revitalize the language include public debates and initiatives like using Lai in

churches. However, the use of Lai remains limited in public functions, festivals, and political events (Chhangte, 2014). The Lai and the Mara also have strong ethnic affinities due to their parallel historical and cultural features (Chhuanawma, 2020).

3.5 Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)

Chakma Autonomous District Council is one of Mizoram's three autonomous district councils. CADC along with LADC are under the administration of Lawngtlai District. Kamalanagar, a town near the LADC and Lunglei District's border, is the CADC's headquarters. The Chakmas call their autonomous capital Kamalanagar but Mizos know it as Chawngte (Pachau & Schendel, 2015). One unique fact about the location is that Chawngte is divided into three settlements. Chawngte- 'C' (aka Kamalanagar) stands for Chakma meaning it is in the CADC area, Chawngte - 'P' stands for Pawi (an appellation for Lai, thus in the LADC area), and Chawngte - 'L' which stands for Lunglei (a part of Lunglei District). Tuichawng River crisscrosses through Chawngte and acts as a natural boundary between the three parts. On the western bank is the CADC area, and the eastern bank of Tuichawng River is divided by a stream called Chawngte Lui known by the Chakmas as Pahn Suri. The northern bank falls under Lunglei district (Chawngte L) and the southern bank is under LADC. All three Chawngte are within walking distance of each other connected by two bridges but all under different government administrations.

3.5.1 The Chakmas

The Chakmas are one of the tribes in the Indo-Bangla subcontinent residing mostly in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CTH) in Bangladesh and the Northeast states of India. They are devout followers of Buddhism and speak a dialect belonging to the Indo-Aryan family. The Chakmas are the second-largest tribal community in Mizoram (Hoque, 2013). The Chakmas follow a patrilineal system where the father is the head of the family (Parwez, 2011).

Although the Chakmas are Mongoloid in origin, the Chakma language, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan family, shows close similarity to Assamese and Bengali but has adopted vocabulary from Sanskrit, Oriya, Pali, Thai, and Prakrit. Although

there is debate over its origin, the language is considered distinct and is believed to have developed through contact with neighbouring languages and cultures over time. The Chakmas also possess their script, *Ojhopath* which has similarities with Brahmi, Tamil, and Burmese scripts. This script is preserved in ancient religious and medicinal manuscripts and is used primarily by traditional physicians and Buddhist monks. However, very few Chakmas are literate in their script, leading to its decline and potential extinction if no significant efforts are made for its preservation (Chakma, 2010).

There have been many debates about the indigeneity of the Chakmas in Mizoram. Mizo scholars Hluna (2020) and Dounzel (2016) to name a few have written that the Chakmas are not original settlers of Mizoram (Lushai Hills) but they migrated from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. The Chakmas, who originated in the Indo-Bangla subcontinent, are Buddhists by faith. They are mostly found in the Arakan region of Myanmar, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, and the Indian states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. The construction of the Kaptai Dam in East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) in 1960 destroyed the inhabitant areas of the Chakmas. As a result, they fled to their neighbouring areas and scattered in many North Eastern states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Tripura. They reside in the entire western belt of Mizoram bordering Bangladesh. One-third of this belt constitutes present-day CADC. Chakma independent researcher Paritosh Chakma (Chakma, 2021) calls the Chakmas “Mizoram’s son of the soil” and elaborates that “the Chakmas are the first to live in the western and south-western parts of what constitutes the political boundary of Mizoram today.” This clashing narrative of Chakma indigeneity in Mizoram has caused multiple rifts and ethnic divides between the Chakmas and the Mizos (Roluahpuia, 2016).

3.6 Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC)

Mara Autonomous District Council is situated on the southern tip of Mizoram. It covers the whole area of Siaha District and is 1445 square kilometres (2011 Census). Siaha is the ADC headquarters as well as the district capital. The

MADC borders with LADC on the north and west and with the Chin State of Myanmar on the south and east. During the PLRC era, Siaha was also the headquarters. As per the Census for MADC area 2015, there are 92 villages and a population of 64,829. The MADC has three main structural organs of government, legislature, executive and judiciary. As per the MADC website, there are 28 departments and 25 Members of District Councils (MDC) (as of 10.10.23). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the ruling party in the 12th term MADC with M. Laikaw as the Chief Executive Member (CEM). The MADC currently has 545 plan staff and 1476 non-plan staff.

3.6.1 The Maras

The inhabitants of the MADC are predominantly Mara tribals who speak the Mara language. There are five dialects in the Mara language – Tlosai, Chapi, Vyhtu, Zyhno and Hawthai. Tlosai is the standard medium for writing and speech as it was the dialect that the British Christian missionaries had adopted back in 1907 when they entered the Mara land (Perry, 1976). The making of the Mara Bible and hymn book and eventually the alphabet in Tlosai solidified the dialect as the main dialect used to this day. Apart from the major use of the Mara language, they also use the Mizo language for day-to-day communication. The MADC introduced Marareih (the Mara language) as a part of the elementary school curriculum in 1984. The Mara people have a strong sense of socio-ethnic identity and are highly proactive in preserving and promoting their language, even more effectively than neighbouring tribes (Shyamkishor & Lalrempuia, 2024).

The Mara tribe belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, specifically the Mongoloid stock. The Lushai knew the Mara as ‘Lakher’ and were later picked up by the British, they are a tribe dwelling in the southeastern corner of Mizoram specifically in Siaha District and enjoying a separate administration, the MADC. The Mara tribes are also scattered in different parts of the state and the neighbouring country of Myanmar, mostly concentrated in the Chin Hills (Zohra, 1994).

3.7 Sites of Fieldwork

1. Lawngtlai

Lawngtlai town is the administrative capital of Lawngtlai District. It is also the headquarters of the LADC. It is 296 km south of Aizawl through NH-54 connected by daily sumo services, Pawan Hans helicopter service and night bus service (*Mizoram Tourism*, 2022). The district borders with other districts – Lunglei, Hnahthial and Siaha; and an international border of Bangladesh on the West and Myanmar on the East. Lawngtlai is an important point for India's Act East Policy Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project (KMMTTP) which is set to connect Myanmar's Sittwe Port through Zorinpui – a land under Lawngtlai district (A. N. Dutta, 2021). Ethnically, inhabitants of Lawngtlai are mostly Lai (formerly Pawi) but the most commonly used is the Mizo language. The Lai practiced Christianity as their religion and the town has a prominent presence of almost all the denominations. The Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) and the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) have offices and sizeable members in the town.

It is important to mention that Lawngtlai is my hometown and I have multiple years of lived experience in the town however, it was not until the start of my research that I had looked at the place as a site for media ethnographic study. Having no prior interest or affiliation with the media scene provided me with new insight and a closer look into the media landscape like my other research areas. I introduced myself as a research scholar from Mizoram University and was not recognized as a local by most of the informants and respondents participating in the study. Lawngtlai town is around 280 kilometres south of Aizawl and it usually takes around 10-12 hours to journey by sumo service and around 13-14 hours by night bus. The sumo fare usually costs Rs. 1200 and the night bus service usually costs Rs. 800.

2. Sangau

When it came to the researcher's attention that the inhabitants of Lawngtlai town hardly speak Lai, it was felt that the Sangau – a small village in the northeast part of the district could be used to represent the Lai language-speaking community,

hence it was chosen. It is 230 kilometres south of Aizawl and is located near the Indo–Myanmar border and is also the hometown of one Mizoram government-accredited journalist from Lawngtlai District. It is a sub-divisional headquarters and rural development block within Lawngtlai district. Sangau also plays an important role in the formation of the Lai ethnic cultural identity which led to the formation of the Pawi Lakher Tribal Union (PLTU) – the first political party in the current ADC area. Sangau is also the footbed of Mizoram’s highest peak, *Phawngpui Tlang* also known as Blue Mountain.

3. Kamalanagar

Kamalanagar, also known as Chawngte, is the headquarters of the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Lawngtlai district, Mizoram. It serves as the administrative and cultural hub for the Chakma community, a Buddhist ethnic minority group in the state. The town is located in southwestern Mizoram in Lawngtlai District and is approximately 286 kilometres by road. It is divided into several sectors and has its local governance under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Kamalanagar faces developmental challenges but remains a centre for Chakma culture, language, and media. It also plays a significant role in local politics and ethnic identity preservation. Pachuau & Schendel (2015) wrote that while it is called Kamalanagar by the Chakmas, the Mizos call it Chawngte.

4. Siaha

Siaha, located approximately 300 kilometres south of Aizawl is the administrative headquarters of the Siaha district, the southernmost district of Mizoram. It is also the headquarters of the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC). Predominantly inhabited by the Mara tribe, Siaha is known for its rich cultural heritage, distinct language, and vibrant community life. The town, surrounded by lush hills and the Chhimtuipui River, serves as a hub for local governance and cultural preservation.

3.8 Ethnography – the Key Research Methodology

The concept of ethnography is deeply rooted in anthropology. Works of anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas emphasized immersive fieldwork and direct observation of culture and societies laying the foundation of ethnographic research. Ethnography is the study of a culture or cultures that a group of people share (Van Maanen, 1995). Ethnography is a term somewhat loosely borrowed from social anthropology, and it alludes to the situated, empirical description of peoples and races. Other terms also cover the same procedure – fieldwork, participant observation, and what is called thick description (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting (Atkinson et al., 2014). It has been used for both the context of discovery and validation (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009).

This methodology has also been chosen for easy engagement with the people to obtain intensive data (Denzin, 1997). According to Creswell, ethnographic research deals with an in-depth qualitative investigation of a group that shares a common culture. He indicated that ethnography is best used to explain various issues within a group of individuals who have been together for a considerable length of time and have, therefore, developed a common culture. Ethnographic research also provides a chronological collection of events related to a group of individuals sharing a common culture.

As a method, it is usually meant to refer to the process of participant observation by a single investigator who immerses himself or herself in the group for a long period (often one or more years), gradually establishing trust and experiencing the social world as do the participants (Madden, 2022).

Ethnographic research can also be called naturalistic, because it seeks to describe and understand the natural social world as it is, in all its richness and detail. This goal is best achieved when an ethnographer is fluent in the local language and spends enough time in the setting to know how people live, what they say about

themselves, what they do, and what they value (Armstrong, 2008).

Ethnographic research employs a cultural lens to study people's lives within their communities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Ethnography is an expression of history, culture, politics and the very essence of life itself. It shoulders the complexities of hegemony, oppression and resistance and accepts discourse not just as a discourse but as culture in itself (Clair, 2003).

It was felt that ethnography was best suited for the study as the ADC area is Mizoram's bustling spot of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. The ADC area has not been a central part of any media research. Records of media by government institutions like RNI records and MJA-accredited journalist lists are the only chronicles of the media sphere and are often not reflective of the ground realities. For instance, there are no MJA members or Accredited Journalists in the CADC area and it is a much-needed inquiry as to why a district council with a certain level of self-governance does not have proper media channels in its vicinity. This research aims to understand media as a social institution by understanding the nature of the media, the nuances and dynamics of media production, and identifying the media personnel – journalists, stringers and content creators as well as the media usage and preferences of the Lai, Mara and Chakma.

3.9 Media Ethnography

Ethnography, as a research method, has been well-established in the media studies tradition (Tosoni & Stiernstedt, 2016). Media ethnography is borne by interest in qualitative media studies that emerged as distinctive studies in the late 1970s (Drotner, 1994). It began to expand in the 1980s as an alternative to media research driven by survey and content analysis (Junnilainen & Luhtakallio, 2016). Morely and Silverstone (1991) describe media ethnography as the analysis of multiple structured contexts of action, aiming to produce a richly descriptive and interpretive account of the lives and values of those subject to investigation. Media ethnography is the ethnographic exploration of media creation and usage (Bender & Zillinger, 2015).

This study employs multi-sited ethnography (conducting fieldwork across different tribal communities and organisational ethnography (to understand the structure and function of media houses) within the framework of media ethnography. Multi-sited ethnography has mostly been used as a shorthand for all ways of doing ethnographic fieldwork in more than one site (Boccagni, 2019). Organisational ethnography involves both observing and participating in a group's everyday life to understand how its members make sense of their world (Neyland, 2008).

These approaches allow for a rounded understanding of how media functions within several ethnic minority settings.

3.10 Methods of Data Collection

Multi-sited ethnography in four settlements – three autonomous district headquarters – Lawngtlai for LADC, Kamalanagar for CADC, Siaha for MADC and Sangau village in the LADC area is done. The ADC headquarters are the centres of economic, political, cultural and media hub for each region hence they are selected as the study sites. The study is an amalgamation of multiple fieldworks done between 2019 and 2023 in and around the 4 locations.

The data collection has multiple entry and exit points - before the fieldwork commenced, I had started building rapport through telephone interviews and WhatsApp conversations with all the Lawngtlai and Siaha MJA members and when the actual fieldwork was done, some form of familiarity had developed between the informants and the researcher. This makes it easier to get accepted into their field and eventually get an insight into their work life. After the bulk of the fieldwork was done, I kept in contact with the media actors to follow up on the major changes and developments if there were any.

3.10.1 Secondary data – Through government and church websites

The **first phase** of data collection began before the commencement of the fieldwork, secondary data were collected and studied beforehand to get a glimpse into what is known and recorded of the media landscape – print and broadcast media

in the ADC area. Such sources are the Government sources like the Statistical Handbook Mizoram published by the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Mizoram, Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI), list of Mizoram Accredited Journalists published by the Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Government of Mizoram, and the official websites of the Lai, Chakma and Mara Autonomous District Councils. Apart from government sources, church websites such as the Presbyterian Church of India, Baptist Church of Mizoram and Evangelical Church of Maraland provide an overview of the church periodicals available in the region.

For objective no.1, the RNI records were not sufficient for the mapping of media and the journalists were key informants in locating media firms and publications not necessarily registered but are in publication. Interviews – face-to-face and telephonic were the most used methods for acquiring such information. Journalists, media firm owners, new media content creators and government officials – in service and pensioners constitute most of the interviewees. With the help of these informants, some defunct print media were able to be traced and documented. This proved to be largely helpful in mapping past media in the CADC area.

3.10.2 Primary data - In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a crucial part of ethnography. It helps in understanding the social phenomena that individuals have experienced in their daily lives (Cohen, 2000). Lead by the secondary data collected beforehand, in the second phase of data collection through fieldwork, I located the media players – journalists and media personnel (both active and inactive) from cable operators, YouTube content creators, officers in the Information and Publicity Department of each ADC office, church publication managers etc. who are the key informants and conducted semi-structured and open-ended in-depth interviews with them to map the media landscape and get a better understanding of the journalistic labor (both governments recognized and freelancers) and media practices exercised in the regions.

Apart from the existing media, I traced the pre-existing media with the help of informants who were recommended to be knowledgeable. This helped in understanding what factors affect the downfall of such media. It is important to note that there is a sizeable number of media freelancers who are not recognized by the government or journalistic bodies who are actively participating in media production and distribution.

Along with the interviews of print media journalists and freelancers, at least one issue of the publication was collected to present a general idea of the content and layout of the publication. This is impossible at times for certain publications as many of them are irregular. Some publications do not have extra print copies available and have sent me through Portable Document Format (PDF). Objective no. 2 on locating the media creators was done initially using purposive sampling by first locating working journalists and visiting media houses and then snowballing onto other content creators - *YouTube* content creators, and freelance journalists. Intensive interviews and field observation were used to understand the process of content creation and distribution. With the consent of the respondents, every interview audio is recorded. The researcher also carried a notebook to write down field notes, which are instrumental in the recollection of the interview ambience.

3.10.3 Ethnographic Photography is defined as the use of photographs for recording and understanding culture, both those of the subjects and the photographers which are used in the study of ethnographic subjects among others. Photographs in ethnographic research can add richness and contextual value to the data acquired (Scherer, 2009). Photographs were taken in areas to provide a visual presentation of data. This method is used mostly to aid the mapping of media which constitutes the first objective of the study. I seek the permission of the subjects studied when taking photographs. Some of the respondents and participants were apprehensive about their images and their homes/offices being photographed, and in such cases, I refrained from taking photographs. Thus, not all the locations studied have visual data presentation.

3.10.4 Participant Observation

When using participant observation as an ethnographic research method, the researcher enters the world of the people he or she wishes to study (Kawulich, 2005). This method is the most appropriate method to understand the media landscape of the ADC regions. Many things need to be observed with conversations to get a clear view of the media landscape. The focus of observation includes the press club, journalists' workplace, offices of cable television operators, printing infrastructures and commercial centres to see how print media is being sold, and homes of people to see what media is subscribed to them.

3.10.5 Field observation

The diverse historical, cultural, and political background of the study area means that no site of study is similar. To identify and contextualize the nuances of media perception and usage in society, participant observation and field observation were done. Visiting the offices of media firms, the workplace of the freelancers, and the overall media presence from visiting people's homes and shops helps not just in acquiring verbal data but also in understanding the ground realities. To help with field observation, interviews in the form of casual conversation were done mainly with middle-aged to older citizens who were shopkeepers, homemakers, auto-rickshaw drivers, and office clerks whom I engaged in conversation mostly as an overt ethnography. Field notes, audio recordings, and photographs were taken when I introduced myself as an overt ethnographer with the consent of the subjects. This helped in shedding light on what media they subscribed to, where they got the information from, and how they used the media available to them.

3.10.6 Focus group discussions

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) is a research method that enables data collection through group discussion on a researcher-determined topic. It is a significant approach because it identifies the interaction within a group discussion as the data source and recognizes the researcher's active participation in leading the discussion to gather data. Others have argued that the value of FGD goes well

beyond listening to others since it can serve as a basis for empowering clients (Morgan, 1996).

After media mapping and the overall status of media were recognized through in-depth interviews and field observation, I had come to know about the media landscape of the regions but it was important to know how the people use and perceive media. I conducted a total of 11 FGDs with 12 participants each in all the areas till it was believed to have reached data saturation. Of these, three were done in Lawngtlai, two in Sangau, three in Kamalanagar, and the final three in Siaha. After the initial stages of data collection, focus group discussions were the key methods in studying the third objective of the study.

In the reviewed literature, to study the media usage and preferences of a community, survey questionnaires were mostly used but for the ethnic tribes of the ADC areas, as the media landscape was practically unknown before the commencement of the study, it was felt that FGDs would be most suitable to understand what media the people preferred. This objective seeks to understand what and how but most importantly tries to comprehend the reason – why.

The participants of the FGDs were selected using purposive and convenience sampling where they had to be the native tribe. For the first two FGDs done in Lawngtlai, Kamalanagar and Siaha, the participants were separated by gender to ensure there was an unrestricted flow of discussion. The questions asked were open-ended with ample room for discussions. Each FGD had 12 participants who were of different ages. In Lawngtlai, Kamalanagar and Siaha, the first two FGDs were conducted among colleges of the same gender. The third FGD were usually a mix of participants from all walks of life. The audio of the discussions was recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Recurring themes and topics were highlighted and presented for analysis.

In the case of the fieldwork in Kamalanagar, the researcher did not speak the local Chakma language and the general public did not speak or understand Mizo and English. To guide the interaction whether in terms of interviews or FGDs and ensure

that there is no room for error, it was done with the help of a translator but most of the participants were able to express themselves in English after the translation of a few words.

Ethnic media in these areas are mostly under the radar, unregistered and unrecognized which makes Objective 1 of the study a rather difficult yet exciting task. To the best of my ability, I tried to bring to light the undocumented history of print media and even cable television operators. First, state-accredited journalists were identified and from then on sources snowballed to others who had something to add to the pool of knowledge on the mapping of the media landscape. The journalists were instrumental in identifying media firms and creators which are not registered anywhere. On the past media and its details, oral knowledge acquired with the help of intensive interviews with government officials, media enthusiasts and surviving relatives of the media personnel were utilized. It was interesting to meet and talk with people who took part in the making of a newspaper some 50 years ago with no surviving copies but only oral memories to spare.

3.11 Sampling

For mapping of media, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to identify media in the region. Secondary data – MJA record of state-accredited journalists and local churches – the LIKBK and the ECM were used as the initial guide for data collection. To map the defunct media, snowball sampling was used where interviews with journalists, teachers, government officials and media personnel led to someone who has information on the obsolete media.

Non-probability sampling particularly purposive sampling is used to select the participants of the focus group discussions. The defining criterion of the participants was that they belonged to the Lai, Chakma and Mara tribes. Separate focus group discussions were conducted for each of the tribes, respectively. A total of 11 FGDs with 12 participants each were conducted among college students, government employees, youth and people from different walks of life. Apart from their ethnic identity, participants were selected based on their availability and

convenience. 3 FGDs each were conducted in Lawngtlai, Siaha and Kamalanagar and 2 FGD were conducted in Sangau. The number of FGDs were determined by the responses received from the participants as till it was believed to have reached saturation.

3.12 Data Analysis

Researchers have emphasized the importance of ethnographic field notes in writing good research. The researcher draws on firsthand experience with the setting, informants, and documents to interpret the data (Emerson et al., 2011). In this research, field notes, audio recordings of interviews, interactions, focus group discussions and photographs form the bulk of the data. Data gathered from audio recordings and field notes were transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word document which was repeatedly read to draw meanings from the text. Observational notes are also added to these transcriptions. Recurring patterns and themes are identified and presented in key concepts to provide a structured and comprehensive analysis of the ethnographic data. Emic (the native's point of view) perspective by Malinowski, (1932) is used to understand the role and significance of media as perceived by the community members themselves—in this case, the Lai, Mara, and Chakma people.

Following the objectives of the study, data are organized in accordance to present a more cohesive presentation and to ensure a better flow of narration. Photographs (when consented) are placed next to the appropriate data to provide a visual description of the setting.

3.13 Ethical considerations

Ethics in ethnographic research has been an important discussion for conducting effective and accurate research. The ethical behaviour of researchers is under constant scrutiny (Behrman & Field, 2004).

I have taken great care not to tamper or disrupt the natural setting of the natural setting under study. Ethical concerns taken were:

3.13.1 Informants' consent

Oral consent was taken from all the respondents of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Before the start of any interaction, I always introduced myself as a media researcher from Mizoram University and that they were the subject of a study that is to be used only for academic purposes and not for commercial gain. Since it is also a study of media businesses, I reassured the media house owners that the salary that they paid their workers or how much they earned would not be shared with other businesses. Ethnography photographs taken were also done with the approval of the subjects involved. However, photographs of streets, offices and other public buildings were taken without any formal consent as they were thought to be government and public property.

3.13.2 Confidentiality

All the respondents were made aware of their option of anonymity. In cases where they choose to hide their details, anonymity was guaranteed. For the data presentation of the FGDs, only the participant's numbers were used to maintain their confidentiality. Some women participants and most government employees are reluctant to use their identity for fear of "being the loud-mouthed woman and risk of being called for an explanation."

3.13.3 Positionality of the Researcher – Ethnic and Social

In most interactions, I introduced myself as a media scholar from Mizoram University, I was treated with great prestige which hindered the free flow of conversation and even led to the respondents adjusting their responses to what they thought would be appropriate instead of being factual. A couple of media personnel who do not have degrees in journalism were also sometimes apologetic about the content and layout of their publications. Some also have mentioned a different number of copies printed to seem more established than they are.

My ethnic identity was also brought up a lot during small talk as rapport-building. My ethnic identity as a Mara living in Lawngtlai without an understanding of either the Mara or Lai language has influenced the research to a certain extent. For

instance, in Lawngtlai, I don't always mention that I am a local and I could pass off as just a researcher from Mizoram University in most of my interactions. This gives a feeling of confiding to an outsider but could also give the respondent a sense of restriction at times. It is a double-edged sword. In Siaha, some respondents were more open to talking with a researcher from south Mizoram but when they had come to learn that I am a Mara who does not understand the Mara language, I was often questioned and sometimes met with disapproving remarks on how I had forgotten my roots. To the Chakma respondents, I was stripped of my identity as a Mara living in the Lai area and I was simply a Mizo. I could tell that my Mizo identity hindered some interactions, especially with government officials and civil society leaders. The need to converse in English also caused some contextual loss in the conversation.

3.13.4 Use of Names in Presentation

In this study, I have chosen to use both first names and last names of respondents when presenting their narratives. This approach is intended to provide proper credit to the participants while ensuring that their identities are recognized. Additionally, since many members of the Chakma tribe use 'Chakma' as their surname, using first names helps to highlight their unique identities and personalities.

3.14 Limitations and Challenges During the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted fieldwork, leading to changes and delays in research plans. It also altered the usual flow and functioning of the media landscape, making data collection more challenging. Additionally, the lack of archival materials and proper documentation made media mapping a tedious task, with some information only obtainable through oral sources. The study's scope was further complicated by the ethnic differences among the three tribes, each with distinct media practices and preferences. Linguistic barriers also added to the limitations, as some contextual nuances were lost in translation. Moreover, my identity as a Mizo influenced the interactions, causing some respondents, particularly those from the Chakma community, to be more reluctant to share openly. These factors together posed significant challenges to achieving a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the media landscape.

CHAPTER IV

MEDIA IN THE LAI AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL (LADC)

The fourth chapter details a thick description of media in LADC specifically from Lawngtlai and Sangau – mapping of media (print, broadcast media and online) along with photographs; identifying the media players and the preferences and consumption of media by the Lai people. Objectives 1 & 2 are merged in the media mapping portion of the chapter. Objective 3 is presented through a presentation of FGD data.

4.1 Mapping of Media in Lawngtlai

According to a list of Accredited Journalists published by the Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Government of Mizoram in 2021, there are 7 state Accredited Journalists in Lawngtlai District. 6 journalists are from Lawngtlai town and only 1 is from Sangau village. Lawngtlai is also a Mizoram Journalists' Association (MJA) district headquarters and according to Lalngheta Ralte, the Editor of *Lawngtlai Post* and the district MJA President (as of 2022), there are 9 members in the MJA Lawngtlai branch.

4.1.1 The Press Club of MJA Lawngtlai District

The Press Club of MJA Lawngtlai District is located near the District Commissioner's Office in the Electric Veng of Lawngtlai. It is a three-story RCC building and the first floor serves as the main office. The façade of the building is painted with white walls and grey accents. The office is divided into three is no actual workstation in the office rather it is a conference room where press releases are held. There is a designated parking spot for the MJA members at the front of the building. Since it does not serve as a workstation, it is empty and locked most of the time.



Figures 3&4. The front view and conference hall of the Lawngtlai Press Club.



Figure 5. The press conference room of the Lawngtlai Press Club.

4.1.2 Media in Lawngtlai–Print

1. *The Lawngtlai Post*

Editor: Lalngheta Ralte

Layout: A3 two-paged laser-printed newspaper in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: MIZMIZ-00942/16/1/2010-TC

Social Media: *WhatsApp* groups, website and YouTube channel.

The first floor of the MJA Office homes the family of MJA Lawngtlai District President Lalngheta Ralte, the Editor of a daily newspaper *The Lawngtlai Post*. In an interview with Lalngheta Ralte at his home on a Friday afternoon in August 2022 after multiple telephone conversations, he told me that he holds multiple roles in Lawngtlai media as the district *Doordashan Aizawl* correspondent, a stringer for *Akashavni Aizawl* and as one of the news editors for *Skynet*, a local cable television provider.

Born in Bilkhawthlir, a village in Kolasib District, Lalngheta Ralte has always had an interest in literature and was involved in the publication of several print media during his younger years. He considers Friday afternoon to be his free time because he did not have to print the newspapers for the next two days – Saturday and Sunday. He told me that although they do not circulate newspapers on the weekends, they work on blog updates and are active on their different WhatsApp groups.

The Lawngtlai Post is a daily newspaper published in Lawngtlai and established in the year 2003. Lalngheta Ralte is the Editor, publisher and printer of the newspaper. It is a two-page A 3 size printed in black and white.

The newspaper is a one-man business where the management and the administration are run by the editor alone with the occasional help from other family

members. The subscription fee is Rs.100 per month. The printing is done from his home office using a computer and a printer. When I asked if he receives advertisements from readers, he said, “We receive occasional advertisements from local readers and Aizawl but the LADC is the most regular provider of advertisements. Not only us, all the RNI registered newspapers in Lawngtlai receive at least three advertisements in a month.”



Figure. 6 The Lawngtlai Post Editor Lalngheta Ralte in his home office.

The Lawngtlai Post also owns an online blog of the same name by the same editor. The blog post generally contains big political news. However, due to poor internet connectivity and insufficient manpower, the last update of the blog was on 29 November 2013 (<http://thelawngtlai-post.blogspot.in/>).

The Lawngtlai Post has a circulation of 170 copies which he printed from his home with his printer. These printed copies are circulated only in government offices – both the state government and LADC. The LADC office subscribed 50 copies of the newspaper and the remaining 120 copies are circulated in all the Mizoram Government offices. The subscription fee is Rs. 100 per month. The newspaper is typed in *Adobe Pagemaker* and is printed on A3-sized paper. He told me that the hey day of the circulation was back when it was printed in cyclostyle with around 2500-

2700 copies. This was the days before social media was popularized and the only sources of information were television and radio. Currently, most of the Lawngtlai Post readership is acquired through multiple Whatsapp groups created by the Editor where a portable document format (PDF) of the newspaper is posted at around 8 in the morning. The PDF versions are shared in colour format. The participants of the group are acquaintances of himself whom he added to the group – government employees, politicians, lecturers, and church leaders from all over Mizoram. The PDF versions of the papers are not password-protected and are free to read by all.

Lalnggheta expresses how he puts as much effort into his blog *thelawngtlai.post.blogspot.in* which he had maintained for more than 10 years. The blog content is similar to his reports in the newspaper, radio and cable TV. He said, “Although we do have not much circulation in print, I can track the traffic of the blog and assume the reach of my content.”



Figure. 7 A copy of *The Lawngtlai Post*.

2. *Lairam*

Editor: V. Lallianzuala

Layout: Two pages A3 size laser printed in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: 40938/86 & MZR – 55/2018-2020 Social Media: Nil

Lairam newspaper is the oldest functioning daily newspaper in Lai Autonomous District Council which was started on 4th December 1984. The name means ‘Land of Lais’. The Editor, Publisher and Printer is V. Lallianzuala, who is a Prominent Press Representative. He is also a member of the MJA Lawngtlai District and an Accredited Journalist. The educational qualification of the editor is matriculation. The establishment of the newspaper was the joint effort of five friends - C. Zara, Manghnuna, Nokiau, L.B. Zathang and the editor where they eventually parted ways after some time and the newspaper has since been privatised. *Lairam* is one of the only newspapers which have a registration under the Registrar of Newspapers for India. The registration no is RNI: 40938/86 & MZR -55/2012-2014. The newspaper is a two-page laser-printed newspaper printed in a small printing room in the corner of the editor’s family living room where a single desktop computer, a printer and a Xerox machine are placed. The small printing room acts as the working space for the editor who is often helped by the News Editor- his daughter, Linda Rinawmi. Linda is a member of MJA Lawngtlai District but is not an accredited journalist. She is the only female journalist in the LADC area.

