

A STUDY OF TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION IN MIZORAM

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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Submitted

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

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled “**A Study of Transnational Television in Mizoram**” submitted to Mizoram University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication by **Nicky Lalrinsanga Lotlai** bearing **MZU Regn. no. 1700048** and **Ph.D. Regn. No. MZU/Ph.D./1397 of 26.07.2019** is a record of research work carried out during the period of 2019-2025 under my guidance and supervision, and that this work has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other titles in this university or any other university or institution of higher learning.

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

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

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Wow, it feels surreal to be writing this section. By the time this page is printed and compiled, I will be 31 years of age- or a month or two younger. Life does flash by, with or without you. I guess these will be my last paragraphs in academia, so I'd like to dedicate this page to a few individuals. If you can't find your name, do not ask me why.

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(NICKY LALRINSANGA LOTLAI)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.N.	American Broadcasting Network
A.F.K.N.	American Forces Korean Network
A.I.R.	All India Radio
A.S.E.A.N.	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
B.A.R.C.	Broadcast Audience Research Council
B.B.C.	British Broadcasting Corporation
B.I.	Broadcast India
C. & S.T.V.	Cable and Satellite Television
C.A.D.C.	Chakma Autonomous District Council
C.N.N.	Cable News Network
C.R.T.	Cathode Ray Tube
D.D.	Doordarshan
D.T.H.	Direct-To-Home
E.S.P.N.	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
F.G.D.	Focus Group Discussion
G.O.I.	Government of India
H.D.	High Definition
I.P.T.V.	Internet Protocol Television
I.R.S.	Indian Readership Survey
L.A.D.C.	Lai Autonomous District Council
L.P.G.	Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization
L.P.S.	Laldailova Pachuau & Sons

M.A.D.C.	Mara Autonomous District Council
M.F.D.S	Mizoram Film Development Society
M.N.F.	Mizo National Front
M.P.F.	Mizoram People's Forum
M.T.V.	Music Television
M.Z.P.	Mizo Zirlai Pawl
M.Z.U.	Mizoram University
N.A.S.A.	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
N.A.T.O.	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
N.B.C.	National Broadcasting Company
N.E.P.	New Economic Policy
P.U.C.	Pachhunga University College
P.V.R.	Personal Video Recorder
R.C.A.	Radio Corporation of America
S.I.T.E.	Satellite Instructional Television Experiment
S.R.D.	Statista Research Department
S.T.A.R.	Satellite Television for Asiatic Region
T.R.T.	Turkish Radio and Television
T.V.:	Television
U.G.C.	University Grants Commission
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.E.S.C.O.	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

U.O.M.	University of Minnesota
U.S.	United States
V.C.R.	Video Cassette Recorder
V.L.P.	Very Low Power
Y.M.A.	Young Mizo Association
Z.E.E.	Zee Entertainment Enterprises

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Over the years, television has been at the centre of a multitude of arguments among scholars, critics, and even ordinary citizens in its ability to affect and influence society, culture, government, religion, and individuals' attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs, creating or forming a false or altered reality in how one perceives and interacts with their environment. As Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) noted, "Television through its storytelling functions, unites and examines a culture." Unlike its predecessors in mass media such as radio, the printing press, and the telegram, television combines the sensory power of visual and audio to influence or dictate our attention and imagination in its presentation of "distortive social imagery" (Corner, 1997; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Philo, 2002; Shrum et al., 1988; Ozkoak, 2016). The power it possessed was clear when the prominent German writer Rudolf Arnheim wrote, "Television is a new, hard test of our wisdom." He further noted the medium has the potential to "enrich its viewers or impoverish them, making an indolent and domesticated audience." Barrett C. Kiesling noted in 1937, "It is with fear and trembling that the author approaches the controversial subject of television" (Kiesling, 1937, as cited in Miller, 2010). Sundaram (2024) also writes, "detached from life, images become autonomous, producing a reality that [is] pseudo-real," highlighting the power of television. Television has been a subject of research as early as 1949; the effects of television on family, society, and culture had already been studied by Rutgers University. Their research concluded that television "increased family unity and cohesion, did not promote viewer passivity, and did not replace other valued diversions, such as outdoor activities and social interactions." However, these findings were debated and challenged, as the research was sponsored by a television broadcasting company (Columbia Broadcasting Company, CBC) and the majority of subjects in the study consisted of "semi-skilled and unskilled workers and grammar school groups" (Roberts & Powell, 2014; Riley et al., 1949). Such criticisms underscored the challenges inherent in assessing the true impact of