The starting circulation number was 500 copies which reached its peak of 3000 copies in the year 2000. The current number of circulation is only 100 copies. Before the area of circulation is the district capital Lawngtlai, Bungtlang, Mampui, Vathuampui, and other districts of Mizoram and 2 copies are sent three times a week via special postal registration. Now, they circulate mostly to the government offices. Earlier the gathering of news was from radio which was replaced by the internet. Government offices, police stations and press releases are the other sources of news.

There is no record of the history or progress of the newspaper in written form. The Editor and his wife mentioned that they had never considered documenting the history of the newspaper. The Editor suffered from a stroke in October 2014 and

most of the work is done by the News Editor under his supervision. *Lairam* does not have any online presence. They do not publish *Lairam* on the weekends.



Figure 8. A copy of *Lairam* newspaper.

3. *Phawngpui Express*

Editor: ZD Dengngurasss

Layout: A3 sized, two pages printed in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: MIZMIZ 01031 Social Media: Nil

Phawngpui Express is a daily newspaper which is named after *Phawngpui Tlang*, the highest mountain in the state which is in the Lawngtlai district. The Editor and publisher is ZD Dengngura. The management and the printing are done by the editor from his home in Bethel Veng. He has a table and printer near his bed which he uses as his office. *Phawngpui Express* was established in the year 1988. It is registered under Mizoram Government registration no MIZMIZ01031. It is a two-page A3 size laser-printed newspaper. The number of circulation is 150 copies.



Figure 9. Editor of *Phawngpui Express* ZD Dengngura in his home office.

4. *Rauthla*

Editor: Elvis Lalthangzuala

Layout: A3 size laser printed in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: MIZMIZ-00941/16/1/2010-TC

Social Media: website and *Android* application, multiple *WhatsApp* groups

Rauthla is an A3 size two-page laser-printed newspaper edited, published and owned by Elvis Lalthangzuala. The term *Rauthla* means ‘spirit’. The newspaper is registered under the RNI. The newspaper has a Joint Editor H. Lalruatfela and Circular Manager Lalbiakthara. The educational qualification of the editor is a Bachelor’s in Social Work. The newspaper is printed in the living room of the editor. The number of circulation is 160 copies and the subscription fee is Rs. 100 per month.

Before *Rauthla* newspaper, Lalthangzuala started a monthly magazine, *Hlimthla* which means ‘shadow’. The printing of the magazine was done in Aizawl as there were no colour printing presses in Lawngtlai. The first edition of the magazine was published in July 2010. The price of the magazine was Rs. 25 which was increased to Rs. 30. It was circulated to different parts of the state. Promotions of the magazine were done by sponsoring a variety night and by forming a football club called *Hlimthla* FC. Due to lack of profit, the publishing of the magazine was

stopped. Although *Rauthla* is owned by Elvis Lalthangzuala however, the Joint Editor, H. Lalruatfela is responsible for most of the news collection and formatting of the newspaper. Lalruatfela regularly posts the PDF version of *Rauthla* in different WhatsApp groups every morning. Only the editor is a member of the MJA Lawngtlai and an Accredited Journalist.

They have a website *rautlanews.com* and an Android app – *Rauthla News* on the Google Play Store which can be accessed for free. They also have multiple WhatsApp groups. The WhatsApp groups also receive daily issues of *Rauthla* in coloured PDFs. *Rauthla* does not publish issues on Saturdays and Sundays.



Figure 10. A copy of the *Rauthla* issue.

5. *Lai Aw*

Editor: JC Lalthangliana

Format: Legal-sized, two pages printed in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI Registration: Nil Other media: Nil

Lai Aw is a daily newspaper edited, published and printed by J.C. Lalthangliana. It is a daily newspaper. *Lai Aw* means the voice of Lai. It was started

in 1988 as a newspaper of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the editor was chosen to look after it. After a while, the newspaper was privatised. It carries the slogan 'Mite tan nang malsawmna ni zawk ang che'. It means 'Be a blessing for others'. There is no registration number printed in the newspaper. It claims itself as an independent daily newspaper and it is printed by the editor from his family bedroom in his home in Council Veng using his laser printer. It has a circulation manager C. Lalmuanpuia. The number of circulation is 100 copies and at least 50 copies are distributed to different offices of the LADC. In an interview at his home office, the editor told me that due to technical problems, the publishing of the newspaper had been interrupted for two weeks but that it was resolved that day. He is not a member of the MJA. Of all the newspapers I've studied, *Lai Aw* is the only one to have received advertisements from the CADC. It does not have any other form of media or online presence.



Figure 11. The home of *Lai Aw* Editor where his home office is located.

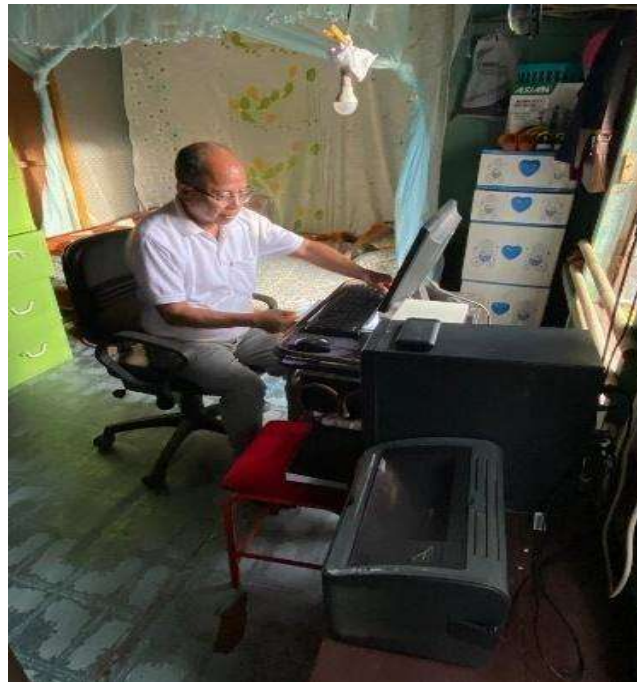


Figure 12. Lai Aw Editor in his home office which is also his family bedroom.



Figure 13. Lai Aw newspaper.

6. *Rameng*

Editor: H. Lalrinmawia

Format: A3 sized two pages printed in black and white. Language: Mizo

RNI Registration: MIZMIZ-00942/16/1/2010-TC. Other media: Nil

Rameng is a self-acclaimed independent daily two-page A3 sized laser printed newspaper. The name of the newspaper means ‘enlightened land’. The editor, publisher is H. Lalrinmawia. He is a member of MJA Lawngtlai and an Accredited Journalist. The circulation is 150 copies with a monthly subscription of Rs.80. The editor works from his home in Khurpui Bazar Veng of Lawngtlai where he lives with his family. He has a Jt. Editor Lalfakkima but his name is not written in any of the print. Lalfakkima helps in the collection of news, typing and formatting of the newspaper. It is written that 520 copies of *Rameng* are printed in a single circulation day but when I asked the editor if that is the true number, he said that they used to print 520 copies back in 2016 but they did not bother to change in the current number. The current circulation is 200 copies. 50 copies are circulated to the LADC office. They do not publish on Saturdays and Sundays. They also skip publication on days when there are special church programs as told by the editor. Microsoft Word is used to design the layout of the newspaper.



Figure 14. Rameng Editor H. Lalrinmawia in his home office.



Figure 15. Front pic of Rameng.

7. Lawngtlai Today

Editor: H. Lalhmingmawia

Format: Legal size, two pages printed in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: MIZMIZ01075 Other media: *WhatsApp* groups, blog

Lawngtlai Today is an independent daily newspaper edited, printed and published by H. Lalhmingmawia from Chawnhu, Lawngtlai. Lalhmingmawia was born in the year 1988 and has a Bachelor of Arts degree. He started *Lawngtlai Today* in October of 2021 with the registration RNI No. MIZMIZ 01075. There is one Joint Editor and one News Editor. The main contents of the newspaper are Lawngtlai district news. They have received advertisements from the Mizoram Government as well as the LADC. The editor is not a member of the MJA.

The current number of circulation is 150 copies; 20 copies are taken by the LADC office and 30 copies by the state government offices in Lawngtlai. The formatting of the newspaper is done in Microsoft Word. They are one of the three newspapers in Lawngtlai which share their PDF for free in *WhatsApp* groups. The other two are *The Lawngtlai Post* and *Rauthla*. *Lawngtlai Today* has a blog – *lawngtlaitoday.blogspot.com* and the contents are managed by the editor himself. The contents are mostly editorials and are uploaded once or twice a week. The editor in an interview said that there is hardly any revenue from the subscription fee alone and the expenditures are almost the same as the income. Some months they are even running on a loss.



Figure 16. Lawngtlai Today issue.

8. The Lairam Times

Editor: LZ Ringlawt

Format: A3 size, four pages printed in black and white Language: Lai

RNI registration: Nil Other media: website

The Lairam Times is the official mouthpiece of the *International Chin Forum* (ICF). It has an ICF organ registration of R. 249/2018-LDC/COOP. It is a weekly newspaper. The ICF is a non-government organisation made up of Lai people from different parts of the world who are interested in the revivalism of the Lai cultural identity in Mizoram. There are 10 Office Bearers (OBs) and Alinery Lianhlawng located in the United Kingdom (UK) is the Chairman. Some of the OBs are also Lai/Chin Diasporas from Bangladesh and Myanmar. The editor said in an interview that the main objective of the ICF is to awaken the Lai cultural identity by promoting the teaching and learning of the Lai language among others and they felt that publishing a Lai newspaper was the first and one of the most important initiatives. There are 12 Executive Committee members and LZ Ringlawt is also one of them.

The Lairam Times was started in Sangau in February 2022 but shifted its production centre to Lawngtlai in June 2022. It is a black and white four-page

weekly newspaper printed on A3 size paper. All the contents are in the Lai language and are mostly related to news and events about the Lai and Chin people. The two inside pages are dedicated to long articles written in Lai. Bylines, news sources and image credits are not given.

According to the Editor, the Editorial Board consists of 5 people who voluntarily work on *The Lairam Times* at least once a week. It is printed in *Lairam Offset Press*, Lawngtlai. As of August 2022, they have printed 300 copies per publishing day. It is printed every Friday and distributed the same afternoon and on Saturdays too. The LADC subscribes to 30 copies. The monthly subscription rate is Rs. 100 per month. The editor said that they have not seen any profit from it but are operating at a loss. The publishing costs are funded by the contributions of the *ICF* members and donations from diaspora communities like the *Chin Evangelical Church, Australia; and Chin Baptist Church, USA*.

The Lairam Times has an active *Facebook* page under the same name as the newspaper and a website called *thelairamtimes.com*. The *Facebook* page is more active than the website. The editorial team is responsible for the management of the content creation. All the online content is in Lai as well. The editorial team are working as volunteers and does not receive any remuneration for their contributions. Aligning with the sentiments of the organization, the contents of *The Lairam Times* are all related to Lai/Chin interests. When I asked the editor if the newspaper could sustain itself, he said that the newspaper's revenue alone was not enough to cover the production expenditures. Donations and funding from the *ICF* members and Lai/Chin Diaspora are what is keeping the newspaper in publication. It is printed at *Lairam Offsst Press in Lawngtlai*.



Figure 17. The Lairam Times.

4.1.3 Media Produced by the LADC

The LADC produces only one print media called *Council Aw*. Apart from

Council Aw, it has one official website - www.ladc.mizoram.gov.in

1. *Council Aw*

Editor: H.C. Vanlalruatpuia

Publisher: The Executive Secretary, LADC Registration No: 1012 NE

Format: A4 size, 12 pages in colour. Language: Mizo and Lai

Council Aw means the ‘voice of council’. As the name suggests, it is a magazine edited by the Information and Public Relations Officer and published by

the Executive Secretary, Lai Autonomous District Council Lawngtlai. It is a twelve-page official organ of the Lai Autonomous District Council which comes out every four months. The circulation is 300 copies. The newsletter is fully coloured with pictures. However, the pictures do not contain captions or credit. It bears the registered no. 1012 N.E with Lai Autonomous District Council. It is an A4-size bilingual newsletter printed in Lai and Mizo. The contents provide an overview of the development works and activities done by the LADC.

The first page of the paper contains the name of the newsletter written in bold letters. The logo of LADC is placed in the left upper corner. The slogan of the paper is written in Lai Ca - ‘BOIPA CU KAN I HUHPHENH NAAK A SI’ meaning ‘The Lord is our Refuge’. This is the only Lai phrase in the whole issue. The left side of the paper bears the headlines of the contents of the magazine. The leading article is about the LADC Golden Jubilee celebration. The article is written in an inverted pyramid style. The left corner of the second page contains the editorial. The adjacent article is about the celebration of the jubilee in LADC sub-headquarters Bualpui (NG). Articles from the third to fifth page are all about the celebration of the jubilee. The rest of the pages are the programs of the LADC Executive Members.



Figures 18&19. LADC Golden Jubilee issue of *Council Aw*.

2. The Official Website of the LADC

The official LADC website is created by the Department of Information & Communication Technology, Government of Mizoram. It contains the general information of the LADC. The Information and Public Relations Department of the LADC has access to the website in terms of content but has no control over the layout of the website. Press Releases are the most updated content. These press releases are all written in Mizo.



Figure 20. The press release page view of the official LADC website.

In an interview with C. Lawmsangzuala, *Information & Public Relations Officer* of the LADC, he said that all the RNI registered newspapers in the LADC area receive regular advertisements from the LADC. He said that a yearly budget of around eight lakhs is sanctioned for print advertisements. He said the LADC currently (in 2023) does not have advertisement rules of their own and they use the Government of Mizoram Guidelines of the Print Media Advertisements of Government of Mizoram - 2018 wherein Clause 4 Category C mentions the lowest minimum circulation of 1000 to qualify to receive advertisements from the government. As per my observation, there are no newspapers in the LADC area that reach one-third of the minimum criteria but in the LADC, they still receive monthly advertisements from them. When I asked him about it, he said that although the

newspaper readership is low everywhere, the local newspapers are the only ones that can publish print advertisements so they exercise relaxation on their part. In return, the LADC is strict on conditions like there has to be an actual hard copy and a publication of at least 15 issues a month. We can see that the government is enabling and supporting the local newspapers beyond their official criteria to ensure the survival and continued operation of these local publications in the region.

4.1.4 Publications by NGOs.

1. *Tialpari Puk*

Publisher: The Mizo Academy of Letters, Lawngtlai District

Tialpari Puk is a quarterly magazine published by the Mizo Academy of Letters, Lawngtlai District. The magazine was started in the year 2008. The magazine is no longer in publication for the last few years. The Editor of the magazine was PC. Chuaudinga. Mizo Academy of Letters, Lawngtlai District is a literary body affiliated with headquarters in Aizawl. To become a member of the MAL, an individual has to get a recommendation from two existing members of the MAL. An annual registration fee of Rs. 100 is taken. The registration renewal fee is Rs. 50. The magazine was sold at Rs. 10 per issue. The funding of the newspaper was accumulated through charity, awareness campaigns and the LADC. Two months of issues are often combined into one issue. However, due to insufficient funding, the publication of the magazine is on hiatus. Past issues of *Tialpari Puk* were printed at the *Baptist Printing Press*, Lawngtlai.

2. *Far Pak*

Publisher: Young Lai Association (YLA)

Far Pak is a monthly magazine of the Young Lai Association (YLA). *Far Pak* means 'the lone pine'. It is named after a famous place near Mizoram's highest mountain Phawngpui Mountain where a single pine tree grows.

The Editor of *Far Pak* is PC. Chuaudinga who is also the Editor of *Tialpari Puk*. *Far Pak* was originally called *Kaladan* which was later changed to *YLA Aw*.

The newly refurbished magazine *Far Pak* was published in 2004 as a monthly magazine. The production of *Far Pak* has been on hiatus since 2017 due to insufficient funds.

The price of the magazine was Rs. 10 per issue. It was printed at Baptist Offset Press, Lawngtlai. The revenue of the magazine is received through advertisements, awareness campaigns, and government contributions.

3. *Mupui LSA Chanchinbu*

Publisher: Lai Students' Association (LSA)

Mupui LSA Chanchinbu is a magazine of the (LSA). The name translates to

'Eagle, an LSA newspaper'. The latest editor of the magazine was V. Lalchhuanzauva who has a Diploma in Computer Science. The LSA is a student body in Lawngtlai. The newspaper has no registration. Registration of the magazine is often proposed but it is not yet achieved due to internal political conflicts. Earlier it was published under the name *Una Voce* but was ultimately changed to *Mupui LSA Chanchinbu* meaning Eagle LSA Magazine. *Mupui* is used to highlight the logo of LSA where an eagle is used. The refurbished magazine was first published on the anniversary of the LSA Foundation Day on 23rd April 2014.

The magazine is not in publication during the time of the study. During its time it had a circulation of 350 copies with a price of Rs.20 per issue. It was printed at *Lairam Offset Press*, Lawngtlai. The newspaper was funded by contributions from different departments of the Government of Mizoram. Due to scarce funding, two months of issues are often compressed into a single issue which transcended to zero publication in 2015. The magazine used to be circulated to different branches of LSA, and Aizawl.

4.1.5 Church Based Media

Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) has its headquarters in Lawngtlai. Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) also has a sub-headquarters in Lawngtlai in Bazar Locality. The main office of the LIKBK is in Chawngte Peng of

Lawngtlai. Among all the church denominations in Lawngtlai, the LIKBK has the largest number of church members. It is the biggest church denomination in the district as well.

The LIKBK Media Cell takes care of the church media.

1. *Grace Channel*

Format: 24/7 Local channel of *KT Vision* rented by the LIKBK Language: Lai and Mizo

They have a 24/7 local channel called *Grace Channel* from 2017 on the local cable television provider – *KT Vision*. They pay Rs. 10000 yearly. Since the owner of *KT Vision* is a member of the LIKBK, he has given them a huge discount said the production manager of the Communication Department – a department created to take the responsibility of all media-related activities. The said owner of *KT Vision* is

T. Zakunga, a deacon in LIKBK College Veng local church and a prominent politician who is currently a Member of the District Council (MDC) and was a CEM (Chief Executive Member) of the LADC in the past. *Grace Channel* broadcasts Christian-based content like documentaries, sermons, music videos, and live telecasts of church conventions. The Communication Department of the LIKBK has appointed a production manager from 2022 who is in charge of the audio and visual production to be broadcast on the *Grace* channel. At the time of the data collection in August 2022, they had not started production.

2. *Kohhran Tlangau*

Format: Small booklet in black and white Language: Mizo and occasionally Lai

Kohhran Tlangau is one of the official organs that started in 1984. It is a monthly magazine printed in black and white in a small booklet form. 1500 copies are printed for Rs 23 per copy and sold at Rs. 20 per copy. It is printed in the *Lairam Offset Press*. *Kohhran Tlangau* being the mouthpiece of the church has information about LIKBK-related news and Christian- centred literature. Most of the contents are

articles, church (local and headquarters) information, advertisements, obituaries etc. The contents are in Mizo and sometimes Lai. The Editor is Upa. H. Lalduhawmi who is a Church Elder contributes to the editorial which is mostly written in Mizo. Apart from informative pieces by the LIKKBK, articles and sermons contributed by readers and church members are the main sources of the contents. These submissions are thoroughly edited and proofread by the editorial team before they are approved for publication.

3. *Lairam Mission*

Format: Legal size, four pages printed in black and white

Language: Mizo

Lairam Mission is a 4-page monthly bulletin published by the Mission Department of the LIKKBK. It contains news and information from the church. The contents are in Mizo and 1700 copies are printed and circulated for Rs.10 per copy and Rs.100 yearly. It is printed at the *Lairam Offset Press*. This is the most circulated print media in the LADC area. There is an editorial team and the editorial team is made mostly of pastors and employees of the LIKKBK offices and are changed after a couple of years.



Figure 21. *Lairam Mission* – the most widely circulated print media in the LADC region.

4. *Thalai Aw*

Format: Small booklet type with coloured covers. Language: Mizo and Lai

Thalai Aw is a bi-monthly magazine published by the Lairam Isua Krista Thalai Pawl (LIKBKTP) – the official youth wing of the LIKBK. It is a small booklet-type magazine. The cover pages of *Thalai Aw* are printed in colour from *JP Offset Press*, Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawland the contents are bilingual – Mizo and Lai. 1250 copies are printed in the Lairam Offset Press – an offset owned by the LIKBK. The Editor is Rbt. Vanlalluaia (Rbt. stands for *Rawngbawltu* meaning Deacon) and there are six other members in the Editorial team. The editorial piece is mostly written in Lai. The circulation of *Thalai Aw* follows a specific routine. After the copies are printed, they reach the main LIKBK office and from then on the Editorial team divides the number of copies needed for each pastoral area in different towns and villages where there are LIKBK churches. Usually, some agents are church deacons and youth leaders who distribute the copies to the subscribers of the magazines. These subscribers are members of the church – especially from the LIKBK denomination.

The contents of the magazine are testimonies, Christian commentaries and reports from different church wings. Church members can contribute articles in either Lai or Mizo.

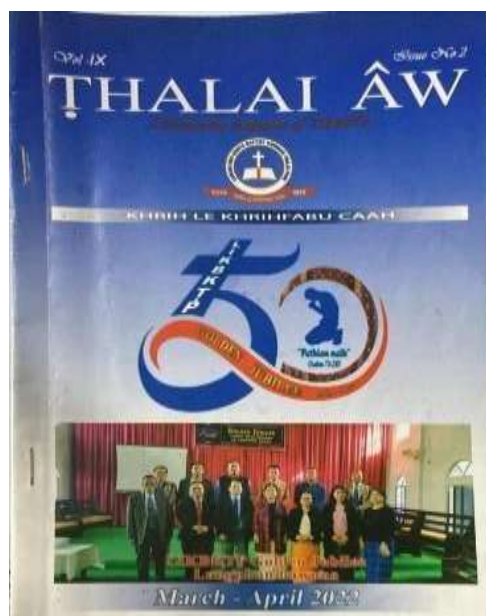


Figure 22. Cover page of *Thalai Aw*.

4.1.6 Printing Presses in Lawngtlai

There are two printing presses in the LADC region. *Baptist Printing Press* is owned by the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and *Lairam Offset Press* is owned by the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK).

1. ***Baptist Offset Press*** - The Baptist Offset Press was established on 1st November 1978 by the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and it can be considered the oldest printing facility in Lawngtlai. The press is used mainly for printing in-house journals from churches, NGOs, church bulletins, government stationeries and public business like books, booklets etc. It is located in the basement of the *Baptist House* in Bazar Veng. The *Baptist Offset Press* has a manager and a couple of floor staff and they are all employed by the BCM.

Throughout the years, the printing technologies in the *Baptist Offset Press* have changed significantly. Starting from offset printing, the current printing technology is laser printer technology that can print large amounts of copies at the same time. The profit received from the printing business goes to the BCM headquarters located in Serkawn, Lunglei District.



Figure 23. Front entrance of Baptist Offset Press.



Figure 24. Offset machine at the Baptist Offset Press.

2. *Lairam Offset Press* -The *Lairam Offset Press* is a printing press owned and operated by the biggest church in the area, LIKBK. It was established on 11 October 1986. It mainly prints monthly magazines like *Lairam Mission*, *Kohhran Tlangau*, *Thalai Aw*, and Sunday School textbooks.



Figures 25&26. The front view and the main printing machine at Lairam Offset Press.

The *Lairam Offset Press* operates under a manager and his team who are all employed by the LIKBK.

4.1.7 Print media outlets

There is a very limited print media outlet in the LADC area. There are three book rooms - owned by the LIKBK, the BCM and the Presbyterian Church of India (PCI). There are no other bookshops or outlets in the region. From notebooks to classroom stationery and books in general, these ‘three book rooms’ (as they are known locally) serve as the only sources. Since these book rooms are owned by the different churches, they are closed on Saturdays, Sundays and other holidays as observed by the church calendars. The bookrooms mainly sell church-approved books and novels, school textbooks and Christian literature. Locally published books and magazines are mostly unavailable in these bookrooms due to the under-recognition of the church authorities. Newspapers and magazines published in Lawngtlai are accessible through subscriptions or PDFs.

4.2 Mapping of Media in Lawngtlai – Broadcast

There are two cable television operators in Lawngtlai – *KT Vision* and *Skynet Vision*. They are both privately owned businesses.

4.2.1 Profile of Cable Television Operators

1. *KT Vision*

Other media: *YouTube* channel

KT Vision is the oldest cable television provider in Lawngtlai District. It was started on 21st June 1990 and is registered under the owner's name T. Zakunga with its postal registration CTV/64/Azl/1990. T. Zakunga is a graduate of Scottish Church Calcutta and an Executive Member (EM) of the LADC. He is also a Deacon in the LIKBK College Veng local church. He is a pioneer in introducing cable television in the district. *KT Vision* is a family-run television network and has had a tremendous amount of success for it. The control room is located at Lawngtlai Bazar locality where the family owns a 4-storey building. The cable occupies the topmost floor where it serves as a control room and a studio. In April 2015, *KT Vision* purchased a rival cable operator *RL Cable* which was sold due to management issues.



*Figure 27.*Sets of satellite antennas *KT Vision* used to receive television signals.

KT Vision provides 15 local channels of which 10 are Zonet Channels. Zonet is subscribed by them with a fee of Rs 10000 per month. There are 9 full-time employees:

- 1 Manager – Rs 20000 per month,
- 2 Computer Operators – Rs 10000 per month,
- 1 News Reader - Rs 6000 per month, 1 Casual – Rs 500 per shift and
- 6 Linesmen - Rs 5000 per month.

KT Vision has around 1800 subscribers. Their peak in subscription was in the year 2004 when they had 3000 subscribers. The subscription fee is based on the package chosen by the customers which ranges from Rs. 200 per month to Rs. 550 per month. There are 11 fee collectors in different localities who commissioned Rs 20 from every subscriber. *KT Vision* usually broadcasts scroll-type advertisements with a rate of Rs 300 for private and Rs 500 for government advertisements for a 24-hour broadcast on all the local channels. *KT Vision* covers all of Lawngtlai town area and neighbouring villages like Thingkah, Mampui, Chawnhu, Chawntlang, Sihtlang, Kawlchaw, Paithar, Vahnne and Rulkual. They did the mandatory upgrade of Analogue to Digitization of Cable Television in 2017.

1.1 *KT Lai*

Format: 24/7 local channel Language: Lai

From the year 2014, *KT Vision* dedicated a Lai local channel in collaboration with *Lairam Media Group (LMG)*– a non-profit media group started in 2012 by a handful of people who felt that the use and popularity of Lai language was declining in the Lai capital. The name of the channel is *KT Lai*. K.R Chhingpuii w/o C. Ngunlianchunga, the then Animal Husbandry & Vety Minister in the Government of Mizoram is the Chairman and there are 25 members in the Lairam Media Group. The main aim of the LMG is “to preserve the Lai language” as stated by the chairman. The owner of *KT Vision* T. Zakunga is also a member of the LMG and he dedicated a single local channel for the telecast of Lai language content free of cost. The contents of the channel are Lai medium music videos, dubbing, sermons and documentaries. Apart from the occasional interviews, music videos and sermons

made in the Lai language, contents are sourced from the Lai/Chin Diasporas all over the world. These diaspora-produced contents are often received for free.

1.2 *Lai Idol*

Format: A Lai language singing competition

In 2014, LMG created a reality singing competition called *Lai* which is inspired by a Mizo reality singing competition *Mizo Idol* created by *Zonet* cable television network based in Aizawl. The competition was started on 22nd September and the finale was organized on 13th November 2014. Funding and sponsorship were received from the LADC and the Government of Mizoram. Reminiscing on the success of the event, the secretary of the organizing committee, L.H. Lalhmunmawia said, “The *Lai Idol* was broadcast on *KT Lai* channel and uploaded on YouTube and the recognition and support we received from the Lai Diasporas living in America, Canada, and Myanmar and from all over the world were incredible and overwhelming. Our Lai brethren living abroad started contacting us and offered funds and financial aid to produce Lai programs.”

The Chin Baptist Church of the USA also sent money via *Western Union* to help with the functioning of the LMG. “Because of the *Lai Idol*, we now have a huge following on YouTube and we received many music videos from Halkha, Chin State in Myanmar to be broadcast here in Lawngtlai”, says C. Lawmsangzuala, a member of the LMG. He also mentioned that there was never any program made in Lawngtlai that seemed to unite the Lai living in different parts of the world than the *Lai Idol* program and the enthusiasm and feedback received from the Lai was a living testament that the Lai – scattered in different parts of the world are one and together in spirit and love for their motherland. The media group also made local programs like a weekly roundup of news in the Lai language and interviews of prominent Lai personnel like politicians. The same program was then uploaded to YouTube. The YouTube channels had a huge fan following and most of the comments are from Lai diasporas living abroad. The filming of such content was mainly done on the in house studio KT Vision.

1.3 Local Channel Programs Offered by *KT Vision*

KT Vision offers 15 local channels and the contents of the programs are mostly Mizo-made content bought from Aizawl-based media houses. Mizo movies are mainly produced by different churches, Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean, Turkish serials and movies dubbed in Mizo. Dubbed contents are mostly purchased from Aizawl and are in DVD format. Daily sumo services are the carriers of such content. Sometimes, un-dubbed movies and television serials are also played. These contents are mostly pirated media downloaded from the internet. The local channels are mostly given names like *KT Thliahloh*, *KT Vision Movies*, and *KT Vision Music*. There are also video-on-demand channels - *KT Vision Demand Channel (Gospel)* and *KT Vision Demand Channel (Lengzem)*, (meaning love songs) which use interactive and automated software like *Creativity Music* which allows viewers to dial a number and select videos from a vast catalogue. They are mostly music videos. They have separate video-on-demand channels for Christian content and love songs and they run 24/7.

1.4 *KT Vision Inpui*

Format: a local channel dedicated to content created by *KT Vision*

Language: Mizo and Lai

KT Vision Inpui (meaning home) is a channel where they broadcast locally made (Lawngtlai) content. If there are any important or big local programs like church conventions, big political public speaking, celebration of Independence Day and Republic Day etc are broadcast live on this channel. *KT Vision* also broadcast their studio local programs on this channel. However, if there is no important function or studio programs to be played, the content is filled with dubbed Korean serials and English movies etc. The local programs made by *KT Vision* are:-

i. **Phone *Hlathlan*** - Phone *Hlathlan* (meaning selection of songs through telephones) is a pre-recorded program where a host will receive phone calls from audiences and interact with the audience about their choice of song and play them. This is telecast once a week at 8:30 every Friday evening.

ii. ***Huapzo*** –*Huapzo* (meaning inclusive) is a program where prominent people from Lawngtlai in different fields of life like politicians, singers, and proficient students are interviewed. This program is broadcast once a week every Friday evening at 8.

iii. ***Naupang Pual*** – *Naupang Pual* (meaning kids-centred) is a program which caters to children's interests. The programs are in such a way the different children fellowship from church denominations showcase their talents on television. The activities include hymn singing, group dancing recitation of Bible verses and so on. This is telecast once every week on Friday at 6 pm. The contents of the programs are Christian-oriented.

iv. ***Daily Report*** – As the name suggests, this program is a short daily report of the weather, no. of police cases, hospital reports and names of doctors on duty in the three hospitals – Civil Hospital Lawngtlai, Christian Hospital Lawngtlai and Lairam Christian Medical Centre. It is broadcast from Monday to Friday at 8 in the morning.

v. ***Weekly News Round-Up***– This is a weekly news roundup of relevant news and events happening in the Lawngtlai district. It is broadcast at 8 pm every Saturday and the repeated broadcast is at 8 am every Sunday.

vi. ***Special Report*** – As the name suggests, special reports on any important events are broadcast. However, there is no fixed timing of the telecast as the production of the program is unpredictable and happens if only there is an event relevant enough to be filmed.

vii. ***Interviews***– Interviews with Lai prominent people – politicians, singers and proficient students are also done occasionally. These interviews are conducted in Mizo or Lai as per the fluency of the guests.

viii. ***Music Videos and concert videos*** – Lai and Mizo music videos and concert videos which are mainly produced in Lawngtlai and other places like Myanmar and the United States are broadcast all day long and are only interrupted by the above-mentioned handful of programs.

2. *Skynet*

Skynet is a family-run cable television network started in August 2015. The owner is Lalmalsawmi Sailo who is also the principal of their family-run private school called Downtown English School. She was born on 13th October 1974 and her educational qualification is a Master's Degree from North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). However, the management of the cable television business is mainly done by her husband Remlalnghaka, an Assistant Professor at the local Government Lawngtlai College. The cable operates from two rooms in their residence in the Bazar locality where one acts as a control room and the other a makeshift studio which is located in the basement.

As of 2022, *Skynet* broadcasts 16 local channels along with a Mizo satellite channel called *Zonet Zawlbuk* which is broadcast from Aizawl and subscribed with a fee of Rs 10000 per month. All the local channels operate 24×7 where the contents are mainly of the primetime shows. 6 full-time employees are paid Rs 6000 – Rs 15000 per month. *Skynet* has 2000 subscribers and is increasing monthly. 14 fee collectors focus on their respective locality and they receive a sum of Rs 20 per subscribers. *Skynet* broadcasts scroll advertisements for which the rate is Rs 300 for private and Rs 500 for government advertisements which are broadcast for 24 hours on all the local channels. *Skynet* covers Lawngtlai town and nearby villages like Thingkah, Thingfal and Chawnhu at the moment with plans made to provide connection to nearby villages like Kawlchaw and Mampui.

The names of the local channels are as follows:

The local channels are *Skynet Lengzem*, *Skynet Gospel*, *Skynet Kids*, *Skynet Plus*, *Skynet Home*, *Skynet Seven*, *Skynet 24×7*, and *Skynet Lai*. Some do not have proper names. *Skynet Home* is used to broadcast their in-house produced content. *Skynet Lai* as the name suggests is dedicated to Lai medium content but they do not produce or create Lai programs. They are bought from sources like *KT Vision* and the Lai diaspora.

This channel mainly broadcasts Lai music videos. The Lai music videos are downloaded from YouTube or brought from street vendors who sell them on DVDs.

2.1 Types of *Skynet Home* Contents

This channel is used to give the content created in the *Skynet studio*. The local programs made by *Skynet* are:-

- i. ***Skynet Weekly***– A 15 – 20-minute weekly roundup of all the important events happening in Lawngtlai district in Mizo telecast at 7:30 pm every Saturday. The *Skynet New Unit* looks after the production of the *Skynet Weekly* where there are news collectors, news readers, editors and technicians who are hired per program. Lalthgheta Ralte, the MJA President and Editor of *Lawngtlai Post* also helps in the production of this program. This is filmed every Saturday at 10 in the morning
- ii. ***Skynet Thlirvelna*** – *Skynet Thlirvelna* (*Thlirvelna* meaning overview) is a panel discussion program where experts on different topics discuss relevant and important topics. It is broadcast at 7:30 pm on Wednesday.
- iii. ***Fakna Hlathlan*** – *Fakna Hlathlan* (meaning gospel song on demand) is where an emcee goes to different parts of town and interacts with random people who them to select a song and dedicate them to someone. This program is telecast at 7:30 am every Sunday.
- iv. **Live Coverage** – Any important events like Independence Day celebration, big church conventions, declaration of LADC election results etc are broadcast on this channel.

Apart from the broadcast of content created by *Skynet*, dubbed movies and Serials are broadcast.



Figure 28&29. Control room and production studio of *Skynet*.

4.3 Online Media

It is a challenging task to map online media as the landscape keeps changing rapidly. For the mapping of online media in Lawngtlai, journalists were asked about the most relevant online media platforms which are based in Lawngtlai. Responses include the mention of LADC websites, WhatsApp groups and a Facebook group called *Lawngtlai Future Group*.

1. *Lawngtlai Future Group* (LFG)

Lawngtlai Future Group is a Facebook group created by Lalmangaihzuala Bawitlung and was created in 2011. It is a private group and one can apply for membership. It is essentially a group where members who are from Lawngtlai or of Lai descent can post news and opinions which are in the interests of Lai and

Lawngtlai-related issues and events. Membership for people outside of the area is not welcomed. As I am from Lawngtlai, I already have access to the group which helps in understanding the group dynamics.

As of August 2023, there are more than 25,000 members in the group. Most of the posts are related to politics and it is perhaps the most active public forum for political debates. The group is especially active before and after any form of elections – VC to LADC and even the state. The heydays of the LFG were during the mid-2010s when Facebook was at its peak popularity among youths and older citizens. According to one admin, the FGD has a strict set of rules to follow to curb blatant hate speech and baseless claims as posts are approved by the administrators.

4.4 Other Media Creators

Apart from media like print, broadcast and online media, there are a few media personnel who are associated with different media based in and outside Lawngtlai. They are not included in the media mapping and are instead focused on as media creators.

1. Lalchharliana

Association: News reporter for *Zonet* cable, news editor for *Skynet*, owner of *Chhimthlipui* YouTube channel.

Lalchharliana who was born in 1968 is a resident of Lawngtlai and owner of a gift shop in Lawngtlai. He works as a district correspondent for *Zonet*, an Aizawl-based television cable network provider. His place of origin is Tualte, a village in Champhai District. His wife works as a clerk in the Government of Mizoram and is posted at Lawngtlai hence, the family relocated to Lawngtlai. He is a member of MJA Lawngtlai and is also an Accredited Journalist.

He started working as a news reporter for *Zonet* in 2017 and he is not paid a fixed salary. His earnings differ from month to month and are usually paid Rs. 15000 to Rs. 20000 per quarter. He sends around five news items – in a Microsoft Word doc that sometimes includes pictures and videos to give more depth to the news item.

Sometimes, if the need arises, he would draft a script and include himself in the video to report on certain events. He works alone most of the time. A handy tripod and a Digital Single-Lens Reflex (DSLR) are his filming equipment. He also uses his personal Android smartphone to film and capture certain events. He uses editing software such as *Correll* Editor to edit videos. He does not have a designated workspace at his home and prefers to work from the corner of his shop where he has a desktop computer. His reports are usually sent to *Zonet* through email.

When I asked how often his reports are aired, he said that since *Zonet* is a privately owned cable network, they are more flexible in the airtime of their news and most of his reports are aired. His work day typically starts at around 9 in the morning when he browses through *WhatsApp* groups like MJA groups, Village Council (VC) groups and LADC groups and chooses events he would like to cover. Government events are his most covered stories. On his selection of newsworthy events, he said that in the case of incidents which are urgent like accidents, he would drop other stories and cover them instead. He added, “I try to highlight and cater to the interests of Lawngtlai people – problems faced by the people, social issues; and developments in terms of health and education.”

He also works as a news editor for *Skynet's weekly news round-up*. The program is filmed and edited every Saturday to be ready for the same night premiere. The reporting and filming he did during the whole week for *Zonet* are revised and edited for *Skynet*. He is paid Rs. 1000 per filming session.

On *Chhimthlipui*, his YouTube channel, he posts content like brief reports of recent events and coverage of MJA Lawngtlai events. Like his reporting for *Zonet* and *Skynet*, the contents of *Chhimthlipui* are mostly related to Lawngtlai and its people. During the time of our interaction in August 2022, *Chhimthlipui* had 47,000 subscribers. When I asked if there is any sort of rivalry between media houses on the sharing of media reports, he said that he does not share the same news item in the same format and has not been in trouble to date. He even occasionally shares some of his reporting to *JB Cable* – a Lunglei-based cable television operator for free. As he is not from the Lai tribe, he has no knowledge of the Lai language and all his reports

are in Mizo.

2. Kiddy Vanchhawng

Association: Freelance reporter for *Mizo Special Report* (MSR), the biggest Facebook group.

Kiddy Vanchhawng was born in the year 1976 and is a freelance journalist for *Mizo Special Report* – the biggest Mizo Facebook newsgroup created by Vanneihthanga Vanchhawng, a prominent citizen journalist based in Aizawl. MSR has more than 3 lakh members at the time of the study. He is originally from Lunglei District but the family has relocated to Lawngtlai as his wife works in a local hospital. Before being a reporter for MSR, Kiddy used to work news editor for *KT Vision's weekly roundup*. He volunteers as an administrator and reporter for MSR as requested by the creator himself since the creation of the group in 2012. He is not a member of the MJA Lawngtlai but has good relations with Lawngtlai MJA members as said by him in an interview.

4.5 Media Usage and Preferences of the Lai People in Lawngtlai

Below is a presentation of 3 FGDs conducted in Lawngtlai. Two FGDs were conducted among college students of the Government Lawngtlai College and one among the general masses, including LADC employees, shopkeepers, housewives, taxi drivers and unemployed youths. The FGDs were conducted with 12 participants each. The discussions are grouped according to a certain type of media. This was used as a guide in the FGDS as well. The analysis of the discussions is listed in Chapter 7.

1. The Lai Language

Of the 36 participants, only a handful of the college students can speak the Lai language. They are mostly from villages in other parts of the LADC. Almost all the other participants do not understand the Lai language. Some have never had the chance to learn the language and are apprehensive about learning a new language even if it is their own.

Participant 5: “I grew up speaking Mizo at home and English at school, so the only time I hear Lai is when my grandparents come to visit from the village. They tried teaching us a few words when we were younger, but I never took it seriously. I guess I just thought, ‘What’s the use of learning it if no one else around me speaks it?’”.

Participant 12: “My understanding of Lai is not even as good as beginner level. I only know some common phrases and the Lord’s prayer.”

Participant 27: “It’s a bit embarrassing sometimes because my relatives from the village speak to me in Lai. My grandfather used to scold me every time he visited. He would laugh and say, “You’re a Lai who can’t speak Lai.” I feel like I’ve missed out on part of my identity, but it’s just not something I grew up with. I wish I had learned it back when I was younger.”

2. Radio Usage (or Lack Thereof)

None of the participants own a radio. Some of the younger participants have never owned radio sets in their lifetime. The older adults have owned radio sets but it was a long time ago.

Participant 3: “We used to have an old radio set, but I don’t think it’s been touched in years. My father used to tune in to the news or listen to songs early in the morning. Now, it’s just collecting dust in the corner.”

Participant 18: “I’ve heard stories from the elders about how they used to gather around the radio for news and entertainment. But for us, it’s a forgotten relic. I can’t imagine listening to a show without being able to see it or scroll through comments like we do on YouTube.”

Participant 9: “The funny thing is, I used to listen to the radio religiously when I was younger. I remember when my elder sister used to play Mizo love songs during power cuts and my younger sister and I would sing along really loudly.”

3. Newspaper

Some participants are subscribed to *Vanglaini* and a few other local papers like *Lawngtlai Post* and *Rauthla*, but the majority aren't subscribed to any local or Aizawl-based newspapers. Many who previously subscribed to *Vanglaini* cancelled it during the pandemic. There is not much admiration for the local journalists as well. They feel that social media is faster, more up-to-date, and more convenient for accessing news. Local newspapers have no value for most of the participants. Meanwhile, all the participants have a subscription to one or more church publications.

Participant 35: "I used to subscribe to *Vanglaini* before the pandemic but now I have fallen out of my newspaper reading habit. There's no point when I can get all the news on Facebook and *WhatsApp* within minutes of it happening. Besides, local newspapers are filled with boring press releases that I've already read online."

Participant 8: "We tried subscribing to a couple of local papers like *Lawngtlai Post* and *Rauthla* but eventually, we let our subscription lapse. If I want to know what's happening, I go straight to social media. It's faster and I can choose what I want to read."

Participant 30: "Honestly, the only printed material we read regularly is the church newsletter. And even that feels more like a habit than something we're genuinely interested in. For real news or updates, it's all about instant alerts on our phones."

4. Television

All participants own TVs and they also subscribe to local cable TV (KT Vision or Skynet). Local channels are the most viewed, especially Mizo-dubbed serials and movies. Mizo content is the preferred choice for most, while only two participants regularly watch Lai channels. All families follow the DDK Aizawl 6:30 news segment. Younger participants tend to prefer their phones over TV and are frustrated with the abundance of dubbed content and low-quality pirated movies.

Participant 2: “Television is more like background noise at home. It’s always on, but no one’s watching. My parents are hooked on the Mizo-dubbed Korean dramas, and I have to admit, some of them are pretty good. The dubbing makes it feel more relatable. But when it’s just me, I switch to YouTube or Netflix if the internet is good.”

Participant 22: “We have a connection to KT Vision. I feel like if you are a Mizo, you can never miss DDK Aizawl news. It’s like a ritual at 6:30 PM.”

Participant 19: “We’ve had a smart TV for a while now, but the most watched channel is still a local channel. My younger siblings keep complaining about all the low-quality dubbed movies and series, but they still end up watching because it is played very loudly in the living room.”

5. Internet

Nearly half of the participants have Wi-Fi at home, and all use at least 4G mobile networks. However, they are dissatisfied with both Wi-Fi and mobile internet service as it is too slow, and connectivity drops completely during power outages.

Participant 14: “The internet situation here is a real pain. We have Wi-Fi at home, but it’s useless whenever there’s a power cut, which happens more often than you’d think. Mobile data is our backup, but even that can be patchy. I’ve given up on trying to stream anything during power cuts. It’s either scrolling through memes on low-resolution or nothing.”

Participant 28: “Every time there’s a power outage, I feel like I’m back in the dark ages. We lose Wi-Fi, our mobile network becomes unstable, and suddenly, we’re disconnected from the world. It’s frustrating, especially when I’m in the middle of an online class or watching something interesting.”

Participant 11: “I don’t know why we even bother paying for Wi-Fi. It’s slow, inconsistent, and barely any better than my mobile hotspot. But when it works, it’s a lifesaver. I can download all the stuff I need to watch later when the connection goes down.”

6. Smartphones

Most participants have owned a smartphone for at least five years, considering it their most valued possession. Some college students received their first smartphones as gifts from parents or relatives after completing higher secondary school.

Participant 25: “Getting my first smartphone felt like a rite of passage. It was a basic model, but it meant I could finally join all the WhatsApp groups and see what everyone was talking about. Now, I can’t imagine life without it. It’s where I read the news, chat with friends, and keep up with my favourite influencers.”

Participant 13: “I got my phone when I passed higher secondary. It was a gift from my parents. I remember feeling so excited because it meant more freedom—no more borrowing my cousin’s phone to use WhatsApp or check Instagram.”

Participant 21: “My phone is practically an extension of me. It’s not just a gadget; it’s how I connect with the world. From checking updates on church activities to watching vlogs by my Mizo YouTubers, it’s all there in my pocket.”

7. Social Media

All participants use social media, with WhatsApp being the most popular, followed by YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. They use these platforms for networking, entertainment, shopping, business, learning, and gaming. Popular content includes Mizo YouTubers covering crime, lifestyle vlogs, interviews, and music. Younger participants prefer Instagram, while older ones lean towards Facebook and are often part of news or Christian *WhatsApp* groups. College and small friend groups are common among younger users, and Mizo celebrities are followed regularly on social media. A few have also purchased Mizo movies through OTT services like *Lersia Play*.

Participant 7: “WhatsApp is my most used social media, no doubt about it. Everything goes through WhatsApp—from news and updates to random gossip. I’m part of a few Christian groups and a couple of newsgroups, but I mostly follow what

my friends are saying. It's like having a little community on my phone.”

Participant 20: “YouTube is my go-to for entertainment. I love watching Mizo vlogs, music videos, and lifestyle content. It's like peeking into other people's lives while being entertained at the same time. Instagram is more for the younger crowd, but I pop in once in a while to see what's trending.”

Participant 4: “Instagram is where I follow all the fashion and beauty trends. Facebook feels outdated now, like something our parents use. I check in occasionally, but it's not my main source of info. If it's important, someone will share it on WhatsApp anyway.”

8. Language Preferred for Media – Social and Broadcast

Every participant preferred Mizo first for the medium of entertainment and social interaction followed by English.

Participant 6: “Mizo is what I grew up with, and it's the language I'm most comfortable with. Even when I read something or watch videos, I prefer Mizo over anything else. Lai is nice, but it's not something I can use confidently.”

Participant 26: “I'll choose Mizo every time, whether it's for talking, reading, or writing. Lai is a part of who I am, but it feels distant. It's not something I use daily.”

Participant 33: “Mizo just flows more naturally for me. Lai is what my grandparents use, but I can barely keep up. I think most of us feel the same—we know it's important, but it's not our first choice.”

9. Lai Content

Most of them are uninterested in Lai language media content as they do not understand Lai language perfectly. Some don't mind if it is played but will hardly play it themselves.

Participant 15: “I don't mind Lai programs when they're on TV, but I won't go out of my way to watch them. If I have a choice, I'll pick something in Mizo or

English. Lai feels too formal, almost like listening to a lecture.”

Participant 17: “I’ve seen a few Lai videos on YouTube, but they don’t appeal to me. I guess because I’m not fluent, it’s hard to stay interested. I understand bits and pieces, but I’d rather watch something in Mizo.”

Participant 24: “Whenever my dad puts on Lai content, I sort of tune out. It’s not that I don’t respect it—it’s just not engaging for me. I think it’s the same for a lot of people my age. We’ll listen if someone else plays it, but we don’t choose it ourselves.”

10. Discussion of the Status of Media in the LADC

There are several opinions on the status of media produced in the LADC. There was dissatisfaction with the overall content of the media in terms of lack of original content and production quality.

Participant 10: “There’s a lot of potential here, but the quality of the content needs to improve. The reporting is often biased or just plain boring. If there were better visuals and more dynamic reporting, I think people would be more interested.”

Participant 31: “The media here feels very limited. We don’t have much choice when it comes to what we can watch or read. Even online, it’s like the same stories keep getting recycled.”

Participant 29: “I think more local voices need to be heard, especially in the media. It’s all the same perspectives, and sometimes it doesn’t reflect what’s happening. We need more diversity in what’s being covered.”

11. Tlangau

Tlangau is still the most trusted form of mass communication for the Lai in Mizoram. It has proven to be relevant for different generations.

Participant 34: “Everyone still listens to Tlangau. It’s kind of funny how even with all this technology, it’s still the most reliable way to get local news. If you miss Tlangau, you miss out on what’s happening.”

Participant 1: “I never thought I’d say this, but Tlangau is still king when it comes to local updates. It’s where we get news that matters to us—community announcements, emergencies, you name it.”

Participant 23: “Even if I’m scrolling on my phone, I’ll pause if I hear Tlangau announcements. It’s become so ingrained in our routine that no matter how advanced we get, Tlangau will still be relevant.”

These narratives provide a deeper understanding of the participants’ relationship with media in Lawngtlai, revealing both their preferences and the challenges they face in accessing and engaging with various forms of media.

4.6 Media Mapping in Sangau

There is one MJA Lawngtlai District member in Sangau – FC Vanlalzawna. One print media – *Chhimthli* is present. There is one cable television operator called *ZL Vision* and one sub-operator, *CT Vision*. There are several inactive and defunct print media like *Chhawkhlei Times* and *The Phongpi Post*. *Tluanglianhang*, a reporter for an online news website *The Chin Post* also resides in Sangau.

4.6.1 Print Media

1. *Chhimthli*

Editor: Maliana Zathang

Layout: A3 two-paged laser-printed newspaper in black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: 35806/91NE1308 Social Media: *WhatsApp* groups

Chhimthli (meaning southern storm) was started by Ronunga Zathanga (L) aka R. Zathang in the year 1970s in Lunglei as a daily newspaper. He shifted his operation to Lawngtlai Council Veng and had an RNI Registration: MIZMIZ00262 of 53806 Lawngtlai on 17/9/1991 from where he continued to publish the newspaper on and off till his demise in 2010. It is considered to be the first newspaper from Lawngtlai District. The father of R. Zathang is Z. Hengmang who is among the few crucial leaders who were instrumental in the formation of the Pawi-Lakher Regional

Council (PLRC) which eventually led to the establishment of the LADC.

After 11 years since *Chhimthli* met its demise, Sangau, a village 140 kilometres northeast of Lawngtlai saw its revival in 2019. Maliana Zathang, the eldest son of R. Zathang who had served as a Havildar in the Indian Army till his superannuation in 2019 took it upon himself to continue in his father's footsteps. The first edition of *Chhimthli* which is now a bi-weekly newspaper came out in June 2019 from Sangau, the hometown of Maliana Zathang's grandfather Z Hengmang.

I met Maliana Zathang in December 2021 at his Assam-type house located in Sangau III locality which also served as an office for *Chhimthli*. He studied till matriculation and joined the Indian and after his despatch, Maliana Zathang lives alone in his house which has a small convenience shop which he rented to an elderly woman. There are two desktop computers in the living room which is also the workspace for him and one co-worker of his two staff. K. Chhawnkima, the Joint Editor is located in Serchhip town (a district capital 134.4 kilometres north of Sangau) and Lalhmahruaia, the News Editor. The Joint Editor who works from a distance does the formatting and the overall layout is paid a monthly salary of Rs.5000 and they usually correspond by email or Whatsapp. One cannot tell that it is a print office if not for the two computers and an array of scattered papers of old editions of newspapers on a small table. A laser printer placed near one of the desktops is used to print 200 copies of the newspaper which is usually done by 1 a.m. One subscription for one month is Rs.50 The windows in the office boast an unobstructed view of *Phawngpui Tlang* also known as *Blue Mountain*, the highest mountain in Mizoram which is indeed a sight to behold.



Figure 30. Home of Chhimthli editor.



Figure 31. Workstation of Chhimthli editor.

Government offices are the biggest circulation and he posts the PDF version in WhatsApp groups he created under the same name as the newspaper. He also posts them in other newsgroups where he is a participant.

Although he had maintained *Chhimthli* for the past three years, Maliana is not a member of the MJA Lawngtlai. He has not received any advertisements from the LADC either. He begins his work hours at around 10 AM and checks the I&PR website from his computer and from then on browses through multiple *Whatsapp* groups via *Whatsapp Web* to try and find if there are newsworthy to be reported. The participants of these groups range from government officials, church leaders, school

headmasters and village leaders. WhatsApp is the most time-efficient way for group communication. E-mail isn't used that much because it is harder to use and it needs too much data. After a quick browse through the groups, he will call and confirm the information posted from the source and draft them for publication. In most cases, the prominent members of the Whatsapp groups are the ones he'll seek for confirmation, especially in the neighbouring small villages where there are no concerned government officials. On events happening inside Sangau village, he'll go out and try to take ground reports and a picture with his Canon DSLR camera. Some days he'll make a quick visit to government offices to get information to be added in print. He also hired one boy who distributes paper early in the morning. If there is a power cut in the village during the preparation of the print, they would strive to finish at least the PDF copies with the inverter power as it cannot power his printer.

I asked him why he chose to publish *Chhimthli* in Mizo instead of Lai, the language most predominantly used in Sangau and he said, "I can speak and write in both Mizo and Lai but the population of the village is just not enough to cater to. If I print it in Lai, I would lose readers who do not understand the language. To sustain the future of *Chhimthli* and also to honor the legacy of my father, I choose to publish it in Mizo." I wondered aloud if catering to such a small population is profitable after cutting the costs of employees and printing expenses with no advertisements from the government and he admitted, "Honestly, I have not made much profit from the newspaper. There are months when it does not even cover the production costs let alone any profit but my passion keeps me going. Many times my pension funds are what keep the business afloat." When I asked what sort of feedback he received from the locals, he said, "I get great verbal and moral support everywhere I go. Even the lesser income households are subscribing if I go there and ask them to subscribe. Sometimes, I get feedback from the subscribers if I make mistakes. Although the PDF is free for the participants in my Whatsapp group, I often get remuneration from some readers from time to time." "The problems I faced are irregular payment of subscription fees, high costs of paper and printing materials, frequent power supply and unstable internet connection which hurt the publication as it costs a lot of time and energy to bring out even one issue," he added.

4.6.2 Defunct Print Media in Sangau

1. *Chhawkhlei Times*

Editor: F.C.Vanlalzawna

Layout: A3 sized black and white, two pages Language: Mizo and Lai

RNI registration: Nil

Social Media: inactive website

Another bi-weekly newspaper *Chhawkhlei Times*, a bilingual publication used to be circulated from Sangau. Started in 2003, its publication has been stopped indefinitely since 2019 due to many reasons. The Editor is FC Vanlalzawna and also the publisher, owner and layout designer of the newspaper. He is one of the Accredited Journalists from Lawngtlai District and an MJA Lawngtlai member. The newspaper is named after a type of rhododendron flower called *Chhawkhlei* which blooms in *Phawngpui Tlang* – the highest mountain in Mizoram which is visible from Sangau.

I visited the home of FC Vanlalzawna in December 2021 to talk about his media ventures as he is also the owner of *ZL Vision* – a cable television network provider. He lives in a Vengthar locality in a Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) home which he shares with his parents and his family. By looking at the condition of their home, it is clear that they are one of the higher-income families compared to the rest of the village. He was born in 1982 and has a bachelor's degree in Commerce from Shillong College under North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). Apart from owning a newspaper and cable television network, he also holds multiple media roles as a reporter for *Zonet* and *LPS* and also sends reports to *Doordarshan Kendra Aizawl* on request. They were in the process of moving into their newly constructed home so he said that he does not have a private office yet. The basement of their building is made as an office for cable television.

Chhawkhlei Times did not have an RNI registration. During my visit, I was told of the many reasons why the publication was halted by Vanlalzawna, “I was the only one who worked on *Chhawkhlei Times* and I had so many responsibilities. It is

hard to give priority to the newspaper because it is just not a lucrative business even though I am very passionate about it. Sometimes we don't even receive 50% of the subscription fees." At one point in time, they had a readership of 1500 copies not only in Sangau and the neighbouring villages like Diltlang, Bungtlang and even Lawngtlai. It does not help that Vanlalzawna is also a church deacon in his local church and a leader in the church's youth fellowship. He is also a Secretary in Mizo National Front (MNF) Lawngtlai District and had hoped for a party ticket in the 2021 LADC Election but was denied. He is the only MNF Office Bearer from Sangau area.

The publication of *Chhawkhlei Times* saw many stages in terms of publication. At one point, he used to send his finished draft by email to *Tawrhbawm Offset* from Aizawl who then sent the prints to Sangau via the morning sumo which reached Sangau at around 3-4 in the evening. The newspaper which is a broadsheet size four sheet paper is distributed around the village by a delivery boy. Other villages were also sent directly from Aizawl. Later on, he printed from his home with a dot-matrix printer on A3 size papers. "I had wanted the best print quality for my newspaper but to get it printed in Aizawl was not just a viable option in the long run and I had to manually print it in my office. I had to reduce the size and yet my printer would crash and overheat in the middle of printing which was very frustrating. The constant power supply cuts and lack of papers in the local market were also other obstacles I faced," he said. On *Chhawkhlei Times* being a bilingual publication, he said, "The majority of the content was in Mizo because most of the audiences, even in Sangau are not fluent in Lai. We could only dedicate one page out of the four to Lai because there is just not enough content to print weekly in Lai. Some local writers submit articles in Lai and I just fill the extra space with the Lai Grammar section. I constantly urge the readers to contribute writing in Lai but it was not effective at times."

Chhawkhlei Times has not been in circulation for a couple of years and the editor does not have an archive of old copy.

2. *The Phongpi Post*

Editor: Salai Vanramdinmawi on behalf of *The Phongpi Foundation*

Layout: A3 sized 4 pages printed in black and white Language: Lai

RNI registration: Nil Social Media: Nil

The Lai writers from Sangau who used to submit articles to *Chhawkhlei Times* felt the need for an exclusive Lai publication and thus born *Phongpi Post* (Lai name for Phawngpui Tlang), a bi-monthly newsletter published under the name of *Phongpi Phu (The Phongpi Foundation)*.

The Phongpi Post was started in 2017 as an official organ of *The Phongpi Foundation* – a foundation started by Rev. Lianchhawn, an immigrant from Myanmar. The foundation started from a *Whatsapp* group whose participants share the same concern about the decline of Lai culture and language among the Lai in Mizoram. It has 357 members and they had a *Phongpi Foundation Annual Meet* in 2017. Their other initiatives include composing Lai songs to produce Lai television content.

The Phongpi Post is a black and white 4 paged newspaper which was in circulation from 2017 to 2019. They were a team of 14 editorial board members with Salai C. Vanramdinmawi as the Editor-in-Chief.

The Editor-in-Chief, Salai C. Vanramdinmawi in an interview at his home in Sangau Vengthar said that the journal was meant to promote and propagate the LaiHolh (Lailanguage). “The publication was prepared in Sangau where the editorial board worked in unison to collect and produce reports of events – local, state, national and sports in Lai,” he said on how the team worked together. Since there is no printing press in the village, they send the *Adobe Pagemaker* file to *Technosis Chaltlang*, a printing press in Aizawl through *Whatsapp* or *Gmail* where 1000 copies were printed and sent back on an Aizawl-Sangau sumo service. The subscription fee is Rs.20 per month and 1 dollar per month for PDF format. There is a large audience from the Lai/Chin diaspora living in other parts of the world – Malaysia, Australia and the United States who subscribe to the publication through PDF which is sent via

email. “Although we printed 1000 copies we managed to sell only around 300 copies in Lawngtlai – the headquarters of LADC, he said with a stress on Lawngtlai being the ADC headquarters but no interest in Lai publication at all,” Vanramdinmawi said. He added that the editorial board had no salary from the publication as they had voluntarily participated in the editorial board with a clear goal of advocating Lai Holh. The first page mostly contains news reports on Mizoram news with LADC region news in the smaller segments.



Figure 32. A single issue of Phongpi Post.

On news reporting, he said, “We tried to highlight news mostly concerning the Lai people of Mizoram and the Chins of Myanmar... Mizoram news is not hard to get but for the Chin news, we build rapport with Chin publications and news websites in Myanmar like *The Chin Land Post*, *The Hakha Post* and *The Dhaka*

Times through Facebook and Gmail and they allowed us to use their reports. We also have news sources from the Lai/Chin Diaspora in Delhi, Malaysia, Australia and the United States.” When I asked if they had faced any problems with writing Lai Holh he said, “There is a major dilemma with the fluency of Lai Holh even among the editorial board. Most of us don’t study Lai Ca in schools but we refer to the Lai Bible written in Hakha Lai – a dialect of the Lai language.”

On the demise of *Phongpi Post*, Vanramdinmawi said, “We could not generate enough revenue to sustain the newsletter and since most of us worked as volunteers, we could not keep on financing with our own money. People who read some issues liked what we published but not enough people cared. The majority of the Lai in Lawngtlai do not even know their language and we could not sell it to them.”