television, revealing the complexities of balancing corporate interests with independent scholarly inquiry. The ongoing scholarly engagement with television's effects is a testament to its enduring significance as a cultural force and it is not merely a source of entertainment but a medium capable of constructing a "false" or altered reality that profoundly influences the way individuals perceive and interact with their environment. This dual nature of both uniting and dividing, enriching and impoverishing, places television at the nexus of cultural production and consumption. The medium's ability to disseminate images and narratives has continually raised questions about the nature of reality and the extent to which mediated representations can transform society. In light of these considerations, this thesis, 'A Study of Transnational Television in Mizoram', seeks to extend this rich body of scholarship by examining how television, particularly in its transnational form, influences cultural perceptions within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Mizoram. By exploring the dynamic interplay between global media narratives and local cultural realities, the study aims to elucidate how television shapes and is shaped by the intricate processes of cultural adaptation and social transformation.

1.2 Concept of Transnational Television

Transnational television is a worldwide system of commodity chains where television forms are exchanged, and broadcasters hold the majority of power. It has become a commonplace and cannot be restricted within national borders (Chalaby, 2005). In the context of Asia, where the deregulation and privatisation of broadcasting rights have increased the dispersion and pluralisation of television channels, television viewership has significantly increased as transnational television content offers audiences more options for shows, as is the case in India (Liew, 2011; Singhal et al., 1988). Transnational televisions, owned by multinational broadcasters "expands and operates in different fashions and present a distinct type of transnationality" (Chalaby, 2015). Chalaby (2015) stressed the importance of being less nation-centric and adopting a more cosmopolitan outlook to understand the "phenomenon's diversity and complexity." As a result, this study does not confine itself to contents from a single country, but instead focuses its attention on the diverse nature of transnational television from different countries, each presenting a

particular culture and “encoded” with different themes based on the country and culture in which it was conceived. In this study, transnational television is understood as those television contents and channels that are produced in foreign countries and later distributed in India through multinational broadcasters such as Satellite Television for Asia and the Pacific (STAR), Sony Entertainment Television and other foreign broadcasters that entered India after deregulation by the Indian government in the early 1990s. Transnational television content in India is mostly distributed through cable connections and later via set-top boxes; it is known as Cable and Satellite Television (C&STV). The contents of transnational television found their way onto India’s TV screens by the late 1970s and the 1980s. Kumar (2000) noted that the transnational content in its early years was mostly British, American, and German TV shows, and he expressed that these shows were “very regional” in nature, but they were the ones that opened up Indian audiences to foreign TV content, as until then DD channels were their only option. Transnational television is also known as “television without borders”, “global television”, “cross-border television”, etc. (Desai & Agrawal, 2009).

1.3 Contextualising Culture

Culture is a complex, continually changing process, and there can be no single definitive definition or conclusion. Several scholars have emphasized that culture should not be limited “to a concept but [be seen as] a complex phenomenon having a historical totality” (Desai, 2022). The word culture itself comes from the Latin *cultura*, originally meaning the cultivation of crops or tillage of land. Over time it was metaphorically extended to include cultivation of the human mind or spirit-learning and broadening one’s mind. In the nineteenth century, anthropologists further defined culture as the lived experiences of individuals in a society that govern social life (Stepin, 2003). Sir Edward B. Tylor’s 1871 definition remains one of the most cited. He wrote: “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871). This definition has been critiqued on the grounds that using “man” excludes half of society, but it highlights the scope of culture as a “complex whole”

encompassing all learned social traits. UNESCO (2000) offered a broader definition: “a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, which encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs.” This underscores that culture includes not just art and literature, but the full way of life of a group. For the purposes of this study, culture will be understood as “a whole way of life of a society or group, including values, meanings, identities, traditions, norms of behaviour, and ways of understanding the world,” emphasizing beliefs and value systems, and in particular the role of society in shaping individual identity and norms (Hodkinson, 2011).