Apart from *Chhimthli*, there are no regular newspapers in the Sangau area. There is no printing press and no physical bookstores. There are two stationary shops where they sell notebooks but there are no regular books for sale. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the proliferation of *Vanglaini*, Mizoram’s most popular and celebrated daily newspaper which would reach the village by mid-day via sumo service and delivered in the evening by an agent. Although there have been many attempts by media enthusiasts to nurture print culture in Sangau, they eventually failed to succeed due to reasons such as lack of manpower, irregular power supply, lack of readership, scarcity in print technologies and eventually lack of revenue.

However, church publications from the LIKBK, Baptist Church of Mizoram, Presbyterian Church of India and United Pentecostal Church reached the village and are distributed regularly. These publications are of different methods varieties – weekly, monthly and yearly in the form of newspapers, newsletters, booklet and reports. Each denomination has several publications which cater to certain age groups – children, youth, women and the whole family. These publications are printed in the church’s headquarters mostly in Aizawl and Lunglei. They are distributed through the channel of church offices to ministers and local church

agents. These publications cost little and it can be said that every household in Sangau has a subscription to at least one church publication.

4.7 Broadcast Media in Sangau

Broadcast media in Sangau is solely concentrated on cable television as there are no radio stations in the village. Television is a common commodity in most homes in and around Sangau and is enabled by local cable television operators.

There are two 2 cable television operators - *ZL Vision* and *LPS Sub Operator*.

1. *ZL Vision*

The first local cable television network was started on 19th January 2000 with the postal registration CATV/86/AZL. It is a family-owned business where the eldest son of the family F.Lalsangzela is the registered owner. However, the actual management and daily production are undertaken by F.C. Vanlalzawna, the youngest son in the family who was born in the year 1982 who is also the publisher and owner of *Chhawkhlei Times*, the aforementioned weekly newspaper and the local correspondent for *Zonet Cable* based in Aizawl.

The control room of *ZL Vision* is located in the basement of F.C. Vanlalzawna's family home in Sangau Vengthar. During my visit to their home, the workers were assembling a huge satellite dish on the front porch which is meant to receive more stable signals for the television channels as I am told by the manager. The control room in the basement of the house looks like an unfinished house construction with exposed brick walls and partitions made of Silpauline and plywood. There are traces of analogue technology which are considered scraps as they are replaced with newer technology years ago. Most of the broadcasting technologies are NXT Digital. There is neither studio nor proper seating area for the workers. The manager told me that they usually cater to the consumers' needs and queries in their home – mainly their living room and the available adult member of the family will be the customer care.



Figure 33. The family home of ZL Vision owner.



Figure 34. ZL Vision control room.

Before the digitization of cable television in India back in 2016, ZL Vision had 47 channels – 6 local channels and two regular employees who were paid Rs. 6000 monthly. It gave around 1050 connections in Sangau and its neighbouring villages of Pang Khua, Thaltlang, Sentetfiang, Lungtian and Vartek. Connection fees were Rs. 250 per month. The channels were pre-selected by ZL Vision which mainly consists of local channels, free channels and other paid channels like Star channels and Zee Channels etc. Local channels would run till 11 at night and Zone Zawlbuk- the only Mizo satellite channel would broadcast overnight. Apart from the connection fees, advertisements are broadcast on local channels in the form of scroll messages displayed at the bottom of the screen. Advertisement rates were usually Rs.

250 for government clients and Rs. 50-200 for private customers or as negotiated with the manager.

For the mandatory digitization of cable television in India, *ZL Vision* had to start from scratch. The manager F.C. Vanlalzawna said, “The transition from analogue to the digitization of cable television costs a huge amount of money and labour. We had to discard almost all of our equipment which was in good condition and buy new and more expensive gear to continue the business. If it were not for my mother’s pension, we would not have sufficient funds to move towards digitization.”

Digitization has however made changes in the way they operate the business. The cable now has 1700 subscribers from Sangau and its neighbouring villages. These neighbouring villages have sub-operators who take shares of the subscription fees as their earnings. They provide 20 Mizo channels currently. 13 channels are provided by Zonet Cable Television which is broadcast from Aizawl and 7 in-house local channels which are broadcast in 720p resolutions. The local channels are named *ZL Vision Home*, *ZL Vision Kids*, *ZL Vision Lengzem*, *ZL Vision Gospel*, *ZL Vision* and some unnamed ones.

The contents of the local channels are mostly dubbed Hindi, Korean and Turkish serials which they bought in a DVD format from vendors in Aizawl. *ZL Vision Gospel* is mostly dedicated to English, Mizo and Lai gospel music videos. *ZL Vision Lengzem* broadcasts love songs in English, Mizo and Lai. Sometimes, Korean music videos are also played. *ZL Vision Kids* is a channel where content deemed appropriate for kids is broadcast. They are mostly nursery rhymes, cartoons and skits downloaded from YouTube. *ZL Vision Home* is where they broadcast their content like – interviews of Lai’s prominent persons mainly politicians and singers by the manager which is usually filmed in his living room home. *Mipuite Hlathlan* – a segment where a host interacts with people and asks them to select a song which will be played in a program aired on the same night or the next day. These are done on gospel and love songs. These are not live programs. They also provide live coverage of any big occasion like church conventions and political rallies. The live coverage is done if such programs take place in Sangau only.

He then went on about how they used to provide a designated Lai channel where Lai contents are played exclusively but that too has been stopped after the digitization of the cable television network. The Lai channel broadcast music videos, dubbed movies and serials in Lai which are mostly created in the district. Some contents from the Chin Hills of Myanmar were also sold to them by vendors who would come to their office and offer such choices in the form of DVDs. This was way before proper internet connections were available to them. *ZL Vision* was the source of most Lai content and other cable television operators from Lawngtlai and Siaha would source it from them.

Two of the local channels whose main contents are music videos are streamed directly from YouTube. Unlike in the analogue era, customers now can choose the package a la carte. The package ranges from Rs. 250, Rs.350 and Rs. 459. The lowest package which is also the most popular one includes the 20 local channels, free-to-air channels and preselected channels such as CNN, cartoon and sports channels. The medium package is Rs. 350 and it includes the local channels, free channels and ZEE and STAR channels. There are around 1700 connections at the moment which also includes less active connections.

At the time of my fieldwork in Sangau, there were more than a thousand Myanmar refugees and when I asked the manager if they had sought a cable television connection to *ZL Vision*, he said, “Most of the refugees do not have cable television because they have not been here for long and they do not understand Mizo language which is what most of your local channels are broadcast in. A handful of them are our consumers and I have included broadcast *INP Mizo* – a Youtube channel to provide more coverage on political news.”

INP Mizo stands for ‘International News and Politics in Mizo language’ and is managed by G. Songate based in Aizawl who is the news editor and the video editor of the channel. The channel mainly posts 10-20 minutes of political news narrated in Mizo. I found it a bit odd that the manager of *ZL Vision* had added a Mizo YouTube channel to cater to the customers who are Myanmar refugees but he said, “Only those who have an understanding of Mizo language to some degree are

connected to our cable. So, it is a wise choice to broadcast a Mizo politics channel because we do not provide even Lai channels at the moment.” He added, “The refugees who speak the Lai dialect of Thantlang fit right in our society because it is similar to what we use in Sangau. Some of them speak in Halkha which is similar to our local Lai language but it is harder to converse with them.”

ZL Vision currently feeds the nearby villages like South Vanlaiphai, Darzo, Pang Khua, Thaltang, Sentetfiang, Cheural, Rawlbuk, Vartek and Lungtian. There is one sub-operator in South Vanlaiphai who is remunerated by a share in the number of connections it garnered. They could also provide higher resolution channels if so wished by their customers. In regards to the management of the business, the manager adds, “The new and digitized system is more regulated by the government wherein we pay much more tax than before. We also bought more pay channels to diversify the channel options but it’s a losing game with a population as little as ours. However, we have more control over the connection fees as it has become easier to terminate a connection in case of negligence in payment of connection fees.

Including the manager and his brother, there are 6 employees. They mostly work as linemen who set up new connections and are mostly there for damage control. They also duty in the control room and are in charge of creating a playlist and scheduling programs for the local channels. They are paid 6000-7000 per month.

2. *LPS Sub Operator – CT Vision*

Apart from *ZLVision*, there is another cable television provider but in the form of a sub-operator for *LPS Vision* -one of the first cable television network providers in Mizoram who are based in Aizawl. This sub-operation started in March 2020 and is owned by C. Lalroliana of Sangau II locality also known as Vengthar. He is the head of his family and has a diploma in Computer Application and also owns a stationary and flex printing shop. The *LPS Sub Operator* gives connections to about 160 households – from Sangau and Pang Khua. Although it works as a sub-operator now, the owner has big plans for the business. In an interaction in his stationary shop in Sangau Vengthar, he said, “The COVID-19 pandemic halted the

progress of the business so much that although we planned to be a full-fledged cable television network provider with the name *CT Vision*, we could only function as a sub-operator right now. We are currently undergoing registration in Aizawl and Lawngtlai. We, however, have registered ourselves under the Mizoram Cable TV Association.”

The LPS sub-operator does not have any local channels of their own other than the 14 LPS channels broadcast from the LPS headquarters in Aizawl. For every connection, they submitted Rs.100 to LPS Vision in Aizawl. They also provide other channels such as STAR and ZEE channels which are mostly sports, entertainment and children-centered channels. The packages come in three options – Rs. 250 (LPS channels + free channels), Rs. 350 (LPS channels + free channels + ZEE and STAR channels) and Rs. 400 (LPS channels free channels+ ZEE and STAR channels in HD) The owner said that the Rs.350 package proves to be the most common package among the customers. They do not have any control over the content of media which is broadcast on their cable television.

The operation does not have a proper office but the printing shop acts as a complaint and bill payment center. The equipment and hardware are stored in the basement of the owner’s Assam-type home in Sangau II. Just by looking at the building, there is no evidence that they are cable television network providers. There are two workers – one line duty and one fee collector who are paid Rs 5000 per month. Out of their 160 subscribers, only 70% of them have paid connection fees regularly. When I asked why they choose to set up another cable television network provider in a small village such as Sangau when there has been one since 2000, C. Lalroliana answered, “We are the largest Lai-speaking community in Mizoram but we still don’t have proper media which caters to our unique community. Lai print media cannot sustain itself and I feel that a Lai channel is a more viable option for propagating and safeguarding our language. We have plans to create and produce as much Lai content as possible in the future when we become a full-fledged cable television network provider.”

4.8 Media Reporters

- 1. FC Vanlalzawna for Zonet** - Interactions already mentioned above.
- 2. *The Chin Post* reporter *Tluanglianthang***

The Chin Post is a Lai/Chin digital media platform started in 2019 by the Chin diaspora from countries like Myanmar, India, South Korea and Australia. They have an active YouTube, Facebook page and a website all under the name of *The Chin Post*. The YouTube channel *The Chin Post TV* is their most active medium with more than 4900 subscribers and 340 videos as of May 2023. On average, one or two videos are posted daily which are mostly 12-15 minute news segments and special ground reports mainly on those affected by the Myanmar military coup. There is even one 26-minute speech video of the Commander of Chin Defence Army from Kalay Kabaw Gangaw (CDF-KKG). The Facebook page – *The Chin Post* bears the motto ‘Media Hmangin Miphun Caah Rian tuan!’ which translates to uniting our people through media. Here ‘our people’ means the Lai-Chin population from all over the world. The Facebook page mostly shares their latest YouTube videos and the latest news concerning the Lai-Chin population.

Their CEO is Salai CP Lian who is based in Australia and has a partnership with Elvy, based in South Korea. *The Chin Post* rented an office in Aizawl as its main office with 4 office workers – 2 newsreaders, 1 cameraman and 1 editor who are all employed on a yearly contract basis. They have 3 correspondents in Myanmar who are working under the radar to report on the ground reality of a country in a coup.

The only correspondent outside of Aizawl is Tluanglianthang, a 29-year-old bachelor living in Sangau. He works from his bedroom in Sangau IV locality and I met him there to talk about his work. Born in Haka (Halkha) village of Chin Hills in Myanmar, his family moved to Sangau when he was just a little boy. He is fluent in Hakha/Lai language as he had studied it in Sunday school back in Chin Hills. He has a Bachelor’s degree in Commerce and was recruited through an online interview with the founders and from October 2021, he joined *The Chin Post*. He is not

registered in MJA nor has plans to join the journalistic body anytime soon. Tluanglianthang said that he had almost forgotten how to read and write fluently in Hakha/Lai language but he continued practicing through a Chin Bible which helped him grasp better into the language. Work benefits include a starting salary of Rs.10000 and TA and DA are provided when on assignment. All the workers communicate daily in the Lai language through WhatsApp group but for more important issues, formal communication is done through Facebook Messenger or Zoom which usually takes place once a month.

Each correspondent has to report at least three news items a day. Tluanglianthang told me that through *The Chin Post*, they aim to broadcast more on the issues of Myanmar and Mizoram with a focus on the Lai-Chin news. With the current hostile environment in Myanmar, the news reports are done incognito to ensure the safety of the reporters. Salary is sent to one office worker through Western Union and distributed locally through Google Pay. Commending the initiative of *The Chin Post*, they have often received donations from the Chin diaspora all over the world which helps in running the operation smoothly.

I met Tluanglianthang in his rented home in Sangau III locality where he lives with his family. It is an RCC building but the basement where Tluanglianthang lives with his family has walls made of rusted tin roofs and it can be seen that it would be too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. The inside is neatly organised and there are two bedrooms separated by curtains which act as partitions for rooms. Tluanglianthang had used the table next to his bed as his workstation. He has a laptop and an Android smartphone which he used for his daily reporting.



Figure 35. Home of The Chin Post reporter.



Figure 36. The workspace of The Chin Post reporter Tluanglianthang.

When I asked if it is difficult to work in the house when there are other family members at home, he said, “I try to work during the day when my family is away at work on our vegetable farmland. But, sometimes I have to work at night when everyone is around and I just put on my earphones and try to finish my duties.” What hinders his reporting more than lack of privacy in his home is the irregular power supply which tends to last days at times. “On such days, the internet connection is gone and I would have to go to the home of friends and family who

have inverters or generators to charge my devices. I used to be afraid that my employers would think that I had vanished during times as such,” adds Tluanglianthang.

When I asked how they maintain the objectivity of their reports and the content of a medium whose sole existence is to cater to the Lai-Chin population, he said, “Media ethics such as unbiased reporting, censoring of victims’ identities, refraining from sensationalizing news have been what our founders iterated in every single meeting as what we report is often a sensitive topic which transcends many nations and could potentially put people in danger. Last year we had a one-week seminar on media ethics with Pastor Lianchhawn as the resource person. It is safe to say that we are trying our best to report what is true in the most sensitive way.”

4.9 Media Usage and Preferences of the Lai People in Sangau

Two FGDs with 12 participants each were conducted among the Lai language-speaking community of Sangau. All the participants are fluent or at least have a working knowledge of Lai both in reading and writing. This is done to add the media usage perspective of the Lai native speakers. The participants were of different age groups from teenagers and pensioners from different walks of life. It was conducted in Mizo. Some recurring themes from the FGDs conducted in Lawngtlai are not presented here to avoid redundancy.

1. Lai Media Preferred

When asked which type of media they prefer to watch, read, or listen to, all participants unanimously expressed a preference for Lai content, lamenting the lack of access to such media.

Participant 3: “I would love to see more content in Lai. Right now, we hardly have anything, and most of the media I consume is in Mizo or English. It feels like we do not have any representation of media.”

Participant 9: “We need more Lai-language media. It’s frustrating that we don’t have many options, and even when we do, it’s mostly online-based. Even my

parents feel the same way. My mother always asks me to help her download Lai music videos from YouTube on her phone.”

Participant 21: “I wish we had more channels or newspapers in Lai. Back then we used to see Lai content on television but in recent years, the Lai channel has been stopped too.”

2. Online Media and Church – The Sources of Lai Media

Online media platforms like *YouTube* and LIKBK church publications are the primary sources for accessing Lai-language content. Occasionally, publications from the **LIKBK** feature articles or sermons in Lai, but these instances are sporadic. Furthermore, not all the people are from the LIKBK denominations and have no access to printed forms of Lai material other than the Lai Bible.

Participant 5: “Most of the Lai content I come across is online, but it’s not consistent. Sometimes the church’s publications have articles in Lai, but they’re not frequent and mostly to brush up my reading skills, I resort to reading the Lai Bible.”

Participant 12: “I follow a few Lai YouTube channels, but for reading, I rely on church newsletters whenever they include Lai pieces. My reading speed is very slow because I have gone out of practice.”

3. Online Conversations Mostly in Lai

Participants shared that Lai is not only used in daily face-to-face interactions but is also the preferred language for online conversations. Whether it’s chatting on social media, messaging apps, or even simple interpersonal communications, Lai remains the go-to language.

Participant 7: “Even when I message my friends on *WhatsApp* or Facebook, I use a less formal version of Lai. It feels more natural, like talking in person.”

Participant 15: “Most of our group chats are in Lai and Mizo — but I think we use Lai much more often.

CHAPTER V

MEDIA IN THE CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL (CADC)

There are no active print publications, MJA members or cable television operators in the CADC area during the period of the study. Kamalanagar, the headquarters of the CADC also known as Chawngte ‘C’ is located within walking distance of Chawngte ‘P’ (which is under the LADC area) and Chawngte ‘L’ (which is a part of Lunglei District). These three Chawngte are divided by small rivers – *Tuichawng* and *Chawngte Lui* but they share many public facilities like the vegetable market and a government college. Chawngte L has one cable television operator and Chawngte P has one *Zonet* reporter. Although these are not technically a part of the CADC they are included in the mapping of media in the CADC because of the geographical advantages shared by the three Chawngte due to their proximity to each other. In the narration, Chawngte area is used at times to mention the three Chawngte areas.

5.1 Mapping of Media in the CADC including Chawngte L and Chawngte P

There is one cable television operator in Chawngte L under the name of *HD Vision*. There is also a news reporter for *Zonet* and his name is Omeg Lalramkinlova.

5.1.1 Profile of the Lone Cable TV Sub Operator in the Chawngte area – *HD Vision*

HD Vision (H.D. stands for *Hmar Darngawn* – the surname of the owner) is a *Zonet* sub-operator based in Chawngte L owned by H.D. Lalrinnggheta whose wife worked as an Assistant Professor at Government Kamalanagar College. The family is originally from Lunglei but has shifted to Chawngte L due to the wife’s job posting. The operation is done from their home which serves as the office and network centre. Their home was a two-bedroom, one bathroom and one living room Assam-type house.



Figure 37&38. Broadcasting materials at HD Vision.

HD Vision was started in March 2013 and used to provide 36 Indian channels and 5 local channels.

Following the order by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 (Amendment Act, 2011) to end all Analog Cable TV and convert to Digital Addressable System (DAS), cable television network providers in Mizoram were also informed by the Mizoram Government General Administration Department (GAD) to convert to digitization, they no longer have local channels of their own but only provides channels given by *Zonet Cable TV*. Lalrinnggheta explains, “After the digitization of cable television, we had to upgrade all our equipment and that cost us around close to 25 lakh which we took as a loan so in the end we just did not have the means to spend more on infrastructure for our local channels like before.”

They are now a *Zonet* sub-operator and they provide only paid channels and Mizo channels provided by *Zonet*. “It was mostly music videos, dubbed movies, sermons and the occasional live coverage of church programs. We also did all sorts

of vox populi type programs where the audience sent us a test message about any topic of the society and we hired someone to read them aloud. It was always a fun and popular program, especially during the elections. We would also broadcast scroll advertisements under the local channels, said the owner of the content they used to broadcast on their local channels back in the day,” said Lalrinnggheta.

Indeed, it is not as easy for smaller cable television network providers to broadcast channels of their own. Stable internet is required to broadcast local channels which I am told is a privilege in the area. *H.D. Vision* is now essentially a sub-operator for *Zonet Cable TV* rather than a cable television of its own. The basement of their home which once was used as an office with two workers has been turned into a storage room with remnants of the analogue days. Now, they don’t have any permanent workers only a technician which they call from time to time. They have different channel packs to choose from which range from Rs. 300 – 450 and include 13 Zonet channels – *Zonet Zawlbuk*, *Zonet Beiseina*, *Zonet Rinna*, *HruainaEng*, *Bawhbel*, *Nauban*, *Senhri*, *Daifim*, *Dingdi*, *Nihawi*, *Rihnim*, *Rinawi*, *IMEM* and 1 Doordarshan (DD) channel. *H.D.* They paid Rs. 3000 for *Zonet Zawlbuk*. These *Zonet* channels with DD are included in every package that they offer. The other options are *STAR*, *Sony*, and *Colours Infinity*, among others. They have around 400 subscribers from Chawngte L, Chawngte P, Chawngte C, Theiriat and Lungrang villages. Only around 40 households were their consumers from Chawngte C as there are fewer Mizo speakers and most of their consumers are Government of Mizoram officials – workers from Mizoram government offices, Chawngte Community Health Centre workers and Mizoram Police.

When I asked if digitization has proven to be beneficial in any way, Mawitei said that there are fewer due bills as the consumers have to clear their bills to use the services. “The main problem we faced during the analogue era was the unpaid bills that we could not just terminate in fear of losing clients. But now, if they don’t pay, they won’t be able to watch television so it has lessened our headache,” she added.

It is evident that *H.D.Vision* caters only to the Mizo-speaking population of the region and with the current stage of digitization; it is beyond their means to

provide a television broadcast outlet ever for their consumers. What is shown on their television is dictated by *Zonet Cable TV* which is 370 kilometers away from them. There has been no localized form of content since 2017. Without the means to broadcast local content, there is no need to hire creators which proved to be a lot less work for the owners who are receiving the monthly subscription fees without fail. Cable television is just another form of investment, a constant source of revenue rather than a creative outlet.

5.1.2 DTH Services

Kamalanagar town from a brief look shows that there is a great economic disparity as the houses from the same lane show huge variations. The majority of the houses were Assam-type houses with layers of dust which were often neighbours with two or three-story concrete buildings. However, such houses of different stature have one thing in common – satellite dish antennas of different DTH (direct-to-home) providers, most commonly *Tata Sky*.



Figure 39. Dusty Assam-type houses with DTH dishes in Kamalanagar.



Figure 40. Concrete houses with DTH dishes.

There are a couple of DTH service providers in Kamalanagar who carry the hardware needed for the connection of such services. Most of the Chakma are connected to one such service.

After the proliferation of cable television in Mizoram during the early 1990s, Mizo-speaking households throughout the state were constant consumers of cable television. District headquarters soon saw its local cable television network and thus witnessed the cable television culture we see today. In Kamalanagar, however, the majority of its population being Chakma speakers with little to no knowledge of the Mizo language don't need cable television connection to the local cables as there is much more content to choose from DTH services.

5.2 Mapping of Print Media in the CADC Area

Hitherto my fieldwork, there was no print media in and around the CADC area. There is also no printing press. When there was no present to study, I was adamant about knowing the past of the print media.

With the help of Dr Jyotirmoy Chakma, an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Government Kamalanagar College, who gave me what was a list of the names of newspapers. With that as a lead, I was able to learn about the

history of Chakma print media. He told me that over the years, several attempts have been made by the CADC, Young Chakma Association (YCA) and enthusiasts to publish newspapers or magazines over the past few years but none had stood the test of time. The reason is lack of readership which means a lack of revenue making such an attempt a short-lived one.

Despite the lack of proper records, I visited different branches of CADC and interviewed ex-government employees, ex-editors, and NGO leaders to trace the history of Chakma print media to a certain extent. The following provides a brief history of print media in the CADC.

1 *Sahitya Patrika*

The first known print media published in Kamalanagar was *Sahitya Patrika* (translates to literature newspaper) which was published by Joush Chakma in 1977. Not much can be traced about the newspaper as it existed only for a short period and with the passing of the editor, no documentation was done and old copies of the newspaper could not be found.

2. *Adamor Phor*

The year 1982 saw the arrival of *AdamorPhor* (meaning light of the village), a YCA initiative legal-sized weekly “social education bulletin” as told by a retired District Adult Education Officer Nutun Kumar Chakma, the then editor of the bulletin. He was also a District Circle Adult Officer at that time. During its existence from 1982 – 1986, the medium of publication shifted from handwritten format cyclostyled into multiple copies to typewriter cyclostyle format. It was written in Bengali script and published every Saturday. The contents were mostly local news, government news, news from YCA, and other sources. He said that people used to submit news written in paper and that it was open for all who wanted to contribute content. The circulation reached its peak of 60 copies. “Besides no manpower and no revenue from the bulletin itself; the CADC did not give much importance to the cause and refused to sanction funds in favour of the bulletin,” said Nuthun Kumar Chakma on why the publication came to an end. No old copies of the newspaper

could be found today.

3. *Sallyang*

A weekly newspaper by the name *Sallyang* (meaning starting point) came into existence from 1991 – 1996. The weekly newspaper was run by the Department of Information and Public Relations, CADC, and distributed free of cost around the Kamalanagar area. The newspaper was managed by multiple editors during its existence. As told by Hriday Chakma, one-time editor of the newspaper, *Sallyang* was an A4 or legal sized (size depends on the paper availability) newspaper which was formatted using typewriter stencil and cyclostyles. Like its predecessors, the contents were in Chakma language written in Bengali script, and mostly consisted of local news and government (CADC) news. The contents were screened by the government for approval of publication. The editorial team was the staff of the I&PR who would work during office hours as well as overtime for at least 3 – 4 days to ensure the timely publication of the weekly newspaper. Hurdles that led to the termination of the publication were the shortage of staff, poor printing facilities, and lack of funding along with free distribution leading to zero revenue. There are no surviving copies of *Sallyang* to this day.

4. *Aalam*

After the halt in production of *Sallyang*, the Art and Culture Department of CADC started a short-lived production of *Aalaam* (the name of a particular Chakma cloth weave pattern) in 1997 – 1999, ‘a fortnightly Chakma literary magazine’ as written on the first page of the magazine. The Editor of the magazine was Lakshmi Bushan Chakma more popularly known as LB Chakma, the Art and Culture Officer in the CADC during that time. *Aalaam* was a legal-sized magazine that gave more importance to literature – songs, poetry, short stories, and folklore. Like all the other print media published in Chawngte, it was also written in Chakma language using Bengali script. It was printed by the office staff using the department cyclostyle machine.

According to Lakshi Bushan Chakma whom I met and interviewed in his K-II home, *Aalaam* was instantly popular among the Chakma people and it had a circulation of around 150-200 copies. Although he was one of the few people fluent in Changmah language in writing and speech, LB Chakma said they had to comply with what the general masses could read and write, hence Bengali script had to be adopted to preserve the Chakma literature. The researcher could find three issues of *Aalaam* – Vol II 30th April Issue No. 16, Vol II 15th July 1997 Issue No. 19, and Vol III 15th April Issue No. 29 (a *Bizu* Special Issue). The contents of the magazine are wholly contributed by the readers who submitted their writings to the department staff. The magazines have a cover with the *Aalaam* pattern printed in yellow ink and the word ‘Aalaam’ is written in colourful Bengali script. The inner side of the back cover had Chakma alphabets and the back cover had a hand-drawn map of the Chakma Autonomous District Council area. The first page of the magazine has dates, volume numbers, and details of the editorial members. From the three issues collected by the researcher, the board of editors was usually prominent members of NGOs like Central Young Chakma Association and Chakma Mahila Samiti; Government Kamalanagar College lecturers, and CADC officers.

The circulation management, cover design, typing, binding, and printing were all done by the Art & Culture Department of the CADC. From the existing copies of *Aalaam*, the inside pages of the magazines are printed in black and white except for Vol. No. II, Issue No.16 which is printed in light green and yellow papers. Some pages have hand-drawn illustrations next to the title of the contents and after the last paragraphs. These illustrations are mostly done in the style of drawing borders around the titles accompanied by small drawings of flowers, scenery, books with quills, candles, butterflies, etc. Although the main contents were written in Bengali script, there were small pages where Chakma script was taught.

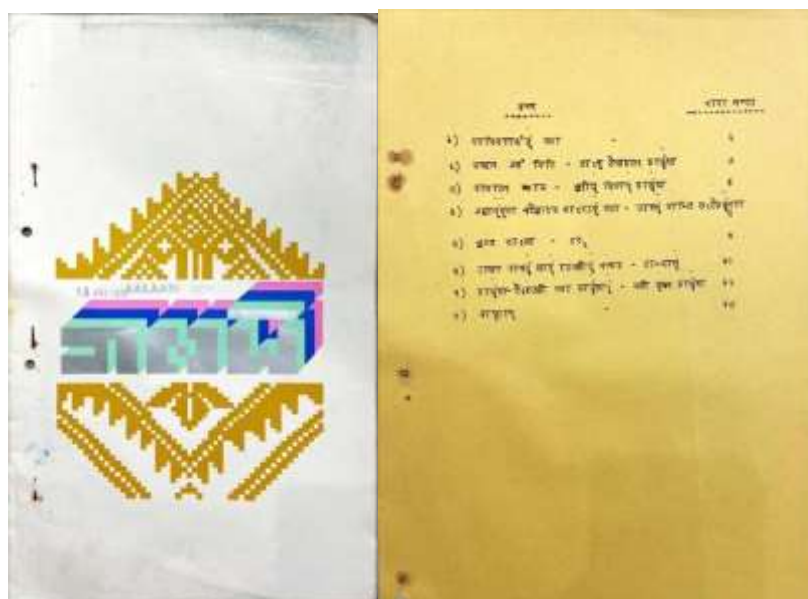


Figure 41. The oldest surviving copy of *Aalam*.

5. *Pogodang*

The next print media to be published was *Pogodang* (meaning announcement). The Editor of the newspaper was Indralal Chakma who has since expired. Family and friends of the editor have said that the newspaper was short-lived, existing for about 6 months to 1 year from 2007 to 2008. Not much information is known about *Pogodang* as there are no surviving copies of the newspaper. It is said to be published in Chakma script which could probably mean that *Pogodang* was the front runner in Chakma script newspaper publication. This claim however could not be verified due to lack of material sources.

6. *Swajak*

The most recent print media to exist was *Swajak* (meaning awareness), an English medium Kamalanagar Weekly newspaper published by the Young Chakma Association. The first issue was published on June 4, 2016, and the last issue was published in March 2019. The weekly newspaper was started under the recommendation of Dr A. Muthamma, IAS, the then District Commissioner of Lawngtlai District and the first Editor-in-Chief was Prabin Chakma, the Public Relations Officer under the CADC. He held the position for a year but passed it on to

Darpan Chakma due to a heavy workload. The editors were appointed by the Chakma Youth Association and the administration was solely placed in the hands of the editors.