In the age of globalisation, culture is increasingly mediated and reshaped through transnational flows of information, particularly via television. Media texts do not merely reflect culture; they participate in its (re)construction by disseminating lifestyles, ideologies, and norms that may challenge or reconfigure local values (Appadurai, 1996; Hall, 1997). In Mizoram- a region marked by an extremely strong Christian ethos, unique linguistic identity, and traditional Mizo customs and culture- the infiltration of global media content poses significant questions about cultural preservation, adaptation, and identity formation. Understanding culture in this context thus becomes essential for analysing how transnational television is reshaping value systems and social behaviour in contemporary Mizo society.

1.4 Television as an Agent of Change

Television acts as an agent of change as it combines technology, culture, commerce, and politics. It is a reflection of the society and culture in which it was conceived or produced. It is also an influential instrument in crossing “geographical and political boundaries” (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2002; Desai & Agrawal, 2009). This combination of visual and audio formats makes it a cultural medium where ideas are exchanged frequently with unexpected results, leading to changes in perspective and interpretation of different cultures, religions, and traditions (Mehta, 2020). McMillin (2010) challenged the notion of television networks as “just another source of entertainment” and argued the need to study these networks: how they negotiate their

identity in trying to attract more viewers and their role in presenting other cultures. Television's embedded messages are crafted so that they can be easily "decoded" in favour of the creator, as Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) articulated: "complexities of image, style, resonance, narrativity, history, metaphor, and so on are reduced in favour of that content that can be more precisely, some say more objectively, described. The content categories are predefined in order to be measured more easily." The arrival of transnational television content in India was viewed as "cultural invasion" and was seen as "alien" by religious leaders, politicians, and social commentators (Butcher, 2003). Sinclair and Harrison (2004), in their paper "Globalization, Nation, and Television in Asia: The Cases of India and China", acknowledged that the liberalisation of the economy is followed by the liberalisation of culture and tradition, as transnational television and its content portray cultural practices that contrast with those of India. The arrival of Satellite Television for Asia and the Pacific (STAR TV) in 1992 and its heavily Western content- such as Baywatch and Dallas- ignited intense debate as it kick-started the arrival of transnational television and a revolution of "cultural change" in India (Butcher, 2003). Before the arrival of transnational television in India, content was strongly controlled by the government. After the arrival of STAR TV and other private stakeholders such as Music Television (MTV), Discovery, American Broadcasting Company (ABC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), the acceleration of what was called the "cultural degradation" of Indian society occurred (Desai, 2022; Jensen & Oster, 2007).

1.5 Television in India

Television in India began broadcasting on 15 September 1959 from Delhi with assistance from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Philips, a Dutch electronics company (Butcher, 2003; Sahu, 2018; Vyas & Sharma, 2002). The presence of television in India could be split into three stages. The first stage, from 1959 to 1983, saw television used as an experimental tool for education and development. The Indian government, in collaboration with the United States government, launched the Satellite Instructional Television

Experiment (SITE), aiming to develop rural India. NASA's satellite was utilised to telecast programmes to 2,332 Indian villages spanning six states; it was estimated to have been watched by 2.8 million people. Television was viewed as a tool to accelerate rural development and foster national integration during this period, with emphasis given to "education and information" for farmers, teachers, and students (Saddiqi, 2020; Sahu, 2018; Kale, 1973). The second stage was when government-owned Doordarshan (DD) had a complete monopoly on broadcasting, which lasted from 1983 until 1991. Delhi hosted the Asian Games in 1982, and it was also the year India had its first communication satellite, INSAT-1A. It was an epoch in Indian television history as colours began to appear on screens (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2000; Sahu, 2018). The educational and development-oriented programmes were augmented with non-educational content. Several English and Hindi serials were telecast during this period; though the programmes became increasingly varied, they were all deemed "culturally appropriate" and acceptable. Indian (Hindu) epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata were hugely popular, and Hum Log, one of the most-watched Hindi serials during this period, was aimed at "family planning and national integration" (McMillin, 2015; Sulehria, 2017). Hum Log also became the first programme launched by DD to get a commercial sponsor (Thomas, 2005). The last stage began in the early 1990s when the Indian government, under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao, adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP) which focused attention on liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG). This opened the market for private players and hence the entry of transnational television content (Sahu, 2018; Singh, 2004; Thussu, 2007). American broadcaster Cable News Network (CNN) seized the opportunity of India's deregulation and became the first news channel to enter India via satellite in 1991, soon followed by STAR TV, Sony, and ZEE TV- all posing a considerable threat and challenge to DD, which until then was the sole operator of television content in India (McMillin, 2015; Thomas, 2005).

1.6 Background of the Study

Like the rest of India, Mizoram experienced a boom in television after 1990. On 5 September 1991, Skylink Cable Networks began its satellite-based television channel, which was soon followed by "local original transmission" content provided

and operated by LPS Television production studio in 1992. Zozam followed in 1994 by starting its own cable network. Zonet Cable Network was also started after the dawn of the millennium in 2004 (Laldinfeli & Ratnamala, 2016; Muansangkimi, 2015). Several studies have been done on the impact and changes brought about by television and its transnational content in India. Crabtree and Malhotra (2000) studied the cultural changes that transpired in India as a result of commercially driven television content and noted significant resistance to “foreign content” due to the heavy presence of sex and violence, but they acknowledged the presence of “cultural imperialism” in India. Scrase’s (2002) ethnographic study on the alteration of cultural identities in Bengal found a “tension” between maintaining traditional Bengal practices like gender roles and age-based authority, and the adaptation of cultural practices seen on “satellite, cable and global television,” which is seen as a “cultural threat.” Butcher (2003), Desai and Agrawal (2009), and Thomas (2006) extensively studied the impact of transnational television in India and the changes that occur as a result of consuming Western content, acknowledging that changes in identity formation and cultural practices do take place. These changes are influenced by individuals’ level of education, religion, economic status, and location, i.e., whether they live in rural or urban areas. Despite studies on Indian audiences, Mizoram is a peculiar case as its culture and religion differ from mainland India (Lintner, 2015; Zarzosanga, 2016). In 1958, the “Mizo Cultural Society” was formed to act as a guardian for the preservation of the customs, traditions, and values of Mizo society, and the Mizos are aware of the influences of other cultures portrayed in songs and movies. As early as the 1950s, the Mizos banned “non-Mizo songs and music”, particularly Hindi songs. It was feared that, if unregulated, these songs and music could lead to “cultural invasion” and eventually initiate the degradation of Mizo culture and society (Zarzosanga, 2021). Civil society organisations continue to act as guardians to safeguard the culture and tradition in Mizoram, and one could argue that individuals’ formation of identity and gender roles are shaped by family, society, and religious institutions. At the start of the new millennium, a Hindi serial named “Kasautii Zindagii Kay” was dubbed into Mizo by LPS and was heavily watched. Consequently, it was banned after the producers faced stern pressure from civil society groups like Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZIP), Young Mizo Association (YMA),

and the Church on the grounds that it promoted “alien culture and religion” due to depictions of Hindu marriages and prayers filling the screens of Mizoram (Kuotso, 2013). Kuotso (2013) also mentioned the rise of dubbed Korean serials, which faced no resistance as they were culturally and religiously deemed appropriate for the Mizo audience.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The consumption of television content by individuals is a complex process of decoding cultural meanings, and an individual’s comprehension of the product is largely influenced by the context in which it is viewed, as well as cultural factors that have moulded the individual to think in a way that is accepted by society (Butcher, 2003; Wang et al., 2000). As such, television and its influence on culture, society, and religion have been studied by scholars to note the effects and changes it has brought about. However, there has been a dearth of studies on television in Mizoram, and few have touched upon the changes it has had on Mizo culture and how television texts are decoded to make meaning. Television content was under intense scrutiny in the early years of television in Mizoram; certain films and serials were banned on the grounds that they degraded local cultural and religious beliefs. As different cultures and traditions are exposed via television, Korean serials have changed perceptions of how the majority Christian state views gender and sexuality. While this change is thought to be positive by some, others see it as a stumbling block in cultural preservation (Colney, 2020). Western films have had a significant influence on Mizo fashion, as evidenced by the popularity and marketability of “cowboy hats and boots”; these acts were not seen as cultural degradation, as they portray a version of masculinity accepted by Mizo society (Lalmalsawma, 2022). The growth in technology has enabled the production and dissemination of culture in the form of films and serials, which can lead to a “cultural disorder” resulting in a “culture of distraction” with no guiding ropes of society to help individuals in their identity formation and affiliation (Butcher, 2003). As Desai (2022) posited, there is a need to study the “localized elements and cultural value adaptations that have been successful with audience taste.” As a result, this research will examine the cultural changes brought about by transnational television in Mizoram and the adaptation of

different cultural values by Mizo society. It will also try to decode why Mizo audiences are attracted to foreign films and serials, and whether this alters their perceptions of different cultures and religions.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study is situated at the intersection of media reception theory and cultural globalisation, drawing upon Stuart Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model and Marwan Kraidy's (2005) theorisation of cultural hybridity. Together, these frameworks provide a nuanced lens for analysing how transnational television is negotiated, reinterpreted, and hybridised within the specific socio-cultural context of Mizoram, particularly in relation to traditional gender roles and Christianised cultural norms.