As told by Prabin Chakma in an interview in his office, “An inkjet printer and papers were provided by the Central YCA to the editors. We used our laptops to format and design newspapers. The newspaper does not have any formal registration but was published with the permission of the Sub- Sub-Divisional Officer, Chawnge who also provides equipment and stationaries with the hope that *Swajak* will reach self-sustainability. The newspaper was published on weekends and sold for Rs.10 per copy. Three students from poor economic backgrounds were employed to distribute and collect subscription fees with a monthly remuneration of Rs. 1500 per month. It was a single-page newspaper designed using Microsoft Publisher software and printed on legal-sized paper. No specific remuneration was given to the editors and the magazine was published often without any profit due to unpaid subscription fees and production costs.”

Although the editorial board were there for formalities, most of the time, the collection of news, reporting, printing and formatting were often done by the editor himself who had their share of other duties in their profession. During its peak, *Swajak* had a subscription of around 560 copies which fell to around 300 copies towards the end of its publication in March 2019. On why *Swajak* failed to thrive, Prabin Chakma added, “We had a lot of things we could not control – lack of manpower, frequent power cuts, irregular payment of subscription fees leading to low to no profit, and inaccessibility to the general masses because *Swajak* uses English as a medium in a mainly Chakma/Bengali speaking community.”

Regarding its content, *Swajak* was an informative outlet which highlights the major events happening around the CADC area from government initiatives, and political news to NGO activity, community reports and occasional op-ed pieces about Chakma cultures contributed by readers. Due to space constraints, editorials are not regular features to make space for readers’ contributions if it is deemed worthy of publication by the editor. Apart from CADC area news, *Swajak* was a

platform for Chakma Diaspora news reported from other parts of the North East like Aragtala etc. Such news or short articles are sent to the editor via email mentioned in the newspaper or through Whatsapp. Occasional advertisements from private and government were taken with publication fees ranging from Rs 500 – Rs 1500.

The soft copies of *Swajak* are preserved by I&PR Department in different Google Drive.



Figure 42. The first issue of Swajak.

5.3 The CADC Official Organs

Managed by the Information and Public Relations Department, the CADC has multiple official organs solely powered by online media.

1. The CADC Official Website

The CADC official website (<https://www.cadc.gov.in/>) archives date back to 2011 and it contains a brief overview of the government – Covid-19, governance, RTI, activities, recruitment, and gallery. Write up on Chakma culture and tradition,

language, and script written by the LB Chakma – a retired Education Officer could

be found. The website posts press releases 4 or 5 times a month which are written in English by the Information and Public Relations Officer (IPRO) appointed at the time. In a telephone interview with the current Assistant IPRO Suman Chakma, he said that when he was first relocated to the I&PR Department, he initiated the option of adding Chakma language for the website's navigation. The Chakma option is written in Chakma script under the language option and upon clicking it, some of the press releases are translated in Chakma script. On the decision to add the option of Chakma script, Suman Chakma said, "We have a beautiful language that is slowly dying and if we do not include it in our official government website, no one will be able to read or write soon." He also said that they are planning to write more official documents in Chakma script.

2. The CADC Social Media Accounts

The other organs such as the *CADC Official* YouTube channel, *Chakma Autonomous District Council* Facebook page, and *cadcmizoram* Instagram page were officially launched leading to the preparation of the CADC Golden Jubileeinin November 2022. *CADC Official* currently has around 3150 subscribers and 61 videos with more than 337,645 views. The content of the channels is mostly videos of the Golden Jubilee celebration. Their latest video is a 55-minute documentary titled *Chakma Zinghani Gonganir Hideiph - A documentary film on the social and economic life of the Chakmas* which as the title suggests is an insight into the brief history and contemporary life of the Chakmas. It is narrated in Chakma language with English closed captions. Produced by the Department of Social Welfare, CADC, and funded by the CADC Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee. Ashok Chakma, a traditional singer who works as a Cultural Assistant in the Department of Art & Culture wrote, directed, and edited the documentary. Suman Chakma said that Wilderness Films India, an archive video and still production house had reached out to them through the documentary and is in negotiation for other similar projects.

5.4 Meetings and Conversations with Media Creators in the Chawngte Area

Accounts of interaction and conversation with the content creators are narrated to stay true to the ethnographic nature of the research. Apart from Chakma content creators, an interaction with Omeg Lalramkinlova, a resident of Chawngte P and a *Zonet* reporter is included here as his area of reporting includes all the Chakma and CADC areas. Surita Chakma, a Chakma content creator but not a part of Lawngtlai District or the CADC area is also included because *YouTube* vlogs of her visit to Chawngte are very popular among the people of the CADC.

1. Omeg Lalramkinlova – Reporter for Zonet and a media enthusiast.

Omeg Lalramkinlova is a 33-year-old man belonging to the Bawm tribe (a sub-tribe of the Lai) living in Chawngte P with his family. He works as a reporter at Zonet Cable TV and is the only official reporter belonging to the CADC and Chawngte to report for any Mizo media firms. He is also an Assistant Secretary in the Young Lai Association sub-headquarters; Chawngte P. He is not fluent in English but can speak both Mizo and Chakma.

Lalramkinlova did not have any sort of journalism training before working for Zonet but is a close acquaintance of Lalngheta Ralte, the Editor of *The Lawngtlai Post*, AIR Correspondent as well as the President of Mizoram Journalists' Association, Lawngtlai District who is based in Lawngtlai. After the COVID-19 pandemic started when he and other YLA leaders monitored the border areas and made small reports on such areas. He was encouraged by Lalngheta Ralte to pursue his passion and thus bagged the role of a reporter for Zonet. He wants to be a member of MJA Lawngtlai District but he was told to wait for his membership to be approved.

His main duty is to collect news from the Chawngte area and pass it on to Zonet. He also sends it to Lalngheta Ralte who also uses it for his newspaper *The Lawngtlai Post* and his reportage. Zonet doesn't give him a fixed salary rather his

allowance is impacted by his monthly performance. For instance, he was paid Rs.10000 in December 2020 because he had sent multiple news items that month. The news reports that he compiled in Microsoft Word from his laptop or on the notes app on his smartphone are then sent to Zonet via email or Whatsapp to the News Editor at Zonet and he would also post the same thing in Zonet News Reporters' Whatsapp group where the participants are local reporters located in different parts of Mizoram. He said that Whatsapp is his most used app for posting his reporting because it is fast and easy to use. He uses his Android smartphone Jio 4G signal hotspot to connect his laptop. His reports usually contain two or three paragraphs of text and a short video covering the incident which he filmed using his smartphone. He does not do any editing on the videos.

His reports are not always broadcast in the Zonet Zawlbuk 7 pm daily news segment but he doesn't feel too bad about it because he feels that reports about Chawngte are given less significance. After all, they "are not from important towns like district capitals," he emphasized.

He has a Zonet Reporter Press card and a Zonet T-shirt. His news sources are mainly CADC press releases, NGOs, and offices like BDO, SDO and CID. There are several *Whatsapp* groups that he participated in like *Chawngkhawpui* where the members are all Mizo (here he mentions that the term Mizo, which means inhabitants of Chawngte L, P, and C excluding Chakmas); *SDO Civil Group* where the participants are government officers some from LADC and CADC, MDC and even MLA. Another *Whatsapp* newsgroup is *Chawngte News* where the participants are people who are keen on the dissemination of news regarding Mizoram and the ADC. He does not post his reports in other *Whatsapp* groups until 7:30 so as not to spoil the *Zonet* evening news segment.

When asked about how he frames his news, Lalramkinlova said that he tries to be objective and refrains from using words or phrases which might be considered biased, discriminatory, or insensitive towards any tribes residing in and around the CADC area.

2. Ashok Chakma

Ashok Chakma was one of the names that were mentioned a couple of times when I asked the locals what they watch on YouTube. With the help of a roadside vendor, I was able to get his contact number. After a brief phone call, he agreed to meet me for an interview. Ashok is a 40-year-old Chakma traditional singer. He is a well-known artist among the locals and was given an appointment as a Cultural Assistant under the Art & Culture Department because he had released multiple audio albums containing Chakma folk songs and self-composed contemporary songs. Yes, he is also the same guy who is instrumental in the making of *Chakma Zinghani Gonganir Hideiph - A documentary film on the social and economic life of the Chakmas*.

I met him at the entrance of the CADC office during his lunch break. After we exchanged pleasantries, I came to know that he speaks little English and since I don't speak the Chakma language so I took the help of a local assistant to help with our communication. "To better understand my story, please visit my home and I'll tell you all about it," he said enthusiastically in English. After a 4-minute ride in his Maruti car, we arrived at his home located in the Kamalanagar 3 locality. His home was a modest green Assam-type house with a tin roof, walls made of tiles and woven bamboo, and thinly spaced wooden floors. The most spacious room had a Chakma traditional baby cot hung from the roof where his youngest son was sleeping peacefully. He lived there with his wife and three kids.

Adjoining their tiny bedroom is a small room that he shyly dubbed, "...my home studio." His home studio is a small room lined with Styrofoam walls which he repurposed from fish boxes. In the corner of the studio was a stack of his wife's aluminium cooking pots next to a microphone stand. "They also serve as a storage room," he commented. His handmade shelf contains a desktop computer and a musical keyboard with multiple sets of headphones and extension cords lying on a bench next to the shelf. He enthusiastically took his Sony Camcorder which was placed neatly in the corner and covered with a thin white linen cloth. "This is where I record most of my songs these days. Back in 2005, I recorded 2 studio albums in

Vega Recording Studio, Aizawl but now that I've built this humble studio I can do it from the comfort of my home," he said with great zeal. Of course, the quality is not at par with that of a professional studio but to him, the physical vicinity is a massive advantage which cuts time and travel costs instead of traveling to Aizawl.



Figure 43. The home studio where Ashok Chakma records his songs.

He doesn't make his music tracks himself; he has acquaintances from Calcutta with whom he did musical arrangements through *WhatsApp* conversations. He usually pays around Rs. 5000-8000 for a single track where payment is done through Google Pay. To generate some side income, he also works occasionally as a freelance videographer covering wedding functions, religious programs, and sorts. His editing software includes Nuendo 5 Software and Coral 15 video software. But that did not go as planned as he said, "I bought the camera in hopes that I might get some side income but I don't feel good in taking money from friends and family, especially for religious programs." In a closed-knit society like Chakma where everyone is a friend of a friend or a relative, I doubt he'll earn much from his side hustle.

Ashok then enquired if we wanted to see how he records his vocals and proceeded to turn on his computer after a few minutes he posed himself next to the microphone stand and sang a song for us. It was a self-composed love song written in the Chakma language. He was a good singer indeed. While he was preparing to sing the song, his wife Deepti who was peeking through the door of the studio shouted at his kids who were in the next room and told them that their dad was trying to record whole house. After all, the Styrofoam walls did not make the best soundproof settings. Ashok does not have a YouTube channel of his own and his songs and videos are often uploaded by others from different channels despite being one of the most celebrated artists in the area. He also does not secure any incentives from videos of his performances on YouTube. Apart from singing in government programs, he used to record songs for other YouTube channels free of cost.

3. Kora

I had come to know about the names of two rappers – Kora and K Raw from my interaction with college students from Government Kamalanagar who told me that they are the most popular artists among the youth. The students were able to acquire the phone numbers of both rappers and after a quick phone call with Kora, he was willing to meet me for an interview. I was at a small tea stall near the CADC office when I called him up and he said he'll be there within a minute. He reached the tea stall soon after and recognized me instantly. "It's a small place and I can recognize the outsiders (non-locals)," he said. He was comfortable conversing in English with a little bit of broken Mizo and thus started our conversation. He told me that his full name was Surjyodhan Chakma and that he had passed his matriculation from Don Bosco School, Lawngtlai. Kora is a 22-year-old auto-rickshaw driver who lives with his father and three siblings in Kamalanagar 2. He studied till Matriculation but dropped out to help his family financially, doing odd jobs for a couple of years, and finally with the help of his family bought an Auto Rickshaw.

He had always had a keen interest in rap music and came up with the stage name KORA meaning 'Danger' in the Chakma language. Under KORA Music'- his production house he had since composed many rap songs – love songs, diss tracks,

motivational and even social commentary songs. His YouTube channel _KORA Entertainment has around 6000 subscribers and 17 videos which are mostly rap songs and self-composed freestyle rap. He records his songs mostly at night on his laptop using an external microphone that he bought himself. On how he records his songs, “My house has thin walls and I can’t record if there is noise so I usually wait till I am home alone to record my songs. If it is urgent and if the weather is clear, I used to drive to the outskirts of the town and record it there too” he said. He knows that his recording equipment is very limited and goes to Lunglei town to rerecord some of his best songs in a professional studio.

He shows me his music video on YouTube called ‘If You Don’t Mind’ which features another artist by the name of Zoogie Chakma. It is a melodic rap song about a lover’s promise recorded in Melody Studio (a professional studio) and shot by his friend and fellow rapper K Raw in Lunglei. Kora told me that the song is one of his favourite self-composed songs of his. The video boasts almost 5000 views despite being released for only a week. As of February 2023, the video has more than 90000 views with more than 200 English comments which were mostly in praise of their rapping skills and videography. One comment reads, “I think this rap song will be the best in the Chakma community. Carry on guys, we will support you.” For most of his other songs, he makes the music video himself, usually in and around Kamalanagar and Lunglei. He used to scout suitable and “presentable locations” which are mostly nice homes around the locality that they usually use for free. He said that he gets invited to community gatherings to perform and that he feels the happiest when the audiences sing his lyrics back to him. Although he is the happiest when he performs, he knows that being a performer alone cannot sustain a family. Another downside of being a rapper in a small community is the altercations he faced with other rappers. He said with a sly smile that he once had a misunderstanding with K Raw and they both even composed diss tracks off each other. After a few rounds of back and forth, they finally patched things up and in fact, K Raw was the one who recorded the videos for his latest song.

4. K Raw

After my interview with Kora, I told him that I was interested in meeting the other rapper K-Raw and he offered to drop me at his friend's place by his Auto Rickshaw. It was around 4 p.m. and the office workers were starting to leave the office it was rush hour for passenger carrier vehicles but he offered me a ride to K Raw's house. K Raw is a 20-year-old rapper whose real name is Karuna Namda Chakma. As Kora dropped me near his home, he introduced me to K Raw but K Raw spoke little English and Kora had to rush back to his duty station to catch at least some passengers. Fortunately, K Raw's brother-in-law who lives nearby was fluent in Mizo and he offered to translate our conversation. I met K Raw in his family's Assam-type home with woven bamboo panel walls and tin roofs in Kamalanagar 3 and his whole family came to watch our interview in their living room. He is a high school dropout and has a YouTube channel under the name 'K Raw Music' with 4600 subscribers before that his music videos and performance videos were uploaded by different channels. One of his breakout music videos is called 'Black Scarf' and after that, he became a household name in the Chakma entertainment community.



Figure 44. The family home of K Raw.



Figure 45. K Raw in his recording corner.

He composed and sang multiple songs - love songs, and social commentary songs in collaboration with other local artists and from the Art & Culture Department of CADC. He makes beats from free software using his laptop and microphone which his family bought for him back in 2019. He used to download free beats from *Vidmate* and tune them to his liking. Like other artists, he too records his songs from his home but since he does not have a single room, he resorts to recording from his homes of his friends and relatives where he could find some form of silence. He shoots most of his videos using a Canon 1500 D DSLR camera and uses his Jio 4G internet connection to upload videos on his channel. “My family has supported me greatly ever since I made it clear that rapping and making music is my passion,” he says while showing me his recording equipment. His father who is listening to our conversation quips, “What can we do but not support him? He has been singing and rapping from a very young age and that’s all that he had wanted to do. After he failed his matriculation examination, I told him to make up his mind and follow what his heart desires.” K Raw said that his biggest musical influences were rappers MGK (an American rapper) and Debine (an Indian rapper from Mumbai). Although he had received only about \$30 from his YouTube channel through Google AdSense, he said that the positive comments on his videos and in real life are the real motivations that

drive him to become a better artist.

5. Priyonkar Chakma

At this point in the observation, it was clear that most of the Chakma content was wholly concentrated on YouTube. The most subscribed Chakma YouTube channel is *Najuk Kajuk Production* which has over 69800 subscribers. As of February 2023, it has 44 videos with more than 14 million views and the first video was published in December 2018. The creator is Priyonkar Chakma, a 30-year-old working as a Low Divisional Clerk under the Art and Culture Department of CADC. Due to a scheduling conflict, I could not meet him in person but he obliged to telephone interview to talk about his channel which he runs from his home in the K-2 Locality of Kamalanagar. He isn't the first one to post Chakma music videos on YouTube but his production model of collaboration is proven to be the most fruitful one with many following in his footsteps. The channel which started as a private venture is now the biggest platform for all media enthusiasts around the region. Artists like Ashok Kumar, KORA, and K Raw have all lent a hand in the production of at least one or more videos.

On the banner of the channel is written 'To promote Chakma song' which is self-explanatory to the type of content posted on the channel. The content is recorded and shot in and around Kamalanagar by the production crew without any fixed pay. According to Priyonkar the revenue generated from the YouTube channel is used to fund new content for the channel. He also said that the production crew is very enthusiastic about showcasing the vibrant sound of Chakma songs. The crew would often work without much profit for the sake of producing content. "There's no representation of Chakma people in cable television or the DTH services, so we are very thankful for YouTube because we can promote our culture to the whole world," he added.

All the music videos on the channel are in the Chakma language and are mostly love songs, traditional songs, wedding songs, and *Bihu* (festival) songs sung by different singers. It is also interesting to note that Priyonkar Chakma acted as a

protagonist or as a choreographer and dancer in most of the videos. “I love singing and dancing from a very young age and had always wanted to share my talent with a wider audience which is possible now through the internet, he added gleefully. It is safe to say that his wider audience keeps increasing as four of his most popular videos have more than 1 million views each.

5. Joya Chakma

Allyang Production is a YouTube channel owned by Joya Chakma, a housewife who works as a freelance dancer and choreographer. She started her channel in July 2021 and currently has 23 videos with more than 400000 views. Joya lives with her family in the K 3 locality of Kamalanagar and with the encouragement of her family started the channel. The banner of their channel reads ‘Chakma music videos for every mood’ which sums up the content of the channel. In a telephone interview, Joya said that she created the channel with hopes to promote the Chakma language, giving exposure, and documenting Chakma arts in the form of music videos. She also said that it is not a private business venture to generate profit but rather a platform for other musically inclined artists to collaborate and create art.

She had collaborated numerous times with the *Najuk Kajuk* team and other artists like Ashok Kumar, KORA, and K Raw. The genres of the songs are mostly cultural, love songs, and Bihu festival songs in the Chakma language. The functioning, management, and overall production of the content are similar to other Youtube channels. “There is no fixed salary for the people involved and most of the crew are volunteers but I sometimes pay Rs. 3000 – Rs 5000 each for the music track, lead singer, and video editor. At the end of the day we are happy to produce another video even if it means that we are going to face financial loss,” said Joya when asked how she finances the videos.

6. Surita Chakma

Surita Chakma is a 23-year-old law graduate from Lunglei town currently residing in Delhi. She has a YouTube channel *Surita Chakma* which she started in December 2017 and currently has almost 100 videos with 18000 subscribers. Her

YouTube description says that she makes travel videos and vlogs which are posted every Tuesday and Saturday. Over 6 years, she has garnered over 880,890 views. Even though Surita is not from CADC, the vlog series of her travels to the CADC area and other parts of Mizoram are a hit among the Chakmas and thus included in the study. Many of the locals especially the youth recommended her channel as a must-watch on Youtube.

She curates her travel videos in playlists such as *Mizoram Meri Jaan – Mizoram Travel Series, 10 Days in Quarantine Centre, Chakma Videos, and Travel Videos and Vlogs*. The videos are narrated in Hindi and Chakma language with English subtitles. Posted between August to November 2020, these videos cover a series of topics like the life of the Chakma tribe in Mizoram, Jhum cultivators, visiting famous landmarks, traditional weddings, etc. The videos are informative as they are narrated in a well-researched script but also have spontaneity to keep the viewers engaged. These videos garnered between 38000-1000 views and the comment sections are filled with positive messages both in Hindi and English from Chakmas all over the world - diaspora from countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia to other Indian states like Arunachal, Assam, and Tripura also applaud her for her efforts in bringing exposure to Chakma culture.

In a telephone interview with Surita, she said that after she did the CADC vlog, her channel witnessed a huge growth in subscribers and viewers from all over the world. One comment reads, “There was a moment where I thought I was watching a documentary. So informative.” Surita said that she had always been curious about the Chakma community in CADC but she could not find much information on the area so when the opportunity came to visit the place, she wanted to share her experiences from being quarantined and visiting various places but did not expect such positive feedback. “Maybe because it was posted during the lockdown, the engagement on my channel was much higher compared to other videos,” she said. “There are always new comments under the videos about how people are glad to see the presentation of the Chakma community in such a way and this reminds me of how large and diverse the Chakma community is,” added Surita.

Apart from light-hearted content, she also highlighted social issues such as the dilapidated condition of government schools, financial hardships faced by farmers, and poor road conditions. She does not have fancy filming equipment for her vlog uses a Redmi Note 8 smartphone camera to record and uses Adobe Premiere Pro CC to edit the videos on her laptop.

5.5 Brief Look into the *Dakkerani*– the village crier

Dakkerani is a village crier who is anointed by the Village Council based on a clear and loud voice, traditionally a *Dakkerani* goes around the neighbourhood on foot and announces by mouth the information given to him by the Village Council, YCA and even political parties. Such information is mostly death announcements, *Dajakam* (community work service), ration supply availability, political meetings and other relevant information given by the government as well. A *Dakkerani* I met in Kamalanagar is a man in his 50s based in Kamalanagar III and has worked as the village crier since 2002. Being a *Dakkerani* does not pay much- Rs.450 per month to be exact. He has a jhum cultivation field which he used to support his family. He is given information through telephone calls and uses a handheld battery megaphone with a microphone provided by the Village Council and goes around town and announces the information word by word as he is instructed. One day during my fieldwork, his microphone broke down and he had to resort to the old ways of announcing the information by mouth which is where his loud voice comes in handy once again. He said that in the case of *Dakajam*, the turnout percentage is much higher if it is made in the name of the YCA and not the Village Council.



Figure 46. Dakkerani of Kamalanagar III.

5.6 Media Usage and Preferences of the Chakma People

To study the media use and consumption pattern of the Chakmas, field observation in the form of home visits, small talk with shopkeepers, informal interviews with various government officers, youths and college lectures, 3 FGD were conducted in Kamalanagar with 36 participants. Chakma college students from Government Kamalanagar College and government employees from different departments of the CADC participated in the FGDs.

Most of the respondents could speak at least two or more languages – mainly Chakma, Bengali, English, Hindi or Mizo. The discussions were done in English and a translator was present when the participants could not speak English.

1. Television

All the participants have televisions in their homes and are connected to the Direct-to-Home (DTH) connection such as *Dish TV* and *Tata Sky*. Their most

watched channels are Hindi channels such as Zee TV, Colors and Star Plus. Hindi is the preferred language for television content followed by English. Television serials, movies and music videos are the most watched content. Some participants owned smart televisions at home but they did not utilize their smart features as the internet connection was slow in the area. None of them subscribe to OTT services citing financial constraints and slow internet.

Participant 11: “We chose DTH connection instead of local cable television because we get more content in Hindi.”

Participant 17: “Hindi television serials are my most preferred television content. My whole family loves to watch it too.”

2. Newspaper

Only one of the participants subscribed to a newspaper – offline or online. Some of the participants remember reading *Swajak* but after the termination of *Swajak*’s publication, they no longer subscribe to any form of print media. Lack of consistent print media over the years affects the news reading culture or lack thereof.

Participant 7: “We used to love reading *Swajak* but like most of the print media in Kamalanagar, it did not last for long.”

Participant 20: “Starting a print media in Kamalanagar is a lost cause. No one is interested in buying something to read.”

3. Internet Connection

All the participants owned smartphones and a majority of them have two SIM cards – Airtel and Jio. These two telecom companies provided a 4G network thus acquiring many users in the area.

Participant 26: “One SIM card is not reliable enough for a decent internet connection. Signal disruptions happen often and we resort to owning two SIM cards to use interchangeably for better mobile data connections.”

Participant 4: “Kamalanagar does not seem so far away from the modern

world if we have proper mobile internet signals.”

4. Social Media

All the participants use social media platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *YouTube*, *Facebook* and *Telegram* and some use *Instagram* and *Twitter* as well. *Whatsapp* is the most used social networking site among all the participants.

Participant 18: “Whatsapp is a part of my daily life. It’s the first thing I look at when I wake up in the morning because all the information I need is there.”

Participant 3: “WhatsApp does not need a very internet connection and all my friends and family, college classmates can be contacted through WhatsApp.”

The participants were all active in one Whatsapp group or the other– family groups, friend circle groups, college groups and online shopping groups.

Participant 19: “I am in multiple WhatsApp shopping groups and I often order from them.”

Participant 29: “Apart from connecting with friends and family, I save study materials - PDF and notes posted on class WhatsApp groups.”

Participant 34: “I am most active in the Government Kamalanagar College Students’ Group and my family group.”

Most of the participants are an admin of their family group and friends group. Other than reading posts, viewing and commenting on Whatsapp statuses, updating one’s Whatsapp statuses is also a favorite activity among the participants.

Participant 7: “I post Whatsapp statuses almost every day.”

Participant 13: “I usually post motivational quotes, random moods and short funny videos.”

Participant 8: “I viewed others’ statuses before opening group messages and I usually post funny memes and selfies.”

Some of the participants are in groups created by elders where random news and information are posted on the regular. Such groups serve as the only source of local news dissemination.

Participants who were not in any newsgroup were asked from where they received information and one participant said that urgent news is usually forwarded to their family group or class group.

YouTube is their most-used social media for entertainment. Their channel subscription varies from *Kabil Sharma Show* to *Kristino Olsen, Survival Skills Anywhere* to *Magnificent Century, Tarot Card Reading* and *Asian Crush* among internationally popular channels to fellow Chakma creators such as *Surita Chakma* (a Delhi University student hailing from Guwahati making travel and lifestyle videos in English). Apart from these channels, YouTube is used for watching and listening to pop songs in different languages, movies, serials, mukbang videos and cartoons.

Participant 36: “I watch YouTube more than I watch television, it’s convenient and the contents are endless. I don’t have to share it with my family and I can watch it in peace.”

Participant 13: “Songs, movies, talk shows, videos are all there on YouTube.

I’m discovering new content every day.”

Participant 12: “I’m watching Korean serials these days and trying to learn some Korean language from channels like ‘Let’s learn Korean channel.’”

5. Consumers, Not Creators

Almost all the participants are passive audiences of media; their interaction with the media they consume is mostly limited to liking the post – video, audio or pictures. A few had mentioned commenting with words of appreciation on certain posts with a few words or by using emojis. There is no desire to post or create content on social media other than a few *WhatsApp* 24-hour statuses or uploading personal pictures on Instagram.

Participant 21: Sometimes I comment on my friend's Whatsapp statuses and like some interesting pictures and videos on Instagram but I don't remember the last time I commented under a post on Facebook or YouTube.

6. Language Used in Social Media

As mentioned earlier, most of the Chakmas living in Kamalanagar are multi-lingual in speech if not fluent in writing. Languages such as Chakma, Hindi, Bengali, English and sometimes Mizo are used by many for day-to-day conversation. For posting on social media, their most-used languages are Chakma followed by Hindi and English. Chakma and Hindi are mostly Romanised although the Chakma script keyboard plugin is available. Only one of the participants used the plugin.

Participant 10: "I use a mix of Hindi and Chakma language in our family and friends group chat. I have a Chakma script keyboard plugin but I hardly use it because it requires much more time to type than Romanised format."

They are also selective about when to use certain language for social media posts.

Participant 13: "I use mostly Chakma and Hindi for Whatsapp posts but I mostly use English and Hindi for Instagram and Facebook because most of my friends can understand English."

7. Radio

Radio is not listened by any of the participants.

CHAPTER VI

MEDIA IN THE MARA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL (MADC)

Siaha is the southernmost district in India and is 313 kilometres from Aizawl. Siaha town has a hill station-type topography with narrow and rugged roads. A visit to Siaha bazaar means that conversation in different languages - Mara, Lai and Mizo can be heard. It is evident from a walk around town that there are many more Mara speakers in Siaha than Lai speakers in Lawngtlai. Remnants of the Lakher Pioneer Mission (England-based Christian missionaries who had entered Maraland in 1907) could be found in the names of certain establishments – Foxall Higher Secondary School, Lorrain Market etc. There are different church denominations and the biggest one is the Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM). They have a printing press. The ECM has a theological institution called Maraland Theological College (MTC) where different theological courses are offered as approved by the Senate of Serampore.

6.1 Mapping of Media in Siaha

According to the DIPR (Directorate of Information and Public Relations) 2022 list, there are 12 accredited journalists in Siaha District. Eight of them are associated with print media, one is a *DDK* correspondent and three are engaged in the local cable television operators. Siaha is an MJA District Headquarter and they have a Press Club and all the MJA members are accredited journalists.

Siaha has two cable television operators – *Hnialum Star Vision* (HSV) and *New Skylink Vision* (NSV). Both the owners of these cable television providers are members of the MJA. The MADC has a couple of publications under different departments and wings. Church publications are the most widely circulated form of print media. Siaha is the headquarters of the Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM) - the biggest church denomination in the area and they have an in-house printing press

6.1.1 The MJA Press Club

It was a humid forenoon in July of 2022 when I visited the Siaha Press Club of the MJA Siaha district. I was welcomed by C. Lalramnghaka, the editor of *Kawl Eng* (meaning dawn) a Mizo daily newspaper who also happens to be the caretaker of the press club and the Editor of *Kawl Eng*– a Mizo daily newspaper. The press club was in Council Vaih (Vaih is a Mara word for locality) of MADC's headquarters in Siaha. The office is a three-story concrete building which I'm told was constructed on a plot of land given to the MJA by MADC and the building construction was funded by the MLA funds during Hiphei's (L) (a prominent politician) term. Just from looking at the exterior of the building, one could not have guessed that it was a press club for multiple reasons; one, it did not bear any indication – signboards, posters or the general façade of a bustling journalists' hub.

Lalramnghaka and his family of 5 shares the inner half of the first floor of the building as their residence and the other half which is nearer to the road acts as the designated press club. He told me that the top floor which is under construction is meant to be the actual press club. The inside of the press club had three long chairs, a couple of plastic single chairs, and a table at one corner. A sign which says 'SIAHA PRESS CLUB' in bold and an MJA Golden Jubilee poster are put up on the wall above the table which could very well be the only hint of the purpose of the office. There are no other journalists present during the time of the interview.



Figure 47 .The Press Club building of MJA Siaha.



Figure 48. The conference room of Siaha Press Club.

6.1.2 Media in Siaha – Print

1. *Kawl Eng*

Editor: Lalramnghaka

Layout: A3 size, two pages, black and white Language: Mizo and Mara

RNI registration: Nil Social Media: Nil

Behind the table is a small room divided by ply walls, a back room that Lalramnghaka – a 50-year-old MJA accredited journalist uses as his workplace to work on his daily newspaper *Kawl Eng*. The workplace has a small desktop computer table with a stabilizer on the side and a single light bulb is hanging a couple of inches above the monitor. When I asked more about the setup of his workspace, he told me that the bulb above the monitor was kept there because he has bad eyesight and his eyes do not work well with just the main bulb so he temporarily hangs another one where it is convenient. As for the stabilizer, he said, “To control power fluctuate and to give me more time to save my work when the power goes out.”