Audience research can be broadly divided into two schools or approaches: the 'empirical tradition of audience research' originating from the United States, and 'Cultural Studies' that emerged from Europe. The former is based on 'behaviourist effects research and a functionalist audience model', while the latter is concerned with media audiences, 'centred on questions of discourse, meaning, and power' (Hodkinson, 2011). Among the founding fathers of British Cultural Studies and Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Hall's model of communication is concerned with the polysemic reception or 'decoding' of media texts, and provides a theoretical elucidation of how 'media messages are produced, disseminated, and received' (Hall, 1980; Ozkan, 2017). Television content (texts) is structured and produced in a way that aligns with the cultural practices and norms of the encoders, and is loaded with messages to influence the decoders to make meaning as intended by the producers (Aligwe et al., 2018; Barker, 2012). In the early period of media studies, scholars considered audiences to be 'passive', susceptible to media's manipulation and influence, and gave them little importance, believing their role was limited to receiving pre-existing meanings and being affected in predetermined ways, restricted by a "conception of a complex structure of relations" (Hall, 1980; Hodkinson, 2011; Ozkan, 2017). In contrast, Hall regards audiences as 'active' in constructing and decoding television texts, and their

interpretation of meaning is based on their socio-economic context, which may differ when decoded from the encoded messages. Though television works to enforce and empower the dominant ideological order and is encoded with such messages, Hall argued that these intended meanings can be challenged, and he posited three ways in which audiences can resist and negotiate the meanings in the text. He described three positions an audience can adopt when decoding the preferred meanings: the ‘dominant (or hegemonic) position’, which alludes to the audience being in tune with the preferred meaning and absorbing the intended messages; the ‘negotiated position’, which occurs when the audience accepts most of the encoded messages but has doubts about specific themes (for instance, a Mizo television audience might agree that Russia is a threat to the national security of the United States but might not agree with the extent to which it was encoded or portrayed); and the ‘oppositional position’, where the audience recognizes the encoded message but does not believe or accept it (Aligwe et al., 2018; Barker, 2012; Hall, 1980; Hodgkinson, 2011; Ivala, 2008). As Mehta (2020) posited, “reception is often at odds with the intentions of its creators—the recipient’s own assumptions and expectations regulate how media content is interpreted and appropriated.” Utilising Hall’s framework of audience research, this study treats Mizo audiences as ‘active’ in their consumption of television texts and attempts to analyse the ways in which meanings are constructed and decoded by them, in order to determine the extent of influence by deconstructing changes in their cultural practices, values, beliefs, gender roles, and perceptions of certain cultures and religions.

Marwan Kraidy’s (2005) *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* builds upon postcolonial and cultural studies scholarship to examine how hybrid identities and cultural forms emerge through the global circulation of media. Unlike earlier theories of cultural imperialism, which viewed the globalisation of media as a unidirectional imposition of Western values on passive peripheral audiences, Kraidy presents hybridity as an ongoing, dialectical process. Hybridity, in this sense, is not a synthesis of two cultures into a stable third form, but a dynamic interaction marked by negotiation, contradiction, and uneven power relations.

Kraidy argues that cultural hybridity is a “strategic tool” that can be used to both resist and accommodate dominant global forces. Rather than portraying hybridity as celebratory or emancipatory in itself, he emphasises its ambivalence and complexity. For Kraidy, hybrid cultural practices are both shaped by and shape globalisation, and they operate within specific historical, political, and cultural contexts.

This approach is particularly relevant to understanding the reception and appropriation of transnational television in Mizoram. As a society deeply influenced by Christianity and colonial legacies, yet rooted in distinct indigenous traditions, Mizoram is a fertile site for hybrid cultural negotiations. For example, the popularity of dubbed Korean dramas, Western films, and global beauty standards among Mizo audiences does not necessarily reflect uncritical acceptance of foreign ideals. Instead, these media texts are often reinterpreted through the prism of local values, religious doctrines, and everyday experiences. A Mizo viewer may admire the independence of female characters in a Western series while simultaneously affirming traditional Christian gender expectations. This contradiction is not a sign of confusion but of hybridity as an active, contested process.