He uses a desktop computer, Microsoft Word software and his laser printer to work on and print *Kawl Eng* on days when all the logistics are in his favour. For example, he could not publish physical copies from four days back because his *Epson* laser printer had some problem so he took some “rest”. Starting in the year

2000, *Kawl Eng* has been owned, edited and published for more than two decades by C. Lalramnghaka. He told me that his interest in newsmaking began when he was in Class 8 and had worked as a delivery boy for *Chhim Aw* daily newspaper earning his school fees because his parents were elderly and could not afford his education. After he completed his matriculation from Old Siaha High School, he went on to help other media enthusiasts with publications like *Buannel* a weekly magazine till he was confident enough to start a publication on his own in 2000. On the reason behind his publication, Lalramnghaka said, “I wanted to start the publication to bridge the gap between the government and the public and to bring awareness of the people of different government schemes.”

He told me that *Kawl Eng* reached a circulation of 700 copies during its prime. Now, only 150 copies are in circulation. He said that a substantial amount of the subscription goes to the different offices of the Government of Mizoram, Siaha branches and the MADC office. “I might have received only about 2 or 3 advertisements from the state government in a year but the MADC has given me at least 2 or 3 advertisements in a month,” he answered when I asked if he had received advertisements from the MADC. It is mentioned in one issue of *Kawl Eng* that it has a Joint Editor, Assistant Editor and Circular Manager and when I asked about them, the Editor said that he was the only one working on the newspaper at the moment but that these workers help him from time to time. He does not have regular pay for them. When I asked him how he collects news, he said, “In the morning, I browse through different social media and collect news that is relevant to Siaha. If in-depth reports are needed, I talk to people and confirm the authenticity of the news. I also visit the I&PR website for press releases and follow-up with reports that are similar to it.” *Kawl Eng* does not publish on Saturdays and Sundays.

2. *Moonlight*

Editor: Jeffrey Khara

Layout: A3 size, two pages, black and white Language: Mizo and Mara

RNI registration: 64043/92 Social Media: *WhatsApp* groups

Moonlight is a daily newspaper published, edited and owned by Jeffrey J Kharawho was born on 3rd November 1969. He has a Bachelor's degree from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). *Moonlight* was started in the year 1990 and has a registration under RNI 64043/92 and MZ-336.

Khara is a well-known journalist in Siaha and I met him several times during my fieldwork. I had a meeting with him at his home in New Colony while he was preparing the next day's issue of *Moonlight*. He lives with his family of five and the table in his living room serves as his workstation where he works on his laptop using Adobe Pagemaker software. He has a Joint Editor - WB Azyu who helped him with news collection most days but he did most of the formatting and editing by himself. *Moonlight* is a single-page black and white newspaper printed on A3 size paper. It is printed mostly in Mizo but some reports are in Mara.

Currently, it has 200 subscribers. Khara said, "We had reached a circulation of 750 copies back in 2011 but social media and the pandemic ruined our numbers drastically. I could afford to hire more workers when we had a better subscription but now I can no longer employ more than one worker," when I asked about their prime days. Now, he has to work multiple roles as a reporter and an editor. The subscription fee is Rs.150 per month. The production of *Moonlight* newspaper is as such – the editor wakes up and checks through his social media, if there is any important function organised by the government – state or LADC, they are the first to be catered to. Events and programs organized by the church and different NGOs are the next priority. If there are any incidents like accidents and major crimes, he will get to the site and make a report. When I asked if he fact-checks on such incidents, he said, "If such incidents happen outside Siaha I will call the NGO leaders or health centre workers and even government employees like teachers in smaller villages to fact-check the incident." Indeed such contacts are easy to come by for Khara who has been in the business for more than 30 years. Once he feels that he has collected enough reports to fill up the two pages of *Moonlight*, he heads home and drafts his newspaper. He mostly works on the draft early in the night and sends the PDF file to the manager of Hriata Offset (a privately owned offset press) through

WhatsApp or email and his part of the job is done. The offset will start printing the newspaper as soon as they receive the file and get it ready for the circulation team to collect it early in the morning. The circulation in charge of *Moonlight* is Vanlalruata, a 20-year-old college student from Meisatla who is paid Rs. 3000 per month. Once Vanlalruata collects the newspaper; he then distributes it to all the subscribers which are mostly government offices.



Figure 49. Moonlight Editor Jeffrey Khara in his workspace.

When I asked if any households subscribe to *Moonlight*, Khara said, “We have around 20 household subscribers who pay the subscription fees regularly. Most of the steady-income households are employees of the government. So, since they read the newspapers at their workplace, most of them do not bother with subscriptions for their homes. I also distribute the PDF version in Whatsapp groups all across Mizoram and even abroad.” The PDF is distributed for free and is not password-protected.

Apart from being an Accredited Journalist, Khara is also a Deacon in his local ECM church. He has been enrolled in different political parties such as Mizo National Front (MNF) and was their Media Chairman in 2006. He had also been a Mara District Congress Committee (MDCC) Secretary back in 2010. When I asked

him why he had joined different political parties although he was a journalist, he said, “Sometimes you have to be an insider to understand the nature of the society. When a political party becomes a ruling party, they will persuade us (the journalists) to join their party to maybe keep us in their clutch. I, too have fallen for such practice in the past but I am in the neutral now,” with a laugh. *Moonlight* has received regular advertisements from the Government of Mizoram and the MADC.

The problems faced by the owner are an inconsistent supply of power to aid him in using his laptop, the irregular payment of subscription bills and a shortage of papers in the press.

Moonlight is also widely known for his yearly project *Moonlight Award*– a program which awards and acknowledges high-achieving citizens from the MADC area in areas of sports, music and literature. It was started in 2003 where there is an award for Best Singer of the Year, Best Officer of the Year, Best Sports Person of the Year, Book of the Year, Best Writer of the Year and so on. Khara is the Chief Organiser and there are 15 organising members. The organising team selects nominations for the different categories of which the audiences cast their votes through the polling format which was included in the newspaper. Now, most of the votes are cast through WhatsApp messages using a certain code for each of the nominations. The main award ceremony is held in community halls – MTP Hall New Colony or New Siaha Multipurpose Hall. The most recent *Moonlight Award* organised in 2021 was held in NSV Hall and the winners were accolated with a citation and Rs. 500 – Rs. 1000 prize money. The overall cost of the ceremony and prizes are mostly from the pocket of Khara with a few sponsorships from local businesses and politicians. The ceremony is filmed by the local cable operators and is broadcast live. It is also uploaded on YouTube. On his intention behind the *Moonlight Award*, Khara said, “I want it to be a program which uplifts the talents of the people.”

3. *Maraland*

Editor: Aldrin Hlychho

Layout: A3 size, two pages, black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: 40800/84 NE-1304 Social Media: Nil

Maraland is a Mizo daily newspaper started by Hmaoko Hlychho (L) in 1980. During the initial years of its production, it was published in Mara but as years went on, it was later changed to a Mizo daily as there were not many subscribers. Now, it is edited and published by Aldrin Laihle Hlychoo from his home in New Colony, Siaha. It is a single-page A3 size newspaper printed in black and white. The registration number is RNI No. 40800/84 NE-1304 MZR.89.2018-2020. The current editor Hlychho is not a member of the MJA because he works part-time in the ECM Press and is under the payroll of the ECM. He is the sole worker for the publication and even prints *Maraland* from his home where he stays alone.

He explains the news collection process, “First I visit government websites like the DIPR and MADC and collect the press releases, I never miss the news segments of the DD Aizawl and sometimes I receive WhatsApp news from the I&PO of the MADC in Mara language which I translate in Mizo. In between these, I also visit different government offices and seek newsworthy reports from them. I usually return home by 2 p.m. and start writing a draft on his laptop. Sometimes I stay up till 2 AM when I face problems with printing.” He does not have an electric power generator so if the power supply halts before or in between printing, the hard copy of the newspaper could not be distributed the next day. In such cases, the PDF version will be distributed. There are also times when even the soft copy cannot be prepared due to a lack of power supply for days. After Hlychho finishes the printing which is usually around midnight, he will keep the copies out in his balcony which will be collected by the distributor – a 16-year-old student whom he employed for Rs.3000 monthly. It is then distributed early in the morning to government offices – the only subscribers. When I asked if none of the households sought subscriptions, Hlychho said that the production costs were high and there were loads of unpaid subscription fees which discouraged him.

On a visit to his home in New Colony, Hlychho has a makeshift workstation set up next to his kitchen area. He took great pride in his work and said, “*Maraland* has the most number of subscribers among the print media here. Although I am not a member of the MJA, I have a good relationship with all the other MJA members and they too include me in all their programs. I print 200 copies and I am also one of the most regular in terms of publication.” The subscription fee is Rs. 100 per month.



Figure 50. Maraland Editor at his home.

4. *Chhim Aw*

Editor: M. Baithai

Layout: A3 size two-page black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: RNI/40920/88 Social Media: Nil

Chhim Aw means southern voice. It is a daily newspaper which is originally owned by K. Laltlanzauva (L) born on 2nd October 1959. He hailed from Vanbawng (Champhai District) and came to Saiha for some personal reasons. He remained in the place till the time of his death. When he came to Saiha, he started the *Chhim Aw* daily newspaper and bore the registration under RNI/40920/88 and NE.Regn 1056.

After his demise, it is passed on to his wife Lalbiaktluangi. But the management of the newspaper is taken up by M. Baithai who is also the editor and publisher of the daily newspaper. He is also the MJA Siaha District President (as of 2022) and an accredited journalist. Besides the editor, there is Jt. Editor C. Lalmawia. It is a small newspaper organization. Both of them are responsible for the news collection, translation, circulation and proofreading of the newspaper. It is an A3 size two-page black and white newspaper and printed at BC Offset. The newspaper layout is done in a normal Adobe Pagemaker.

In an interview with the Editor, I asked how many subscribers they have and he said, “We used to distribute in many villages of Siaha District namely *Tipa, Zyhno, Laki, Kawlchaw, Zero* and *Niawhtlang* back in 2016 but now the subscription has declined a lot and we cannot afford to send it to these villages. Now we have less than 200 subscribers all within Siaha town.” The subscription fee is Rs. 100 per month. Like other publications, *Chhim Aw* also faced problems in production similar to others in the same business – irregular payment of subscription bills, lack of interest from the general public and constant power supply cuts which led to the failure in circulation of the papers.

5. Buannel

Editor: CZ Hluna

Layout: A3 size, 2 pages, black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: RNI/67973/96 Social Media: Nil

Buannel in English means ‘unexplored jungle’. K. Laltlanzauva (L) was also the original owner of the paper. The RNI registration number is RNI/67973/96 and MR.N.E.(Mz)-1205. The overall management and ownership are passed on to C.Z. Hluna born on 17th September 1971 and received his Bachelor’s degree from Saiha Government College in the year 1996. He is also one of the three DDK correspondents and AIR stringer for the Siaha district. *Buannel* Daily newspaper was first started as a weekly magazine from the year 1991 till 1997. Soon after the ownership was passed onto C.Z. Hluna, he transformed it into a daily newspaper in 1998. I met the editor at his home in ECM Veng he told me they had almost 1000

subscribers in 2008 but now they have less than 150 subscribers. The subscription fee is Rs 100. It is a two-page newspaper. The layout and format design is done in a normal Adobe Pagemaker and printed at BC Offset. Most of the subscription goes to the state government and MADC offices. The PDF formats are circulated through WhatsApp newsgroups. He also sends them to prominent Mara who works as lecturers, officers and politicians who are not based in MADC.

In his experience as AIR Stringer for Siaha District in 1999, Hluna said that how they send and gather news has changed drastically. “We used to write reports by hand on paper and we hurriedly went to the I&PR Office to use their wireless set by which we contact Aizawl office and verbally exchange the reports which they wrote down on paper or with a typewriter. After we had done several years of duties that way, we were introduced to a Fax machine kept in the District Commissioner’s office. Then came email which was more complicated than a fax machine because we did not have a stable internet connection for the longest time. Over the years, email became the most convenient mode but in 2021 they implemented the Prashar Bharti News Network (PBNS) where all our reports are organized neatly. I might be getting old because I have a hard time getting used to the PBN,” he reminisced on how they send reports over the years.

He joined DDK as a stringer in 2008 along with K. Sabi and since the reports are more visual, they used to send the written reports in papers but videos and still images through rewriteable DVDs. He adds, “These DVDs are sent to Aizawl by night bus service which leaves Siaha at 3 p.m. and reaches Aizawl by 7-8 a.m. The Aizawl office collects a week’s worth of DVDs and sends them back once a week. Sometimes, our videos and still images would corrupt and we would only know about it once it reached Aizawl, so it was such a headache, especially on reports which are breaking news. Like radio, we transitioned to email but now everything has to be filed through PBNS.”

If their reports are published, they receive Rs. 1500 per broadcast day. Hluna and Sabi agreed to split duty days by 15 days each month. They send about 20 news stories to both DDK and AIR Aizawl but not all of them get air time. Hluna said that

there is a higher chance of their reports being published by the AIR than DDK. When I asked him if he ever feels that his reports are being sidelined by the AIR and DDK he answered, “The airtime is very short and there are correspondents and stringers in all the 11 districts so I don’t feel too disheartened when our stories don’t cut. I know that the editors are trying their best to represent the whole of Mizoram. I’d say that compared to before, we are getting much airtime. If our reports are not broadcast in the main news segment, they’ll most likely be in the district news segment.”

6. *Saiha Post*

Editor: B. Vanlalhriata

Layout: A3 size, 2 pages, black and white Language: Mizo

RNI registration: RNI/67973/96 Other Media: Owns Hriata Offset

Saiha Post is a family-run print media firm and it is formerly owned by B. Dawpho born in 1958. Dawpho received schooling till Class VIII from Tuipang High School (present Day Tipa) in 1977. At present the newspaper is in the hands of his son, B. Vanlalhriawho takes charge of the management and publication of the newspaper. He is the General Secretary of MJA Siaha (as of 2022) and an accredited journalist. The daily newspaper was started in 1990 and received its official registration under RNI.53807/91. The family resides in New Siaha West. As of 2022, there are two Copy Editors Mapuia and Lalmama. The three of them work in unison to publish the *Siaha Post* daily. In an interview with Vanlalhriata, he said that the three of them exchanged roles in preparing the contents of the newspaper.

During the year 1994, the number of subscribers reached up to 1300 but in 2022, they only published 180 copies. The subscription bill is Rs 100 per month. It is two pages daily and is printed at Hriata Offset in Council Vaih. It is done in a simple Adobe Pagemaker.



Figure 51. An issue of *Siaha Post*.

7. *Times of Maraland*

Editor: B. Dawpho

Layout: A3 two pages in black and white Language: Mara exclusively

RNI registration: Nil Social Media: Nil

Times of Maraland is the only newspaper published wholly in the Mara language. The owner and publisher is a 64-year-old prominent journalist B. Dawpho who is also the founder of *Siaha Post*. He is one of the two Senior Advisors for the MJA Siaha and a prominent press representative accredited by the state. The daily newspaper was started in 2014 and is not registered with the RNI. I met Dawpho at his home in New Siaha and talked about the intention behind the starting of a Mara daily. He said, “I have observed the print media in Siaha for quite a long time and always felt a bit of shame to not have a regular Mara daily when we use it for conversations. I wanted to give people something to read daily in our dialect.” It is a single-page black and white newspaper and like most of the other newspapers, it is printed on an A3 size paper. In 2022, *The Times of Maraland* has about 100 subscribers and the subscription fee is Rs. 100 per month. The Editor of *Moonlight* Jeffrey Khara is mentioned as a Joint Editor as he has helped him with the translation of press releases. Apart from some help he got from Khara, the formatting, typing

and proofreading of the newspaper is done by Dawpho. He works from his bedroom or living room at his home with his laptop. The newspaper is printed in Hriata Offset which is owned by his son, Vanlalhriata, the editor of *Siaha Post*. As a common practice in the area, most of the subscribers are from government offices. The PDF version is disseminated through WhatsApp groups all over Mizoram.

Dawpho has a lifetime of experience in the journalistic field. He was among the founding members of the Chhimtuipui Journalists Association (CJA) established in 1984 which was the first journalistic body in south Mizoram. He had served as CJA's President for 5 terms and as a Vice President for more than 11 terms.



Figure 52. Dawpho at his home which is also his workstation.

6.1.3 Defunct Print Media

1. *Deiva* – Editor-in-Chief: H. Beitlulai

Deiva is a short-lived Mara daily newspaper which used to be in circulation from 2014 to 2016. *Deiva* was started in the 1980s by Nahlo Solo who now serves as an MNFm MDC in the MADC. It was a daily newspaper but was short-lived due to many reasons. It was revived by a group of young media enthusiasts H. Beitlulai, the son of H. Sahmu, a veteran politician in the Mara Community and his friends. After finishing a Master's Degree in Journalism & Mass Communication from Sikkim Manipal University, Shillong in 2013, Beitlulai and a couple of his friends decided to

revive the publication of *Deiva* in 2014.

In an interview with Beitlilai in New Colony, he said that he and his colleagues Robert B. Syuhlo and B. Vabeibaoly were very enthusiastic about bringing an all-Mara newspaper to the scene. He said, “We were not satisfied with the nature of print media in our area and although we knew all the problems we would face, we took the leap to revive *Deiva* back in 2014. All we wanted to do was promote Mara language and culture through print media. Most of the newspapers are practising outdated forms of journalism – spending 1 to 2 hours for news collection, copy-pasting press releases, taking news items from Facebook and other social networking sites without fact-checking, mooching off politicians and government officials and we have seen how this deteriorated our society and culture and we wanted to challenge that practice, on what motivated *Deiva*.”

He goes on about how they had worked on *Deiva*, “We used to translate Mizo news even if it does not concern Siaha which is time-consuming. A single issue would need to be printed only by 1 to 2 AM. It was tough. By the end of 2015, we had reached a subscription of 1000 copies, not just in Siaha but to the Mara Community in Aizawl which we sent by post and even to the Mara diaspora in Malaysia through email in PDF format. We used to send it to every village in Siaha district - wherever the sumo service reaches.”

During its production, *Deiva* faced loads of problems - financial crisis, lack of manpower, problems in power supply, and low-quality offset machines. They would print *Deiva* in *Chhim Aw* Editor, Baithai's offset. The printing could not meet the satisfaction of Patlaw. Patlaw took great pride in the revamped *Deiva*, especially the introductory issues. He says, “Print media in Siaha is running just to get advertisements. Newspaper editors are very close with the political leaders. The leading newspapers had problems with *Deiva* although they aimed to promote the Mara dialect and culture. Most of the editors and newspaper workers would have spent 1 to 2 hours on news collection – from FB and other SNS. They were in the Mizo dialect. Some of them are using copy-paste method. At first, we would circulate it for free and after that, due to financial problems, we had to collect

subscription fees problem which could eventually lead to the downfall of the newspaper.” Monsoon season brings a whole set of problems – power supply, limited supply of ink, and paper. Lack of manpower as the editorial board was also engaged in other NGOs and political parties. He has joined the BJP. He had contested the MDC Election as a BJP Candidate but was not victorious. “We used to publish frankly and roughly about the wrongdoing of the MADC officials – elected execs, departmental issues, and publicize it. We had faced a lot of problems and even got called to give explanations twice by political parties. Because we were radical in practice, we could not get regular advertisements from the MADC,” he said in an interview.

On why he had joined the BJP, Beitlawlai said that he is an active member of the NGO and holds leadership posts – MTP, and MSO which led him to a clear lens on society. As the son of a renowned politician, he was pressured into joining political parties and he joined BJP in April 2022 and contested in Siaha West II but failed to succeed. He feels that the BJP puts the highest favor for the minorities and hence that is why he joined the BJP.



Figure 53. A Copy of Deiva.

2. *Mararâh Thlalâ* - Robert V. Solo

Before *Deiva*, Robert V. Solo had started an all-Mara newspaper called *Mararah Thlala*. It means ‘*Maraland Mirror*’ and is not registered in the MJA, Saiha. It is Regd. No.D.30017/1/2012(S) and started its publication in June 2015. The editor of the newspaper is Robert V. Solo who has a Post-Graduate degree from North Eastern Hill University in 2011. The newspaper was established to safeguard and promote the local Mara language.

The daily newspaper features news items, editorials, articles, and composed songs. It is created using simple Adobe PageMaker. The primary sources of news include the DIPR website, international sites, and local platforms such as BBC, NDTV, Mizoraminkhel.com, Zo Footy, and MADC. For MADC-related news, they visited the Information and Publicity Department to gather information.

6.1.4 Media Published by the MADC

1. *Hmahsienna*- Official organ of the MADC

Hmahsiena is an official organ of the MADC started in 2010. The name is a Mara word which means development. It is an A3 size 4-page weekly newspaper written in Mara language which is published and edited by the Information & Publicity Officer (I&PO), on behalf of the MADC. It is essentially a black-and-white newsletter where the MADC government highlights the activity and achievements of the different departments within the MADC. The official programs of the MADC officials are also highlighted. Advertisements and circulars are also included regularly. Articles from readers are also included regularly if they fit the theme of development. It is distributed free of cost – to all departments of the MADC, Village Councils and NGOs such as Mara ThyutliaPy (MTP) branches within Siaha. It was first printed in the Information & Publicity Department laser printer but they later shifted to offset printers. They printed 200 copies which were distributed by the 4th Grade staff within the department. The MADC government provides funds for the publication cost of *Hmahsiena* which is usually around Rs. 50000 per financial year.



Figure 54. A copy of Hmahseina

2. Hla Nata Bie–Board of Mara Literature

Hla Nata Bie is a monthly Mara literary magazine published by the Board of Mara Literature. This board was founded in 1983. It was first started as a monthly bulletin in 2007 bulletin has gradually developed into a monthly magazine in 2017. The main purpose of the magazine is to promote and propagate the usage of the Mara language. As such, all the contents are only in Mara language. It is funded by the MADC with a budget of 6 lakhs every financial year. 800 copies are printed and sold for Rs. 20 per copy. The contents are mainly articles contributed by Mara literature enthusiasts. The Editor is L. Beimokhai born in 1983. He has a Bachelor of Arts Degree and has written many poetry books and novels.



Figure 55. A copy of *HlanataBie*.

3. MADC websites

There are two websites for the MADC. The first one is accessed through madc.mizoram.gov.in and is an undertaking of the Government of Mizoram. It is powered by *Senhri*– A content management system provided by the Department of Information & Communication Technology, Government of Mizoram. The website contains details of the MADC – department, who's who, Acts and rules, notifications, circulars and orders and press releases. The main content of the website seems to be the press releases issued by the Information & Publicity Department on behalf of the MADC. All the press releases are written in Mara and are mostly accompanied by pictures of the program covered. The archive of the press releases dates back to 2017. About 10-20 press releases are published monthly. This website is similar to the LADC website.

The other website is www.madconline.com and this website was created, maintained and updated by the MADC.



Fig 56. MADC's in-house website.

6.1.5 Church Publications

1. *Krizyhpā Chiahmie*

Krizyhpā Chiahmie is a monthly church journal started in the year 1926 and the postal registration is REGD.NO.NE.-394(MZ). It is owned by the Evangelical Church of Maraland but it is edited and published by N. Dawhniarili, Siaha on behalf of the Board of Communication, ECM (H). The circulation is 1300 copies and costs Rs 20 monthly. The journal has an Editor-in-chief, Editor, Associate Editor, Circulation Manager and members. Since the journal is owned by the church, the contents are religious and church-centric news. The contents of the journal are mainly editorial, articles contributed by the church members, reports and obituaries. It is printed at the ECM Offset Press, Siaha. One unique thing about the journal is that the same issue is printed in both Mara and Mizo to cater to both speakers. To cater to both Mizo and Mara-speaking church members, *Krizyhpā Chiahmie* is printed in two versions – Mara and Mizo.

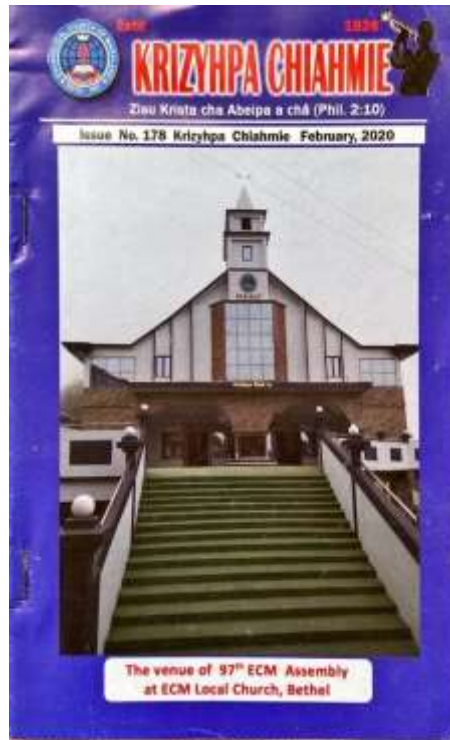


Figure 57. A copy of Krizyha Chiahmie.

2. *Mission Buletin*– ECM Headquarters

Mission Bulletin is a bi-monthly bilingual publication by the ECM. It was started in the year 1994 and is in circulation today. 1000 copies are printed and circulated all over the ECM churches mostly sermons and ECM Mission field news in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and others.



Figure 58. A copy of Mission Bulletin.

3. Ambassador – Krizyha ThyuthliaPy (KTP)

This is a quarterly Krizyha Thyuthlia Py (KTP) magazine. The KTP is a youth fellowship of the ECM. It was started in 2015 and today it has reached a circulation of 1000 copies. It is a small booklet-type magazine with coloured covers and black and white inside pages. The main contents are the activities and updates of the KTP.



Figure 59. A copy of *Ambassador*.

4. *Dorcas* – Krizyhp No Py (KNP) ECM

Dorcas is published by the Dorcas Editorial Board on behalf of the Krizyhp No Py(KNP), a children’s fellowship of the ECM. It was established in the year 2012 and today 600 copies are printed. The contents are mostly the church initiatives taken by the KNP. Sermons, field reports, testimonies etc. are regular contents of the *Dorcas*.

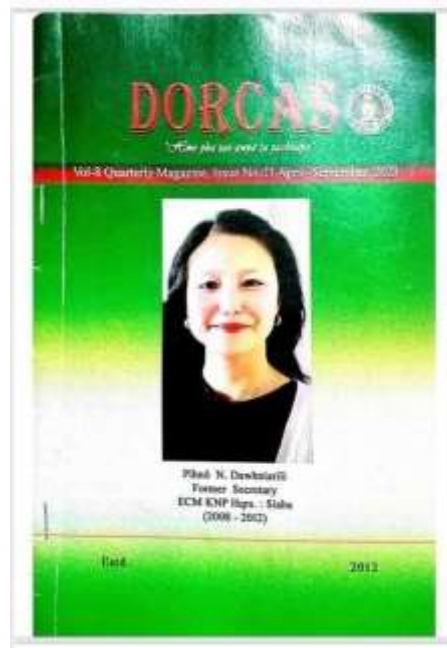


Figure 60. A copy of Dorcas.

6.1.6 Printing Presses in Siaha

1. Tlosai Lorrain Memorial Press

The ECM owns the oldest printing press in southern Mizoram. It was started by RA Lorrain, one of the Lakher Pioneer Missionaries in 1926. From handwritten to letterpress printing namely the Louisa Lorrain Memorial Press which was used from 1961 to 2003, the press has upgraded its machinery with time by purchasing its first offset printing machine in 2003. It is under the management of VB Mokhai, allotted by the ECM. The press takes on the printing of all the church's print media like newsletters, booklet, calendars and other church publications. The actual printing job is done by a group of five workers. The Tlosai Lorrain Memorial Press only prints in black and white and colored covers have to be outsourced.

It is one of the major sources of income for the ECM Church. The priority of the Tlosai Lorrain Memorial Press is the printing of church publications but they also cater to other commercial orders.



Figure 61&62. The outer view of the ECM Press building and the latest printing machine.

6.2 Broadcast Media: Radio and Cable TV

There is one radio station and two cable TV operators in Siaha

6.2.1 Akashvani Siaha – Prasar Bharti

Akashvani Siaha was started in the year 1996 as a Community Radio Station. Formerly known as All India Radio Saiha, was upgraded to a local radio station in 2010. Located in Circuit Veng of Siaha, it is the only radio station in the ADC of

Mizoram. AIR Saiha has its local substation in a separate gated compound but the actual building is an old Assam-type building.

The Station Head take care of the overall management of the station. The contents are of different languages – Mara, Lai, Mizo, English and Hindi. Although there is a studio, they don't broadcast or make live content. The technician mentioned that they function more as a relay centre for disseminating information and content from Akashvani Lunglei and Akashvani Aizawl. The studio serves as the workstation for the announcer. The announcer then activated the feeder which relays news from AIR Aizawl. The station operates at a frequency of 202.02 MW and 1484 KHz. The medium wave transmission is broadcast via a dish, while the short wave is transmitted through a satellite. Additionally, the medium wave provides a primary channel with similar content using 1 kilowatt of power.

The total strength of workers present in the station is as follows:

Senior Technician -1, Technician -2 Engineer-1 Senior Announcer- 2 and around 15 casual announcers.

At the time of my visit, most of the 3 p.m. to 8 pm programs were all song segments in the Lai and Mara languages. The 6.30 pm news is relayed from Akashvani Aizawl station.



Figure 63,64&65. Pictures of Akashvani Siaha.

6.2.2 Cable Television Operators

In Saiha town, there are two cable TV operators.

1. *New Skylinks Vision (NSV)*

The owner of the cable is V. Pawhla born on 07th September 1967 who resides with his family in New Colony, Siaha. It is a family-run business which was started in 1997 with a registration number CTV-62/Azl/1998. NSV is the 3rd registered local cable television operator in Mizoram.

As of 2022, NSV has 3700 subscribers from all over Siaha District. The number of villages covered are *Thingsen, Zero, Maubawk, Theiva, Theiri, Tuisih, Tipa 'L', Tipa 'V', Zyhno, Siatlai, Ahmypi, Khopai, Laki, Vahai, Serkawr, Kawlchaw* and Saiha Town. There are 10 fee collectors and the fees have to be paid before the 15 of every month the collectors receive 10% salary from the fees they have collected. The NSV had spent around 30 lakhs from the conversion of the analogue system to digitization.

The forms of revenue are advertisements from local and government. The more substantial amount of revenue received is from the subscribers. The advertisement business helps the income of the cable operators. The customers range from company to private business runners. The advertisements are displayed 2 times during daylight and 3 times at night time for 1 day. For the scrolls that are displayed under the Television screen, for private it is Rs. 200 and for Government announcements, it is Rs. 500 per one scroll.