Bringing together Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model and Kraidy’s theory of cultural hybridity allows this thesis to develop a dialectical understanding of how transnational television is consumed and reconfigured in Mizoram. Hall helps to illuminate the interpretive agency of Mizo audiences- how they read and make sense of gendered media representations and Kraidy provides the broader framework for understanding the structural and cultural dynamics of global-local interaction. This integrated approach recognises that while media texts are encoded with dominant ideologies (often shaped by Western or global capitalist values), they are decoded within culturally specific contexts that are themselves shaped by histories of colonisation, conversion, and cultural resilience. Furthermore, the negotiation of meaning does not happen in a vacuum; it is mediated by hybrid cultural formations that reflect the lived contradictions of Mizo society i.e., between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, patriarchy and emerging gender consciousness.

In this sense, hybridity and decoding are not discrete stages but overlapping, recursive processes. The decoding of media texts by Mizo audiences contributes to hybrid forms of cultural expression, such as the adaptation of Korean fashion with local modesty norms, or the reinterpretation of assertive female characters within Christian frameworks of femininity. These hybridities, in turn, inform future readings of media and reshape local cultural scripts. By foregrounding this dynamic interaction, the theoretical framework employed in this thesis avoids both cultural essentialism and reductive globalism, and instead situates Mizoram as an active participant in the negotiation of global cultural flows.

1.9 Research Questions

RQ1: Does the introduction or arrival of transnational television lead to alterations in the established gender roles, cultural values, and practices of Mizo society?

RQ2: What are the nature and roles played by Mizo dubbing studios in the localisation of transnational television content, and how do they act as cultural gatekeepers?

RQ3: Why are Mizos attracted to dubbed transnational television content, and does this change their perceptions of different cultures and religions?

1.10 Area of the Study

Like other North-Eastern states, Mizoram was carved out of Assam to become the 23rd Indian state on 20 February 1987, after 20 years of struggle for independence. Located in a “mountain range running south from the Himalayas”, Mizoram shares a 722-kilometre demarcation line with neighbouring Bangladesh and Myanmar; it also shares interstate boundaries of 123 kilometres with Assam, 95 kilometres with Manipur, and 277 kilometres with Tripura. Encompassing an area of around 21,081 sq. km, there are 52 people living per square kilometre in the state, making it the second least populated state in the country with 1,091,014 people as per the 2011 Census. With a literacy rate of 91.33per cent, it has the fourth highest literacy rate in India; Mizoram’s female literacy rate is 89.27per cent, the second highest in the country, only behind Kerala’s 92.07per cent. It is also among the very few states in

India where Christianity is the major religion; according to the latest census report, Christianity is the religion of 87.17 per cent of the state's population. There are 11 districts in Mizoram with Aizawl as the state's capital (Nithanga, 2005; Patnaik, 2014). The people inhabiting Mizoram are known as Mizos, a generic term meaning "hillman" or "highlander". They comprise several clans: Lusei, Pawi/Lai, Lakher/Mara, Hmar, Paihte, Kuki, and others. Like the Chin and Kuki, the Mizos trace their origin to Chhinglung, believed to be located in present-day Southern China; the term "Chhinlung" could be translated as "a covering rock". Among the ten Autonomous District Councils in India set up under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, three are present in Mizoram. The Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) are both located in the southern district of Lawngtlai; the neighbouring district of Siahla is home to the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) (Shyamkishor, 2014; Thangdailova, 2003). Situated at 1,220 metres above sea level, the state is blessed with an abundance of hills, mountains, lakes, and rivers. Comprising 21 hills, the average elevation of the hills is around 900 metres. Phawngpui Tlang, in Lawngtlai district, is the highest peak in the state at 2,175 metres above sea level. The longest river in Mizoram i.e., river Tlawng, spans 185.15 km, originating in Zopui Hill in Lunglei. According to the Mizoram State Climate Change Cell, the state falls in the heavy rainfall region of the country with an average of 2,500 to 3,000 mm of rainfall every year, and temperatures vary from 11°C to 21°C in winter and from 20°C to 30°C in summer (Mizoram State Climate Change Cell [MSCCC], 2018).

1.11 Methodology

As this research aims to ascertain the changes that have taken place in Mizoram since the introduction of transnational television- particularly in cultural values and practices, perceptions of gender roles in a patriarchal Mizo society, and broader societal transformations- the researcher adopted a qualitative research approach. Given that the topic is largely unexplored and under-researched, this study takes an exploratory approach. Qualitative methods are well-suited for capturing the complexities of societal change as they provide the depth and flexibility necessary to understand people's experiences and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This

methodological framework enables a thorough investigation into how transnational television has influenced Mizo culture by considering individual and collective perspectives. Kumar (2011) stated that to study “values, beliefs, understandings, perceptions, and meanings”, a qualitative approach is more suitable, as it allows greater flexibility for deeper understanding. Similarly, Alasuutari (2010) argued that qualitative research is essential in the social sciences because it enables discussions of individuals’ everyday experiences as a form of social engagement. This perspective is particularly relevant in media studies, where the subjective experiences of audiences shape their understanding of media influence. Mohajan (2018) also highlighted that qualitative research prioritises the exploration of people’s lived experiences, including how they interact, interpret, and react within their social environment. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) further emphasised that qualitative research allows for an in-depth engagement with social phenomena, making it an appropriate choice for this study. The core data for this study is derived from primary sources, including intensive in-depth interviews with six dubbing studio owners, thirty prominent individuals, and five focus group discussions conducted between December 2023 and August 2024. This primary data is further supplemented by secondary sources, such as books, journal papers, newspapers, and unpublished dissertations and theses. Secondary data helps contextualise the study by situating it within existing academic discourses on media influence and cultural transformation (Silverstone, 1999). The combination of primary and secondary sources ensures a comprehensive analysis, strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings. By employing a qualitative and exploratory approach, this study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions on transnational television and the lived experiences of Mizo audiences. This methodological framework enables a nuanced understanding of how media consumption influences cultural values, gender norms, and broader societal structures in Mizoram.

1.11.1 Focus Group Discussion and Selection of Participants

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a widely used qualitative research method that provides rich, in-depth insights into participants’ experiences, attitudes, and perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). As this study explores why Mizo audiences

are attracted to dubbed transnational television content and how such exposure might alter their perceptions of different cultures and religions, FGDs are particularly valuable. It is one of the most popular and effective methods to collect data in qualitative studies; hence, a substantial amount of the data in this research is collected using this approach. Five focus groups consisting of 41 individuals (each group having at least seven participants) were conducted to gather data on why Mizo audiences are attracted to dubbed transnational films and serials. As several studies (Katzman, 1972; Mrunalini, 2010; Watercutter, 2013; Stoll, 2020; Kumar, 2023) have mentioned that television shows are largely watched by women, as is the case in Mizoram (Lawbei, 2017), the researcher selected/organised three focus groups consisting of women that were selected via purposive sampling and also two focus groups from Pachhunga University College (PUC) and Mizoram University (MZU) adopting the same sampling method to add depth and perspective of the youth in Mizoram.

According to Nyumba et al. (2018), “a focus group discussion is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction.” As this research aims to capture the personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of Mizo viewers of transnational dubbed television, focus group discussion is employed in this study.

1.11.2 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews and Selection of Participants

The core data for this research consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with dubbing studio owners in Mizoram. This study examines how Mizo dubbing studios act as “cultural gatekeepers” for Mizo culture, customs, and traditions by localising or indigenising transnational television content via dubbing. The researcher purposively selected six dubbing studios in the state’s capital, Aizawl: Zonet Daifim, Zonet Dingdi, Zonet Zamzo, LPS 11, LPS 8, and LPS 4. Though there are a few dubbing studios in other districts, the work produced and the reach of these studios is limited compared to the selected studios in Aizawl. The selected studios are all linked to LPS and Zonet, the two largest satellite and cable

operators in the state. Additionally, another key reason for selecting these studios is their 24/7 availability to audiences in the state. Furthermore, thirty prominent citizens, scholars, and authors were interviewed to ascertain changes in traditional Mizo cultural practices and gender roles in a patriarchal Mizo society, of which 15 were men and 15 were women, to balance perspectives. According to MacDougall and Fudge (2001), there are several differences in sampling between quantitative and qualitative data. To generate “rich data”, qualitative studies mostly adopt a purposive sampling method. Kumar (2011) also notes that in qualitative studies, randomisation of samples does not carry as much importance as in quantitative studies, as respondents who are “information-rich” are mainly selected to provide the necessary information. Furthermore, the informal nature of semi-structured interviews allows participants to open up more freely and provide more depth to the data; it also eliminates the feeling of being interrogated, which could hinder the data collection process (Adam & Cox, 2008; Ruslin et al., 2022).