NSV has a subscription to 14 Mizo channels from Zonet Cable TV for which they pay Rs. 10000 per month. They have six in-house local channels which mainly broadcast dubbed movies, music videos, sermons, and other Mizo content. They also make Mara content like weekly news round up, vox populi, and interviews for their Mara local channel. NSV has also successfully hosted six seasons of *Mara Idol*, a singing competition show which is a replica of *Mizo Idol*, a singing show previously organized by Zonet. NSV has also hosted the Siaha round of auditions of *Mizo Idol* for Zonet. *Mara Idol* has a grand prize of one lakh and other benefits. Other content

created by NSV are *Junior Idol*, spelling bee, comedian search, and quizzes. This content is mostly shot in their in-house studio which is also available for rent.

There are 14 paid workers under NSV.



Figure 66&67. Studio and control room of NSV.

2. *Hnyaloom Star Vision (HSV)*

HSV is by H. Sangkhara born on 1st May 1969 and received a bachelor's degree from Government Saiha College. The family resides at *New Saiha 'East'*. It is a family-run business which was started in 1997 and a postal registration in the year 1998- CTV-60/Azl/1998. As of 2022, HSV has 2800 subscribers. Three permanent workers are paid monthly. They have a subscription of 14 LPS channels and 8 local channels of their own. The contents of the local channels are mainly in Mizo.

Other than subscription fees, the other source of revenue is advertisements from the government - MADC and state and private businesses. The advertisements are mostly run for 24 hours at a rate of Rs. 200 for private customers and Rs. 500 for government.



Figure 68&69. Cable Operation Room & Residence of HSV. Pic credit: Sandy Zomuanpuii.

6.3 Online Media

1. *Maraland.net* – Beirokhu Beita

Maraland.net was created in 2002 by Beirokhu Beita, the present Information & Public Relations Officer of the MADC when he was working in the food industry in Japan. He said, “The internet speed in Japan was already quite decent during those times and I was feeling nostalgic and wanted to make something for my homeland and I decided to make a website and thus, *Maraland.net* with the tagline ‘*The Home*

of *Maras on the Internet*’ was created.” The main purpose of the website is to “...fill the virtual gap created by the non-availability of any proper sites dedicated to the cause of the Maras.” It holds various information on the Maras and Siaha from news, poetry, and articles. They are mostly written in the Mara language. The website is active with content posted almost every day. The creator Beita also uploaded the MADC Press Releases in a different format. The categories of content range from articles, music videos, news and sermons. It is maintained by a bunch of admins who do it voluntarily. They also have a YouTube channel under the same name.

2. *Huasua Net* – Aaron Chhachhai

Huasua Net is a *YouTube* channel owned by Aaron Chhachhai. He had previously worked in different media houses before starting *YouTube*. He started the channel in 2019 and has posted videos on all sorts of themes which concern the Mara people. From political news, music videos, interviews and social commentaries, *Huasua Net* mainly covers all these topics in the Mara language.

3. *John Beizachhi*

John Beizachhi is one of the most celebrated singer-songwriters in the Mara Community. He was born in the year 1979. He became a B-grade radio artist in 1997 and has released multiple audio albums. He has music videos for songs in Mara, Mizo, Lai and Paite. His song *Sakhmeltha* was at the top of the LPS chart at one point. He started his self-titled *YouTube* channel in 2017 and has posted more than 400 videos. The channel has more than 20000 subscribers. He has received the Moonlight Award several times and was invited as a guest artist in various countries like Malaysia, Australia and Myanmar. He is famous for his love songs.

6.4 A Brief Look Into the *Tlah Aw* - the Mara village crier.

The *Tlah Aw* is a village crier for the Mara people. The name is an alliteration of *Tlangau* in the Mara language. The *Tlah Aw* performs the same duty as the *Dakkerani* and the *Tlangau*. The *Tlah Aw* is usually appointed by the Village Council members. Every Mara locality has a separate *Tlah Aw*.



Figure 70. Tlah Aw announcing information.

6.5 Media Usage and Preferences of the Mara People

To study the media usage and preferences of the Maras, 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Siaha, involving a total of 36 participants were conducted. The FGDs included two groups of college students from Government Siaha College and one group comprising individuals from diverse backgrounds. Most respondents could speak at least two or more languages, primarily Mara, English, and Mizo. The discussions were conducted in Mizo, as the majority of the Mara participants were fluent in the language.

1. Print Media

While some of the participants are subscribed to the local newspapers, some do not have a high admiration for the way the print media functions. Print media is not read by the majority.

Participant 3: “Most of the newspapers here don’t cover anything of substance. They’re all focused on getting advertisements from the government, and the journalists seem more concerned with pleasing politicians than providing real

news.”

Participant 16: “My family and I don’t read any print newspapers. We don’t find them informative, and they mostly contain news we’ve already seen on Facebook and WhatsApp groups.”

Participant 22: “I’m not sure how the newspapers here stay in business. I see them at government offices, but it’s rare to find anyone reading them at home.”

2. Cable Television

Despite being a Mara-speaking community, Mizo content is the most-watched content on cable TV.

Participant 6: “We have a cable connection, but the Mizo channels are what we mostly watch. They have better shows, dramas, and movies.”

Participant 9: “I watch *New Skylink Vision* for community announcements, but for the rest of the day, our TV is tuned to the Mizo news channels or Mizo-dubbed movies.”

Participant 13: “Local content is very limited. We mostly use the cable for Mizo channels, and sometimes for Korean or English movies.”

3. Radio

Although there is a radio station in Siaha, I did not locate any listeners. Even the casual announcers do not listen to it when not on duty.

Participant 7: “The radio is more for the older generation. I haven’t listened to it in years, and neither have my friends. If there’s something important, we hear about it on Facebook or through *Tlah Aw*.”

Participant 14: “I’m a casual announcer at *Akashvani Siaha*. Most of the content is relayed from other stations. We don’t have much original programming, and even I don’t listen to the radio when I’m not on duty.”

Participant 29: “Radio used to be important, but not anymore. Most of us have moved to other platforms like YouTube and Facebook.”

4. Social Media

Social media is mostly used for networking, entertainment, and information.

Participant 2: “Facebook is where I get all my news. I follow multiple groups that share updates in both Mara and Mizo. I feel like I’m more informed this way than by reading the newspapers.”

Participant 10: “I use social media for everything—from chatting with family members living abroad to getting updates about our village. It’s much easier and faster than waiting for the news to be published or broadcast.”

Participant 24: “YouTube is my main source of entertainment. I watch Mizo content the most there – from music videos, interviews and vlogs.”

Participant 12: “For the youth, social media is our go-to. I follow *Huasua Net* and other Mara content creators for updates. You don’t need the radio or TV if you have a smartphone.”

5. *Doordarshan Aizawl* Daily 6:30 pm News is the Most Popular News Segment

The *Doordarshan Aizawl* 6:30 news segment is the most popular and most watched. This surpasses all news segments on Mizo television.

Participant 9: “Even if we read news from newspapers or social media, our family would always tune in to *Doordarshan Aizawl’s* 6:30 news segment. We miss it only if there are church programs. Even then, we watch it on YouTube later.”

Participant 20: “I watch *Doordarshan Aizawl’s* 6:30 news segment on YouTube. I don’t normally watch the news but I play it on my phone when I take my daily bath.

Participant 28: “I think most Mizo households watch 6:30 pm *Doordarshan*

News.”

6. Culture of Church Publication Subscriptions

There are a couple of church publications available for different denominations. All the participants have a subscription to one or more such publications. Some younger participants also realized that they were always subscribed to at least one church publication during their lifetime. However, these publications are not necessarily read by the audiences.

Participant 19: “I cannot recall a time when my family has not been without at least one church publication. I think we have around three different types of church-based publications reaching us every month. I hardly read them.”

Participant 2: “My father thinks that subscription to church newsletters is one of the good qualities of a good Christian. I have hardly seen him read it and it just clutters the magazine rack. He doesn’t even let us reuse the pages as wrapping papers and if they are older than a year, we just throw it in the dustbin.”

Participant 36: “I think church publications are a non-invasive way of propagating the gospel and more church members should subscribe to at least one.”

7. Language Preference

Although there is a preference for Mara content, Mizo content is more accessible.

Participant 1: “I prefer reading news in Mara, but most of the media here is in Mizo. Even our local TV channels broadcast in Mizo more often. I think it’s because it has a broader reach, but it’s a shame we don’t have more in our language.”

Participant 18: “Mizo is what we see and hear more of, but that doesn’t mean we like it. I’d rather have more content in Mara. It’s our language, and it should be the focus, especially in our district.”

Participant 28: “My kids speak Mara, but they consume most content in Mizo. It’s everywhere—from schoolbooks to TV shows. They’re more fluent in Mizo now, and I fear Mara might be lost in the next generation.”

Participant 36: “For formal announcements, I prefer Mara. Even if I understand Mizo, Mara is clearer for me, especially when it’s about local governance or community issues.

CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The last chapter of the thesis highlights the study's key findings and the concluding statements. It also comments on the study's limitations and highlights the future scope for media studies in the peripheral regions and marginalized people of Mizoram.

The key findings of each objective are presented region-wise following the same pattern as the presentation of data.

7.1 Objectives 1&2 Findings from the LADC (Sangau and Lawngtlai)

Objectives 1&2 include the mapping of media and identifying the content creators and process of media production. Findings from the LADC are as follows.

1. Small-Scale and Family-Run Print Media

Most newspapers in Lawngtlai are small-scale, independently owned, and operated by single editors or their families from their homes. Editors often perform multiple roles, including content creation, printing, and distribution, which reflects a lack of specialization and irregularity in circulation.

Circulation numbers are low, typically ranging from 100 to 200 copies, and most subscribers are government offices. The newspapers do not reach the masses and the general public. This suggests that print media is not yet a viable commercial venture but serves more as a passion project or as a means of livelihood.

2. Outdated Formats and Reporting

Media operations do not have big budgets, which affects both quality and aesthetics. Newspapers use home-based laser printers mostly in 2 pages A3 sized papers and produce simple black-and-white layouts. There are no unique selling points for any of the newspapers to attract the audience. The reporting also lacks

uniqueness as they are mostly taken from the same sources – government websites, social media posts etc.

3. Reliance on Government Support

Most newspapers in Lawngtlai depend heavily on subscriptions and advertisements from state and LADC government offices. This limits their audience to mainly government employees, making it difficult for them to reach a broader public. The reliance on government funding also risks compromising their journalistic integrity and poses the question – do they cater to the people or the governments?

4. Government Support for Local Media through Relaxed Advertisement Regulations

The LADC and the Mizoram Government provide advertisements to local newspapers even if they don't meet the minimum circulation criteria as found in Mizoram Guidelines of the Print Media Advertisements of Government of Mizoram - 2018 wherein Clause 4 Category C mentions the lowest minimum circulation of 1000 to qualify to receive advertisements from the government. By relaxing these rules, the LADC ensures the survival of local publications, acknowledging their role as the only available print platforms in the region.

5. Slow Adaption to Digital Platforms

The editors have adapted to digital platforms by circulating free PDFs of newspapers through *WhatsApp* groups to cater to a wider audience. But not everyone can be in a WhatsApp group and this creates a gap of knowledge. With the free distribution, the newspapers' reach is vast but there are no profits for the editors. While newspapers like *Rauthla* have a website and an Android app, their reach is limited by the overall unawareness of their existence.

6. Role of Media in Cultural Preservation and Community Identity

Newspapers like *The Lairam Times* are not just information providers but

also serve as platforms for cultural identity and preservation as they are supported by the Lai and Chin diaspora communities to promote the Lai language and cultural heritage. Church-based media like *Kohhran Tlangau* and *Lairam Mission* also play a significant role in community-building and reinforcing religious and cultural values.

7. Challenges of Professionalism and Documentation

There is a lack of professionalization within the media sector. The editorial staff usually consists of the editor's family members or volunteers from the community, leading to inconsistent production and management. Most newspapers and media outlets do not maintain detailed records of their history or progress or have any trace of information on the internet indicating a lack of adaption to the growing digital media landscape.

8. Church Print Media Supremacy

When every newspaper saw a decline in subscription numbers and was hanging on between 100-200 pages, a monthly bulletin *Lairam Mission* by the LIKBK has a circulation of 1700 copies making it the highest circulated print media in the districts.

10. Challenges in Print Media Sustainability

Local print media like *Chhimthli*, *Chhawkhlei Times*, and *The Phongpi Post* faced significant challenges, including a lack of revenue, high production costs, and limited readership. The editors often struggled with irregular subscription payments, shortage of printing materials, and technical issues. This reflects the broader issue of sustaining print media in small communities with limited resources and audiences.

11. Impact of Language on Media Viability

Language choice plays a crucial role in media viability. Maliana Zathang chose to publish *Chhimthli* in Mizo instead of Lai to cater to a broader audience, even though the publication is based in a predominantly Lai-speaking village. Similarly, *Chhawkhlei Times* struggled to maintain bilingual content due to a lack of sufficient Lai content and contributors.

12. Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Media Operations

The socioeconomic status of the media owners and the community influences media operations. For example, Maliana Zathang uses his pension funds to keep *Chhimthli* running, and Vanlalzawna's cable business relies on his mother's pension. Financial constraints are a significant burden for media viability in these communities. Media, especially print has a hard time surviving due to low revenue and eventually cease to exist.

13. Cross Nation Reporting through the Internet

Reporters like Tluanglianhang of *The Chin Post* navigate reporting through less-than-ideal environments on sensitive issues related to Myanmar and the Lai-Chin community by working in *Sangau* a rather remote area with limited connectivity.

14. Reconnection to Lai Cultural Roots through Media

Although many Lai people in Lawngtlai have drifted away from their cultural roots, a significant portion of the community is now experiencing a renewed interest in reconnecting with their heritage. Media enthusiasts, in particular, are at the forefront of this movement, using both traditional and digital platforms to preserve and promote Lai language, culture, and history. Initiatives such as the broadcast of Lai local channels, the publication of the *Phongpi Post* and the establishment of *The Chin Post* demonstrate a collective effort to strengthen cultural identity and awareness among the Lai community, both locally and within the diaspora. The media industry is doing a much better job at the revival of the Lai culture than even the LADC.

7.2 Objective 3 Findings from the LADC

Objective 3 deals with the media usage and preferences of the Lai people residing in Lawngtlai and Sangau. From the five FGDs conducted among them, these are the key themes that have emerged.

1. Different Levels of Lai Language Proficiency

Lawngtlai respondents showed limited proficiency in the Lai language. Many, especially the younger generation, are not comfortable using Lai in daily communication, leading to a sense of disconnect from their cultural identity. Some feel guilty for not learning it earlier, as explained by their hesitation in speaking to older relatives. In contrast, all Sangau respondents are fluent in Lai and prefer it for communication and media consumption. Lai is actively used both offline and online, making it the dominant language in Sangau.

2. Radio – a dated medium

Radio has never been a part of many participant's media experience. Older generations only keep them alive from memories. It has been replaced by modern media.

3. Newspapers Largely Replaced by Digital Media

There is a declining relevance of newspapers as shared by the people of the LADC. Despite the lack of interest in newspapers, participants continue to subscribe to church publications – not necessarily to read them but as a duty of a good Christian. Many have stopped their subscriptions to newspapers after the pandemic.

4. Television as a Background Medium

Television's dominance is with limited engagement. Although every participant in Lawngtlai owns a television and subscribes to local cable, TV is often relegated to the background, with people watching out of habit rather than genuine interest. The popularity of Mizo-dubbed content, such as Korean dramas, indicates a preference for relatable content, even if quality is compromised.

The people of Sangau desire Lai television content. Sangau participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of Lai-language programming on television, highlighting a demand for more representation in media.

5. Internet Frustrations and Admirations of Social Media

Lawngtlai respondents are highly dependent on mobile and Wi-Fi internet, but they expressed dissatisfaction with slow speeds and frequent outages, especially during power cuts. The Internet has become the primary media source for many participants. Despite connectivity challenges, the internet remains the most important medium for information and entertainment, with respondents prioritizing it over other media forms.

6. Smartphones as a Valued Possession

There is a high smartphone usage as nearly all participants have had a smartphone for several years. Smartphones are seen as essential tools for social networking, entertainment, and accessing information.

7. Social Media as the Central Hub

Social media, especially *WhatsApp* and *YouTube*, are the most frequently used platforms. Lawngtlai participants are part of multiple WhatsApp groups for news, social interactions, and Christian community activities. There is also a slight preference in social media platforms preferences by age. Younger participants prefer short-form content while older participants lean towards longer and more informative content.

8. Language Preference

Lawngtlai respondents predominantly prefer Mizo for media consumption, both online and offline. Lai is considered formal and less relatable, making Mizo and English the default choices for most participants. In contrast, Sangau participants prefer Lai for all forms of media, highlighting a stronger cultural and linguistic identity.

9. Tlangau as a Trusted Form of Communication

Tlangau remains the most trusted and widely used form of mass communication in Lawngtlai and also in Sangau. Despite the advent of digital

platforms, people still rely on *Tlangau* for timely local updates and community announcements. This illustrates its continued relevance across generations.

7.3 Objectives 1&2 Findings from the CADC

1. Media Landscape Overview

The media landscape in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) is notably underdeveloped compared to other regions in Mizoram. There is an absence of active print publications, members of the Mizoram Journalists' Association (MJA), or cable television operators based in the CADC during the study period. Media presence is primarily restricted to the neighbouring Chawngte areas (Chawngte P and Chawngte L), highlighting the lack of localized media content specific to the CADC region.

2. Only a Mizo-Owned Cable Television

There is one active cable television sub-operator named HD Vision in Chawngte L. HD Vision operates under Zonet Cable TV, providing mostly Mizo content rather than localized Chakma-specific programming. This arrangement has led to a lack of local media production, as the sub-operator no longer has the resources to produce independent local channels. Consequently, HD Vision caters only to the Mizo-speaking population, while the Chakma-speaking population relies on DTH services such as Tata Sky, which offers a wider variety of content in Hindi and Bengali.

3. DTH Services and Media Consumption

Due to the dominance of non-Mizo-speaking populations, there is a preference for Direct-to-Home (DTH) services like *Tata Sky*. This preference comes from the broader language and content options provided by DTH, which better meet the needs of the Chakma-speaking community. This creates a divide between Mizo and Chakma households in terms of media consumption, further isolating the community from the mainstream Mizoram media landscape.

4. Print Media: Historical Perspective

Although there is no active print media in the CADC today, historical attempts to establish print media have been made. Several newspapers and magazines have emerged and disappeared over the decades due to a lack of readership, funding, and infrastructure. The short-lived nature of such publications indicates the challenges faced in sustaining print media in the CADC.

5. Online Media and Social Media Presence

The CADC government focused on establishing an online presence through its official website and social media accounts. The CADC website includes press releases and content related to governance and the community, with some materials available in Chakma script. The website, along with social media platforms like *YouTube* and *Facebook*, has been instrumental in promoting the cultural heritage of the Chakma people.

6. Content Creators and YouTube Channels

In the absence of traditional media outlets, YouTube has emerged as a significant platform for content creators in the CADC area. The focus on YouTube has provided a platform for Chakma content creators to share their work and engage with the community. This community transcends not only the Chakma in CADC but also the larger Chakma Community in different parts of the world.

7. Role of the *Dakkerani* (Village Crier)

The role of the *Dakkerani*, or village crier, remains vital in the CADC as a traditional medium of communication. The village crier disseminates important information, such as death announcements and community service notifications. This method of communication highlights the lack of media infrastructure and the reliance on traditional means to reach the community.

7.4 Objectives 3 Findings from the CADC

1. DTH service instead of Cable Television

All participants own televisions and use Direct-to-Home (DTH) services like Dish TV and Tata Sky, indicating a strong preference for television content. Hindi is the preferred language, with channels such as Zee TV, Colors, and Star Plus being the most watched. This suggests that Hindi content resonates more with the Chakma audience compared to Mizo or English programming. The preference for Hindi channels and content over local cable television is attributed to better access to Hindi content through DTH services.

2. Internet and Social Media Penetration

The use of social media, particularly *WhatsApp*, is extensive and deeply integrated into their daily routines. *WhatsApp* serves as a primary source of news dissemination and social interaction, reflecting its accessibility and utility even in areas with limited connectivity. *YouTube* is widely used for entertainment and educational content.

3. Passive Audience Behavior

The Chakma participants exhibit passive behaviour on social media, with minimal content creation and interaction. Most interactions are limited to liking and commenting on posts, while the creation of original content is largely restricted to *WhatsApp* statuses and personal photos on *Instagram*.

4. Multilingual Communication

The participants are multilingual and use a mix of Chakma, Hindi, and English on social media. The choice of language depends on the platform and audience, with Romanized versions of Chakma and Hindi being more common than the Chakma script.

6. Radio is Irrelevant

None of the participants listened to the radio, indicating that this medium is

not considered relevant or accessible for information or entertainment in Kamalanagar. There is also no sight of radio during the fieldwork.

7. Media Consumption Shaped by Access and Infrastructure

The choice of DTH over local cable, minimal use of OTT platforms, and reliance on dual SIM cards reveal that infrastructural constraints significantly shape media consumption patterns. This affects how the Chakma people engage with media, limiting their exposure to more diverse content.

8. Digital Media as a Dominant Medium

With limited access to print media, digital platforms, particularly social media and YouTube, have become the dominant medium for information and entertainment. This transition emphasizes the need for improved digital literacy and access to better internet services.

9. Ethnic and Linguistic Identity in Media Usage

The selective use of language and the emphasis on Hindi content underscore the complex interplay between ethnic identity and media preferences. The Chakma community's preference for Hindi media, despite being a linguistic minority, suggests that regional and ethnic media have yet to fully capture their interests or needs.

7.5 Objectives 1 & 2 Findings from the MADC

The media landscape in the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC), primarily focused on Siaha town, is diverse and multifaceted, encompassing print, broadcast, cable TV, and online media. The key findings are as follows:

1. Multi-lingual Print Media Industry

Siaha hosts several print media outlets, each varying in size, scope, and language. These publications are predominantly in Mizo and Mara, catering to the local population's linguistic diversity. It also has the only commercial vernacular Mara newspaper the Times of Maraland.

2. Church-Related Publications

Church publications produced by the ECM (Evangelical Church of Maraland) are circulated widely and continue to thrive in the number of circulations. The printing press owned by the ECM cemented the roots of the church publications. Compared to the LADC area, the church publications produced in the MADC regions have content in the vernacular language.

3. Dated Radio Station

The only radio station in the MADC *Akashvani Siaha*, functions as a local radio relay centre, disseminating content in Mara, Lai, Mizo, English, and Hindi. This station primarily relays programs from *Akashvani Lunglei* and Aizawl rather than producing live content, showing a limited capacity for local broadcasting. The radio station failed to reinvent itself and lost its audience.

2. Multitasking Print Media Producers

Most print media in Siaha are small, family-run operations with limited resources. Editors are often multitasking across roles like editing, writing, and distribution due to a lack of additional staff. Some newspapers are run single-handedly, such as *Maraland*, where the editor is the sole producer and distributor. The production of local newspapers is highly dependent on government offices as subscribers and the limited revenue from advertisements.

3. Home-based Newspaper Production

Most newspapers in Siaha are produced using basic desktop publishing software like Adobe Pagemaker or Microsoft Word and are printed using home-based laser printers. The production is often done late at night to ensure timely printing and distribution the next morning. Editors rely on news from government websites, social media, and local contacts.

4. Cable Television Producers

NSV and HSV have dedicated teams responsible for the creation of local

content, including news, advertisements, and public service announcements. Cable TV operators rely on scroll advertisements and government support for revenue. Content is often a mix of locally produced shows and content purchased or downloaded from external sources. Apart from these, they need to rely on Aizawl based media houses – Zonet and LPS for most of their local contents.

5. *Tlah Aw* – a Key Cultural Figure

The *Tlah Aw*, or village crier, is a key cultural figure in the Mara community, preserving oral tradition and fostering social cohesion. As the voice of the Village Council, they maintain authority, trust, and cultural identity through announcements made in the Mara language.

7.6 Objective 3 Findings from the MADC

1. Print Media: Limited Consumption and Declining Relevance

There is a widespread perception that local print media lacks quality and credibility. Participants view local newspapers as heavily influenced by government advertisements and political agendas, leading to scepticism about their news content. The survival of print media in Siaha appears to rely heavily on subscriptions from government offices.

2. Cable Television: Dominance of Mizo Content

Despite being a Mara-speaking community, the dominant viewership is towards Mizo language channels. This is largely because Mizo channels offer a broader range of content, including dramas, movies, and news, which are more appealing compared to the limited local offerings.

3. Radio: Obsolete for the Younger Generation

The focus group findings indicate that radio is largely obsolete for younger generations, who find it less convenient compared to digital and social media platforms. Even the casual announcers working at *Akashvani Siaha* do not actively listen to the radio outside of duty hours.

4. Social Media: The Primary Source of Information and Networking

Social media, particularly *WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook* have emerged as the primary source of news and updates for the Mara people. Younger participants prefer social media for its interactive nature and diverse content, including vlogs, music videos, and social commentaries.

5. Preference for Doordarshan Aizawl's 6:30 pm News Segment

The Doordarshan Aizawl 6:30 pm news segment is the most-watched news program among the Mara people. This preference is deeply ingrained as a cultural habit, with many households ensuring they tune in daily, either live or on YouTube later. Many participants also consume this news segment on YouTube, highlighting the integration of traditional media content into new media platforms.

6. Church Publication Subscriptions: High Subscription but Low Readership

Most households are subscribed to at least one church publication, a practice perceived as a demonstration of religious devotion and community membership despite high subscription rates, engagement with church publications is low, and many participants admitted that these publications are often left unread. Church publications serve more as a symbol of faith and social standing rather than as a source of news or information for many subscribers.

7. Language Preference: A Complex Linguistic Scenario

While the Mara people express a preference for content in their native language, the scarcity of such content results in a reliance on Mizo media. There is a concern among participants that Mara might gradually lose its prominence, particularly among younger generations.

7.7 Conclusion

The media landscape of the ADC areas is multifaceted as each region has

different cultural and societal contexts. This study is but a mere foundation study to document and include the media landscape of the ADC areas in the larger narrative of media in Mizoram. Given the diverse cultural setting of the area of study, it is impossible to try and merge the complex variants of the media landscape into a single concept. Instead, this research highlights the unique features of each region. Several key concepts have arisen from the data presentation and findings.

1. Hybridization of Traditional and Modern Media

Field observations and interviews revealed that traditional communication methods—such as oral announcements by the *Tlangau*, *Dakkerani*, and *Tlah Aw*; local print media, local television channels and online media play form a dynamic media landscape in the region. Simultaneously, the younger generation's adoption of digital platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube to name a few shows a rapid digital transformation. Rather than replacing tradition, these digital forms are being integrated into existing cultural frameworks, creating a hybrid media ecosystem.

The coexistence of traditional and digital media is not accidental; it is rooted in culture and is an adaptive response to both internal cultural obligations and external structural challenges. The persistence of traditional communication methods—such as the role of the *Tlangau*, *Dakkerani* and *Tlah Aw*—amplifies a deep-seated commitment to oral heritage and communal participation. This traditional base provides cultural continuity, which is then enriched by the infusion of digital practices.

2. Resilience amid Infrastructural Challenges

Despite infrastructural hurdles such as limited connectivity, scarce technical resources, low subscription and geographical isolation, local media practitioners have demonstrated resilience. The data show that these print media firms have developed adaptive strategies—such as low-cost production techniques and digitization to make up for the loss in revenue.

3 . Media Marginality

There are different levels of media marginality – intentional and unplanned. In the Lai and Mara communities, women have little to no space in media production. Minute and visual roles such as television presenters and cover pages are mostly dedicated to women. The Chakmas, on the other hand, are marginalized in terms of media production, representation and participation. No public media or leading Mizo media has Chakma stringers or correspondents. Chakma issues are reported by a Mizo reporter who does not speak the Chakma language. Chakma women have even lesser participation in media.

4. Media Democracy (or lack thereof)

Media democracy is highly compromised because of the political economy of the media industry. The people make print media in the ADC area for the government—total dependency on the government for advertising revenue, content and skill development. Print media caters only to the state and holds little societal value. No circulation of newspapers on Saturdays and Sundays – the non-working days of the government dictate how the print media industry moulds its practice to tailor the government timings. The media does not keep the government accountable instead it acts as its mouthpiece. This practice is prevalent and is treated as a norm because the print media cannot sustain on its own but have to rely on the government – local and state for financial assistance.

5. Lack of Media Pluralism

There is limited diversity of media outlets and voices within media in the ADCs. No diversity of voices in content creation especially in the print media makes it monotonous for the readers. There is no diversity in not just the content creators but in the media content too. Camaraderie to a fault among the journalists and media creators results in the sharing of news sources and even reports at times curbs the competition among the media practitioners. Print media are confined to reporting on political news in a non-critical way which does not impress the audiences.

6. Media Infrastructural Challenges

Media infrastructures in autonomous district councils are lacking in terms of technology, communication and connectivity. Basic infrastructures required for the smooth functioning of print media - good roads, stable power supply, fast internet connectivity and availability of printing facilities are the major problems faced by print media firms. Geographic and economic factors are at play here. The ADC region being located in the two southern districts of Mizoram and one of the host districts Lawngtlai having the lowest literacy rate of 65.88% in Mizoram all impact the media landscape. Newspapers are often a one-man band due to a lack of funds to hire staff. No newspaper has enough resources to rent a designated office and corners in the living rooms or bedrooms serve as offices. Lack of professional media training reflected in the news making, layout and format and maintaining journalistic integrity.

7. Christian Ethos in Media Production and Consumption

The Lai and Mara being Christians, there is a strong integration of Christian values, beliefs and principles not just in the contents and creation of media but also in its consumption. Church publications are the most widely circulated print media despite having a low readership. Local cable television operators have several channels dedicated to Christian content – songs, sermons and coverage of big church events. All the commercial print media do not publish on weekends, especially on Sundays because the creators have religious obligations from the night before.

8. Gender Disparity in Media Production

The media landscape in the ADCs is a male-dominated field – editors, producers, and owners are predominantly male. There is only one female MJA member in the whole area of the ADCs. The *Tlangau*, *Dakkerani* and *Tlah Aw* are also historically male. All three communities – Lai, Chakma and Mara are patriarchal societies where traditional gender roles confine women to domestic responsibilities and men have more freedom over career choices. Women are less likely to own and work in public-facing professions like journalism and media production. Thus,

women in the ADC region have little to no interest in media production.

9. Mizo Vernacularism in Media Content and Consumption

Almost all the media published or broadcast are made in the Mizo language. Reading, writing and watching content in Mizo have become the daily media experiences of the Lai and the Mara people because of Mizo language assimilation. The dialect of the majority tribe Lusei known today as the Mizo language is what is used by the British missionaries to preach, write and teach. It continues to be the lingua franca of Mizoram. Most Lai have lost the ability to speak in their mother tongue. Such is the reason why Lai publications have a hard time sustaining themselves despite several attempts.

The Mara are much more fluent in their language but only a few Mara vernacular print media are maintaining presence but in survival mode rather than growth phase. Vernacular church media circulations however are increasing in numbers for reasons – production costs borne by the church without the expectation of making a profit and people subscribing to it as a religious obligation.

The Chakma on the other hand have little to no understanding of the Mizo language and are never the target audience of Mizo vernacular media.

10. Culture of Church Publications Subscription

Church members subscribe to the church's publications as a support for the church and this practice has become a church tradition. For most of the Mara and Lai people, it does not matter if they read the actual content of the publications, the mere act of subscription is a deed that makes one a good Christian. Hence, the subscription numbers of church publications do not fall as much compared to other print media.

11. Information Divide

In the absence of proper print and broadcast media, social media particularly *WhatsApp* groups are the only source of information especially in the Chakma society. Social factors such as gender, and economic and social status promote and proliferate this information divide. This information access discrepancy further leads

to gender inequality, income disproportion and lack of equal opportunities in jobs and even in political careers.

12. Social Media Dominance

Traditional media, print in particular has little to no reach or relevance to the general masses but most of the masses are connected through social media. New media, particularly smartphones occupy the most space in the public media sphere. Smartphones are the only private source of information for most of the three tribes.

13. Online Media – a Subaltern Media

Online media serves as a platform for creating self-narratives, self-representation, creative expression and information sources for marginalized groups. The Maras use online media to conserve and propagate their language in the form of everyday conversations. The Chakmas use online media especially YouTube for **cultural expression** in the form of music videos. Many Chakma YouTube channels have videos with more than several hundred thousand views. Higher presence of women and youth in online media as content creators. Cultural transmission and language preservation among all three tribes are most evident in social media.

14. Diasporic Influence and Confluence

The Lai/Chin diaspora maintains a connection in the production and consumption of media through sponsorships and collaborations. Revivalism of Lai's cultural identity is the common goal. The Chakma diaspora confluence as audiences. Viewership and engaging in mutual and constructive engagement.

15. Regional Disconnect

The ADCs are not just disconnected from Mizoram's administrative and economic capital Aizawl geographically, there is a regional disconnect in the media sector as well. The only commercial newspaper which reaches the ADC region is *Vanglaini* with 100 copies for a population of 2,36,589. No print media from the ADCs is circulated outside the region.

16. Prevalence of Traditional Indigenous Media

Tlangau, Dakkerani & Tlah-Aw— town criers as they are known in the Lai, Chakma and Mara respectively which are rooted in the oral form of information practised for centuries are still the most trusted and relied upon media for crucial information and will likely continue to flourish. Cultural significance in the preservation of oral tradition, cultural symbolism and community cohesion are the reasons why they continue to prevail in the close-knit societies of the Lai, Chakma and Mara. Somehow, the print media is the least relevant media for the masses.

7.8 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the media landscape in the ADCs of Mizoram.

1. Enhance Digital and Technical Infrastructure: Investment in improving internet connectivity, and technical resources – better roads, reliable power supply and printing materials such as paper and ink in the ADC regions is much needed. Setting up community-based digital centres and subsidizing low-cost equipment for local media practitioners, to ensure that technological limitations do not hinder the production and dissemination of local content.

2. Capacity Building and Skill Development: There is a need for professional training programs and workshops for local media personnel in the ADCs, focusing on media ethics, a strong code of conduct, and journalistic integrity. This will enable local journalists to produce high-quality, ethical reporting that reflects the realities of their communities. Focus on digital media production, multimedia storytelling, and effective use of social media platforms are also highly recommended.

3. Financial and Institutional Support: Financial support not just in the form of advertisements but as grants or financing schemes can help develop projects that merge traditional practices with modern technology. Additionally, creating partnerships between local media organizations, cultural institutions, and non-governmental organizations can amplify resources and expertise.

4. Encourage Community Engagement: Establishing community forums or digital platforms where citizens can engage with local media content and provide feedback can strengthen the relationship between media producers and their audiences. Efforts should also be made to cultivate a reading culture among citizens by promoting community book clubs, library events, and engaging local publications. To nurture reading culture early on, schools must instigate the joy of reading by encouraging reading not just textbooks but also newspapers and other books. Church being an influential factor of the Lai and the Mara must foster a culture of reading – not just religious texts but newspapers. A more informed readership will support a thriving media landscape that reflects their interests.

5. Promotion of Culturally Relevant Content: Considering how local television channels are the most watched channels among people, there is a huge interest from the audiences for local media content. Cable television operators should prioritize producing more informative and educational content that addresses local history, social issues, and development topics. Culturally relevant content that prioritizes local narratives, and vernacular language programming to document indigenous oral histories and cultural practices should be promoted.

6. Incorporate Local Media in Democratic Processes: Local media platforms should exercise their power as a fourth pillar of democracy by promoting civic engagement and social accountability. Content that critiques local governance, highlights social issues and fosters public debate should be prioritized by the local media to hold the government accountable.

7. Inclusive Representation of Media Personnel: Not just at the ADC level but also for the government and private media institutions, there is a need for inclusive reporting to ensure that all minority groups are represented. As such the Lai and the Mara have reporters for DDK, Akashvani, Zonet and LPS, it is advisable that these institutions must appoint a designated Chakma reporter to ensure an unbiased representation.

7.9 Scope for Further Studies

There is significant scope for further studies in this area. For instance, future research could explore how ethnic media in the region is shaped by the cultural identity of the inhabitants. Audiences' perception of the local media in the promotion of their cultural identity could also be studied using a mixed-method approach. An in-depth content analysis of the media in the ADCs could also provide a larger understanding of media landscape.

APPENDIX – I

Interview Questions for Key Informants (Journalists, Cable TV service providers, YouTubers, Media Managers of the Church)

i. Questions for Print Journalists

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of media firm currently engaged with
3. Language of the publication
4. Does your media firm (newspapers, magazines) have official registration?
5. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
6. How many employees do you employ in your publication?
7. How many copies of newspapers/magazines do you print and circulate in a single day?
8. In which year did you circulate the largest number of copies of your newspaper/magazines?
9. What type of content do you mostly publish?
10. What are your news sources? Do you give credit to the sources?
11. How do you classify the credibility of your sources?
12. Do you have any formal media training before joining this profession?
13. Does your publication have an online presence?
14. How do you adapt to the increasing popularity of social media?
15. What is your primary source of income?
16. What is the day-to-day workflow of your publication?

ii. Questions for Cable Television Network Providers

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of media firm currently engaged with
3. Language of the broadcast
4. Does your media firm (newspapers, magazines) have official registration?
5. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
6. How many people do you employ?
7. How many subscribers do you have?
8. Is your subscription quantity increasing or decreasing?
9. What type of content do you mostly broadcast?
10. Do you make any content? How many local channels do you provide? Do you have channels in Lai, Chakma or Mara?
11. What are your news sources? Do you give credit to the sources?
12. How do you classify the credibility of your sources?
13. Do you have any formal media training for the employees of your firm?
14. Does your firm have an online presence?
15. How do you adapt to the increasing popularity of social media and increasing OTT services?
16. What is your primary source of income?
17. What is the day-to-day management of your firm?

iii. Questions for YouTubers

1. Name of the respondent

2. Details of the YouTube channel
3. Language of the content
4. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
5. Do you have any co-workers or employees?
6. How many subscribers do you have?
7. Is your subscription quantity increasing or decreasing?
8. What type of content do you mostly make?
9. What type of content do you show on your YouTube channel? Do you have any content in Lai, Chakma or Mara?
10. How do you record and edit your content?
11. Is YouTube your primary source of income?

iv. Questions for Church-based Media Managers

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of the Church-based media currently engaged with
3. What type of media does your church produce?
4. Language of the content
5. What are the primary functions of church-based media?
6. How is the media department managed?
7. Who are the content contributors and creators? How is content selected for publication/broadcast?
8. How are church media printed, recorded and disseminated?
9. Are there any monetary advantages from running church media?

APPENDIX II

Key Questions for Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on Media Usage and Preferences of the Lai, Chakma and Mara people.

i. Newspaper

1. Do you have a subscription to any newspapers?
2. Do read online newspapers?
3. Do you often read your church newsletter/bulletin?
4. If not subscribed to any newspapers, why?
5. From where do you receive news - local news, state news, national and international news? What was the last newspaper you subscribed to?
6. What types of news interest you the most?
7. Which language do you prefer when reading news?

ii. Radio

1. Do you have a radio set at home?
2. Do you listen to the radio? If yes, how and if no, why?
3. Does your family listen to the radio?
4. Which programs do you listen to on the radio?
5. Do you know anyone who listens to the radio?
6. What language do you prefer when listening to the radio?

iii. Television

1. Do you have television at home?
2. Is it an analogue or smart TV?

3. Are you connected to the local cable television or direct-to-home (DTH)?
4. Do you have a subscription to OTT services?
5. What channels do you watch the most?
6. What language do prefer to watch television content?
7. How often do you watch television?
8. Do you watch television with your family? Which channels do you watch with your family?

iv. Online Media

1. Do you own a smartphone?
2. Do you have an internet connection on your phone? Which network provider?
3. Do you have a wi-fi connection at home?
4. Name all the social networking sites (SNS) where you have an account.
5. Which SNS do you use the most?
6. What other mobile applications do you use regularly?
7. What *WhatsApp* group are you most active in?
8. Are you in any news *WhatsApp* groups? Name a few.
9. Are you the admin of any social media groups or pages? – *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, websites etc.
10. What channels do you subscribe to on YouTube?
11. Tell me what you watch on YouTube.
12. Do you watch or read any content in the Lai/Chakma/Mara languages?
13. Are there any favourite Lai/Chakma/Mara content creators? – blogs, YouTube

channels etc.

14. Do you create content for social media? – reels, shorts, vlogs.
15. What language do you use most on social media?
16. For what purpose do you use social media the most?
17. Do you wish to see more content in your language?

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[g=PT3&dq=keval+j+kumar+mass+communication&ots=khaVJ7955G&sig=Dg0xRs-KKeUsHNn4qJL8gSNabj0](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ECF7hjnZWfcC&oi=fnd&p=g=PT3&dq=keval+j+kumar+mass+communication&ots=khaVJ7955G&sig=Dg0xRs-KKeUsHNn4qJL8gSNabj0)

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APPENDIX – I

Interview Questions for Key Informants (Journalists, Cable TV service providers, YouTubers, Media Managers of the Church)

Questions for Print Journalists

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of media firm currently engaged with
3. Language of the publication
4. Does your media firm (newspapers, magazines) have official registration?
5. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
6. How many employees do you employ in your publication?
7. How many copies of newspapers/magazines do you print and circulate in a single day?
8. In which year did you circulate the largest number of copies of your newspaper/magazines?
9. What type of content do you mostly publish?
10. What are your news sources? Do you give credit to the sources?
11. How do you classify the credibility of your sources?
12. Do you have any formal media training before joining this profession?
13. Does your publication have an online presence?
14. How do you adapt to the increasing popularity of social media?
15. What is your primary source of income?
16. What is the day-to-day workflow of your publication?

Questions for Cable Television Network Providers

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of media firm currently engaged with
3. Language of the broadcast
4. Does your media firm (newspapers, magazines) have official registration?
5. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
6. How many people do you employ?
7. How many subscribers do you have?

8. Is your subscription quantity increasing or decreasing?
9. What type of content do you mostly broadcast?
10. Do you make any content? How many local channels do you provide? Do you have channels in Lai, Chakma or Mara?
11. What are your news sources? Do you give credit to the sources?
12. How do you classify the credibility of your sources?
13. Do you have any formal media training for the employees of your firm?
14. Does your firm have an online presence?
15. How do you adapt to the increasing popularity of social media and increasing OTT services?
16. What is your primary source of income?
17. What is the day-to-day management of your firm?

Questions for YouTubers

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of the YouTube channel
3. Language of the content
4. Are you a member of the Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA)?
5. Do you have any co-workers or employees?
6. How many subscribers do you have?
7. Is your subscription quantity increasing or decreasing?
8. What type of content do you mostly make?
9. What type of content do you show on your YouTube channel? Do you have any content in Lai, Chakma or Mara?
10. How do you record and edit your content?
11. Is YouTube your primary source of income?

Questions for Church-based Media Managers

1. Name of the respondent
2. Details of the Church-based media currently engaged with
3. What type of media does your church produce?

4. Language of the content
5. What are the primary functions of church-based media?
6. How is the media department managed?
7. Who are the content contributors and creators? How is content selected for publication/broadcast?
8. How are church media printed, recorded and disseminated?
9. Are there any monetary advantages from running church media?

APPENDIX II

Key Questions for Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on Media Usage and Preferences of the Lai, Chakma and Mara people.

i. Newspaper

1. Do you have a subscription to any newspapers?
2. Do read online newspapers?
3. Do you often read your church newsletter/bulletin?
4. If not subscribed to any newspapers, why?
5. From where do you receive news - local news, state news, national and international news? What was the last newspaper you subscribed to?
6. What types of news interest you the most?
7. Which language do you prefer when reading news?

ii. Radio

1. Do you have a radio set at home?
2. Do you listen to the radio? If yes, how and if no, why?
3. Does your family listen to the radio?
4. Which programs do you listen to on the radio?
5. Do you know anyone who listens to the radio?
6. What language do you prefer when listening to the radio?

iii. Television

1. Do you have television at home?
2. Is it an analogue or smart TV?
3. Are you connected to the local cable television or direct-to-home (DTH)?
4. Do you have a subscription to OTT services?
5. What channels do you watch the most?
6. What language do prefer to watch television content?
7. How often do you watch television?
8. Do you watch television with your family? Which channels do you watch with your family?

iv. Online Media

1. Do you own a smartphone?
2. Do you have an internet connection on your phone? Which network provider?
3. Do you have a wi-fi connection at home?
4. Name all the social networking sites (SNS) where you have an account.
5. Which SNS do you use the most?
6. What other mobile applications do you use regularly?
7. What *WhatsApp* group are you most active in?
8. Are you in any news *WhatsApp* groups? Name a few.
9. Are you the admin of any social media groups or pages? – *WhatsApp*,
Facebook, websites etc.
10. What channels do you subscribe to on YouTube?
11. Tell me what you watch on YouTube.
12. Do you watch or read any content in the Lai/Chakma/Mara languages?
13. Are there any favourite Lai/Chakma/Mara content creators? – blogs,
YouTube channels etc.
14. Do you create content for social media? – reels, shorts, vlogs.
15. What language do you use most on social media?
16. For what purpose do you use social media the most?
17. Do you wish to see more content in your language?

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Educational Background:

Name of Exam	Year	Board/University	Subject	Percentage	Division
HSLC	2008	Mizoram Board of School Education		62%	I
HSSLC	2010	Mizoram Board of School Education	Arts	55.4%	II
Bachelor of Arts	2013	Delhi University	English (Hons.)	46%	II
Master of Journalism & Mass Communication	2015	Mizoram University	Journalism & Mass Communication	77.1%	Distinction
M. Phil	2016	Madurai Kamaraj University	Journalism & Mass Communication	80.75%	Distinction

Research Publications:

Ruatpuii, V. L., & Lalruatkimi, D. I. (2023). From Passive Audiences to Active Producers: A Case Study of Chakma Local Content Creators in Mizoram.

South India Journal of Social Sciences, XXI.

Ruatpuii, V. L., & Lalruatkimi, I. (2022). Media Usage Pattern of Chakma Women.

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Papers Presented:

Presented a paper titled "Media Preferences of Lai Women" in the National Seminar on "Media, Women and Culture: The Indian Trijunction" organized by the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University on September 13th and 14th, 2018 at MZU Guest House.

Presented a paper titled "Deciphering Lai Local Television Channels of Lawngtlai" in the ICSSR Sponsored National Seminar on "Resurgence of Nationalism: Citizenship, Identity and Belonging" jointly organized by Mizoram Political Science Association and Department of Political Science, Govt. Aizawl College, Mizoram on 17th - 18th October, 2019.

Presented a paper titled "Media and Politics: A Case Study on Lawngtlai Media Coverage on District Council Election 2020" in the International Web-Convention Hundred Years of Media Education - Decoding the South Asian Mystique on December 19 and 20, 2020.

Presented a paper titled "A Case Study of Media in the Chakma Autonomous District Council of Mizoram" at the XLI Annual Conference cum Seminar of Mizo History Association on 'The Making of Mizo History: From Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial period' during December 2-3, 2021 at Govt. T. Romana College, Aizawl, Mizoram.

FROM PASSIVE AUDIENCES TO ACTIVE PRODUCERS: A CASE STUDY OF CHAKMA LOCAL CONTENT CREATORS IN MIZORAM.

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement and easy accessibility of media technologies, anyone with at least a slight interest can be a content creator these days. By passing the rigid organizational structure of traditional media, new media platforms are harboring millions of media creators around the world who are armed with as little as a smartphone and a decent internet connection. Such is also the case of the Chakma minority people living in Mizoram who do not have representation or platform in the traditional media mostly owned by the dominant Mizo tribe. The Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) region saw proper internet connection as late as 2019 and since then, there has been a rise in media content made by the people in their language across different new media platforms. Using intensive interviews and field observations as methodology, this paper is an attempt at exploring and witnessing how local creators are taking strides in making media content despite limited resources and how they make the most out of the resources disposable to them. Accounts of interaction with a government employee who has a small home studio made out of repurposed fish box Styrofoam walls; an Auto rickshaw driver by day, a rapper by night who records diss tracks using a laptop at the outskirts of the village because the house was too noisy; a YouTuber who received massive positive feedback from local and diaspora Chakma communities on her travelogue series are discussed and reflected in the paper to give a broader view on what it takes to be a content creator a small Chakma society.

Keywords – *Local media, content creation, Chakma, field observation, intensive interview*

INTRODUCTION

Much like its neighboring states in North East India, Mizoram, located at the southernmost border is home to different tribal population. According to the 2011 census, Mizoram has a total population of 1,097,206 where 94.4% are classified as Scheduled Tribe – the highest percentage of statewide tribal population in the country (*Statewise Total & Tribal Population*, n.d.). The people living in Mizoram are known as Mizo and can be broadly classified into two groups – the Duhlian (commonly known as Mizo) speaking Lusei and the non-Lusei communities like the Mara, the Lai, the Puihte, and the Hmar who speak both Duhlian and their language or dialect. More than 70 % of the total populations are Duhlian speakers (Saitluanga et al., 2022).

Mizoram has 11 districts and 3 autonomous district councils (ADC) formed under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India on 29 April 1972 which are – the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC). The ADC in Mizoram is concentrated in the two southernmost districts – Lawngtlai which is divided into LADC and CADC and MADC in Siahla district. CADC comes under the Tuichawng Constituency of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. It borders Lunglei District in the north, LADC in the east, and shares an international border with Bangladesh in the west and Myanmar in the south. Kamalanagar town also known as Chawngte is the headquarters of the CADC.

CHAKMAS IN MIZORAM

At 8.46% of the state's total population, the Chakmas are the second-largest ethnic scheduled tribe in Mizoram. They speak Chakma, a language also known as Changma Bhajeh, and a script called Ajha Path. However, due to convenience, they have adopted the Bengali script in most of their writings. Most of the Chakmas are not fluent speakers of Mizo language and are

Media Usage Pattern of Chakma Women.

V.L. Ruatpuir¹ & Dr. Irene Lalruatkimi²

Abstract

With the gradual advancement of technology and communication channels, media usage has become a constant in our everyday lives. This paper tried to study the media usage pattern of Chakma women residing in Kamalanagar village, the headquarters of the Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lawngtlai District. Using qualitative method of data collection namely field observation of the study area and focus group discussion among 12 Chakma women were used to collect first-hand data on the media usage pattern. It is found that mobile phone is the most used medium for personal, educational, and information purposes. YouTube is also used by all the participants to watch mainly entertainment content. None of the participants subscribed to print media and hardly read any news at all. Television at home is mostly used to play Hindi serials or cartoons which the whole family can watch together. Chakma society is a patriarchal society and women are mainly considered to be the homemaker rather than the bread earner, this practice is also reflected in the media usage as women are hardly content creators but is more passive users of social media. It is also found that the younger participants used languages such as Hindi, Chakma, and English interchangeably over different platforms of social media. Their unawareness of the Mizo language posed the main reason behind the lack of consumption of Mizo media content manufactured within the state.

Keywords: Chakma, media usage, new media, focus group discussion, Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lawngtlai District.

Introduction

Media usage has become an integral part of our everyday lives. With the gradual advancement in technology, there have been a plethora of choices in the medium of communication. The cheap and easy accessibility of modern communication technology provides the opportunity to access numerous new media platforms not just for the dominant member of the society but for the marginalized groups as well who were otherwise underrepresented and often suppressed by society. This study is done among the Chakma women residing in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) of Mizoram. The CADC was formed under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India on April 29 1972 to safeguard the tradition and rights of the Chakma tribe living in Lawngtlai District of Mizoram. Kamalanagar town (also known as Chawngte C) serves as the administrative headquarters of the CADC. The CADC area comes under Chawngte Rural Development Block of Lawngtlai District. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Chawngte RD Block is 45,307 of which 21,850 are females. 92.07% of the inhabitants are Buddhists and the female literacy rate is 31.12%. Most of the Chakmas are multi-lingual in speech if not fluent in writing. Languages such as Chakma, Hindi, Bengali, English, and sometimes Mizo are used by many for day-to-day conversation.

Review of Literature

Media usage and consumption have been an integral part of media research both on international and national stages. Dolch (2020) studied the media usage patterns of male and female German higher education

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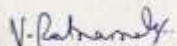



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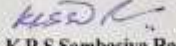
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DEPARTMENT : **MASS COMMUNICATION**

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Head

Department of Mass Communication

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ABSTRACT

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MEDIA IN THE
AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCILS OF MIZORAM**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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PHILOSOPHY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT & INFORMATION
SCIENCE (SEMIS)
OCTOBER 2024**

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MEDIA IN THE AUTONOMOUS
DISTRICT COUNCILS OF MIZORAM**

BY

V.L. RUATPUH

DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION

Supervisor

Prof. IRENE LALRUATKIMI

Submitted

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

An Ethnographic Study of Media in the Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram.

ABSTRACT:

Media plays a vital role in our day-to-day lives. It is integral to foster relationships with communities, disseminate information, and entertain. With the media's constant presence in our daily lives – from our personal to public spaces, it must have one of the most significant influences on our culture and society by which we live in a media culture and perhaps, media society (Hodkinson, 2016). Media plays an important role in society where it influences public opinion, provides a link between the government and the people, acts as a government watchdog, and affects socialization. This thesis attempts to explore the vernacular and ethnic media landscape of a democratic society composed of ethnic minority communities in Mizoram.

For minorities worldwide, media serves as a vital platform for representation and advocacy. Through vernacular and ethnic media, these communities not only stay informed about government policies but also use them as a tool for preserving their culture and traditions, representing local identities, and contributing to the cultural continuity and empowerment of marginalized groups (Matsaganis & Katz, 2010).

Media and the Marginalized Groups

Ramasubramanian (2016) examines how racial minorities (in the U.S.) are adapting to, resisting, and challenging mainstream media practices in the current convergence era. By engaging in collaborative, community-based transmedia storytelling projects, these groups are developing new critical media literacies and becoming more active in digital citizenship. Racial minorities are using these transmedia platforms to create more inclusive and participatory forms of storytelling, offering alternative narratives that challenge mainstream media representations.

Jasmine Yimchunger & TJPRC (2019) explore how Naga youth perceive their representation in mainstream Indian media. Through focus group discussions

with Naga youth, the study reveals a sense of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and marginalization in the way mainstream media portrays the Nagas. The media often emphasizes conflict, insurgency, and outdated stereotypes, such as the portrayal of Nagas as "savages" or "headhunters," while neglecting the rich cultural diversity and positive aspects of Naga life. The study further highlights how Naga youth negotiate between their dual identities as both Nagas and Indians, often feeling alienated from the national narrative due to cultural and political differences. It argues that media representation plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these feelings of alienation.

(Alam et al., 2024) examine how media portrayals influence tribal communities in Jharkhand. There is a practice of oversimplification and stereotyping of indigenous issues in mainstream media, often focusing on conflicts over land and resources while neglecting the complex socio-economic challenges. The paper argues for ethical journalism and nuanced media representation to address tribal issues effectively and promote sustainable development. It also explores the media's role in shaping public opinion, influencing policies, and fostering social justice and community empowerment.

A study of media perception among the tribal Gujar community in Kashmir India by Mufti & Hashim (2016), reveals that despite the massive proliferation of internet facilities and social media, for the Gujar tribes, radio is still the most accessible and widely used medium with television trailing in the second. Due to the low literacy rate and lower socio-economic condition of the tribes, print media and internet usage are also minimal. This shows that literacy and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in determining media access and usage among marginalized communities. The lower literacy levels limit their engagement with print and digital media, while the affordability and accessibility of radio make it the most relied-upon medium. This emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive media strategies that consider the educational and economic conditions of such communities.

In a study of the same tribe, but in a different Indian state; Himachal Pradesh, Kumar & Rabindranath (2017), highlight the generational divide in media use within

the tribe. Older generations are more reluctant to adopt modern technologies and prefer traditional media or religious and social programs. They also express concerns about the potential negative impact of media, such as cultural erosion and exposure to inappropriate content. In contrast, the younger generations show more curiosity towards modern media, particularly mobile phones, which they use to access social media, entertainment, and global trends. Despite their nomadic lifestyle, the younger Gujjars are more open to modernity and technological advancements.

A study on the media usage profile of the Gujjar tribe located in Haryana by Garg (2018) found that only a small percentage of Gujjar only a small percentage of Gujjar households access traditional media like newspapers (2.5%) and television (4%). These low figures are attributed to low literacy levels and cultural beliefs, particularly in Muslim households, where television is often viewed as haram (forbidden). Mobile phones are found in 90% of households and are the most accessible medium, bridging geographic, social, and economic boundaries for this community. Men have more access to media compared to women, and elders exhibit more resistance to modern media out of fear of negative cultural impacts. Youths have been the fastest adopters of new media technologies in most cultures.

Mizoram, one of the northeastern states in India has 95% of its population classified as Scheduled Tribe making it the state with the highest concentration of protected tribal communities in India. Among these tribes are three tribes – Lai, Chakma and Mara who are safeguarded under the Sixth Scheduled to the Constitution of India with their own Autonomous District Councils namely – Lai Autonomous District Councils (LADC), the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC).

In Mizoram, the capital city Aizawl is the economic, educational and media hub and media studies are also mostly concentrated in and around the city. Using ethnography as a methodology, this study aims to explore the media landscape of the less studied part of Mizoram – the Autonomous District Councils (ADC) regions. The scope of this study is to explore the media landscape within the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram—LADC, CADC, and MADC.

Objectives of the Study

1. To map the various mass media operating within the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram.
2. To identify the media creators and the process of media production and distribution.
3. To study the media usage and preferences of the people (Lai, Chakma and Mara) in the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram.

This study contributes to the knowledge of the broader discourse of media studies primarily on the ethnic and vernacular media industry. It also addresses a research gap in the media landscape of Mizoram, especially in the Autonomous District Council Areas, an area that has been unexplored in academic literature. This research not only offers an insight into the workings of media but also into how people make use of such media. The study also highlights the working conditions of the journalists and other media content creators and suggested practical recommendations to improve their work environment.

Ethnography – the Key Research Methodology

The concept of ethnography is deeply rooted in anthropology. Works of anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas emphasized immersive fieldwork and direct observation of culture and societies laying the foundation of ethnographic research. Ethnography is the —study of a culture or cultures that a group of people share (Van Maanen, 1995). ‘Ethnography’ is a term somewhat loosely borrowed from social anthropology, and it alludes to the situated, empirical description of peoples and races. Other terms also cover the same procedure – fieldwork, participant observation, and what is called ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting (Atkinson et al., 2014). It has been used for both the context of discovery and validation (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009)

Structure of the Thesis

Although the study has three research objectives, an attempt has been made to address all the objectives in one chapter for each study area rather than dedicating the objective to separate chapters. This approach is used to convey a more cohesive narration of events and contextualize the data based on the specific cultural, historical and political setting of each region.

Chapters IV, V & VI are also accompanied by photographs of the study site to offer better insight into the ground realities of the study area.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction, providing an introduction to the relationship between media and society, a glance at media in Mizoram, and the backdrop of the study to give an overview of the thesis.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The second chapter delivers an exhaustive review of several studies on media and minorities, ethnic media and media culture in Mizo different regions to identify the research gap that the study aims to fill.

Chapter III: Area of Study and Methodology

This chapter offers two purposes: a detailed overview of the methodology – Ethnography and the background –geographical, social and cultural information of the study area.

Chapter IV: Media in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC)

The fourth chapter details a thick description of media in LADC – mapping of media (print, broadcast media) along with photographs; the media players and also the preferences and consumption of media by the Lai people.

Chapter V: Media in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)

The fifth chapter delves into media in CADC – mapping of media past and present, the condition of the media industry and how media is consumed and utilized by the Chakma people.

Chapter VI: Media in the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC)

The sixth chapter offers an overview of the media landscape in the MADC and what and how the Mara people choose to use media.

Chapter VII: Findings and Conclusion

The last chapter of the thesis discusses the study's key findings along with the concluding statements. It also comments on the shortcomings of the study and highlights the prospect of media studies in the peripheral regions and marginalized people of Mizoram.

Key Findings of the study:

Radio – a dated medium

Radio has never been a part of many participant's media experience. Older generations only keep them alive from memories. It has been replaced by modern media.

Small-Scale and Family-Run Print Media

Most newspapers in Lawngtlai are small-scale, independently owned, and operated by single editors or their families from their homes. Editors often perform multiple roles, including content creation, printing, and distribution, which reflects a lack of specialization and professional recruitment.

Circulation numbers are low, typically ranging from 100 to 200 copies, and most subscribers are government offices. This suggests that print media is not yet a

viable commercial venture but serves more as a passion project or a service to a specific community.

Outdated Formats and Reporting

Media operations do not have big budgets, which affects both quality and aesthetics. Newspapers use home-based laser printers and produce simple black-and-white layouts. There are no unique selling points for any of the newspapers to attract the audience. The reporting also lacks uniqueness as they are mostly taken from the same sources – government websites, social media posts etc.

Reliance on Government Support

Most newspapers in Lawngtlai depend heavily on subscriptions and advertisements from state and LADC government offices. This limits their audience to mainly government employees, making it difficult for them to reach a broader public. The reliance on government funding also risks compromising their journalistic integrity and poses the question – do they cater to the people or the governments?

Church Publication Subscriptions: High Subscription but Low Readership

Most households are subscribed to at least one church publication, a practice perceived as a demonstration of religious devotion and community membership. Despite high subscription rates, engagement with church publications is low, and many participants admitted that these publications are often left unread. Church publications serve more as a symbol of faith and social standing rather than as a source of news or information for many subscribers.

Christian Ethos in Media Production and Consumption

Incorporation of Christian values, beliefs and principles in the contents and creation of media. Editorials and op-eds often align with Christian values. Church publications are the most widely circulated print media. All the commercial print media do not publish on weekends, especially on Sundays.

Prevalence of Traditional Indigenous Media

Tlangau, Dakkerani & Tlah-Aw— town criers as they are known in the Lai, Chakma and Mara respectively which are rooted in the oral form of information practised for centuries are still the most trusted and relied upon media for crucial information and will likely continue to flourish. Cultural significance in the preservation of oral tradition, cultural symbolism and community cohesion are the reasons why they continue to prevail in the close-knit societies of the Lai, Chakma and Mara. Somehow, the print media is the least relevant media for the masses.

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