1.11.3 Data Coding and Analysis

In qualitative research, selecting the right analytical method is crucial for understanding the data collected from participants. This study, exploring the experiences and emotions of individuals through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, opted for thematic analysis to analyse the transcribed data. Thematic analysis is a flexible, accessible method that allows researchers to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data, making it well-suited for exploring complex qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher chose thematic analysis because of its ability to handle large amounts of textual data, which is common when dealing with interview and focus group transcripts. Unlike methods tied to specific theoretical frameworks, thematic analysis offers flexibility, enabling the researcher to develop themes that emerge organically from the data itself. This approach is particularly valuable when the goal is to uncover deeper meanings or insights from participants’ lived experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). The process began with familiarisation with the transcribed data, followed by the generation of initial codes. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. The researcher

continuously revisited and revised these themes to ensure they aligned with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to uncover patterns in the participants' narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study's topic. In this study, a trial version of NVivo 15 software was used for generating codes and themes.

1.11.4 Ethical Considerations

In the social sciences, research ethics involves protecting both the researcher and participants while advancing the field of study (Wiles et al., 2006). According to Coffelt (2017), it is the duty of the researcher to conduct studies dealing with human viewpoints and life circumstances in an ethically sound manner. These considerations were taken into account when gathering and analysing the study's findings. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher provided each participant with a printed informed consent form. The participants were also given an oral explanation of the study by the researcher, who assured them that the data obtained would remain anonymous and would not be used for any purpose other than this research. Additionally, the researcher promised that the identities of the interviewees would not be disclosed. The interviewees gave their consent to engage in this study, and they were free to skip any questions if they did not feel comfortable or to discontinue participation at any time. Before recording audio and telephone interviews, the respondents' prior consent was obtained. The researcher gave each participant a random number and a unique identification for their professional category in order to conceal participants' identities; name aliases were then used in this study.

1.12 Chapterisation

This thesis comprises six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: Transnational Television in Mizoram: Assessing Alterations in Traditional Cultural Practices and Gender Roles

Chapter 4: Voicing the Global, Localising the Moral: Dubbing Studios as Cultural Intermediaries in Mizoram

Chapter 5: Mediated Fascinations: Cultural Curiosity, Religious Boundaries, and the Appeal of Dubbed Transnational Television in Mizoram

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Chapter II

Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The influence of television on cultural values and societal change has been a significant focus of media studies, especially with the rise of transnational television. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on various aspects of television's impact, drawing from both historical and contemporary studies. The first section examines the origins and development of television, beginning with early mechanical and electrical models, and traces its evolution as a powerful cultural tool (Chalaby, 2005). Television, as an extension of culture, is explored in-depth, with attention to how it shapes and reflects cultural norms, traditions, and values (Silverstone, 1999). The literature further delves into television's role as a form of soft power, as it enables the diffusion of cultural influence beyond borders, often shaping global perceptions through selective content (Nye, 2004). Transnational television is examined as a significant driver of cultural change, with studies highlighting its role in influencing gender roles, societal values, and cultural identities (Straubhaar, 2015). Additionally, international research on television and culture underscores the varied responses of audiences to foreign media content, highlighting both resistance and adaptation (Lull, 2000). The chapter also examines the history of television in India, focusing on its introduction, development, and the socio-political context that shaped its growth. In particular, the concept of "invasion from the sky" is explored; discussing how foreign media content, especially through satellite television has impacted local cultural and political landscapes (Rangin, 2010). By reviewing these key areas, this chapter lays the foundation for understanding the specific cultural and social transformations caused by the introduction of transnational television in Mizoram.

2.2 The Origin of Television

The invention of television is a process that spans several decades, that involves multiple engineers and inventors; as a result, the invention of the medium cannot be

credited to a single person, organization or a single nation (Hendy, n.d.). As television is based on “photo-electricity”, Edmond Becquerel’s discovery of the “electro chemical effects of light” in 1839 can be said as the base in which all other components were later added. He observed that an immersion of suitable electrolyte which was then “illuminated by a beam of light” provides an electromotive force between the electrodes.

Another important milestone happened in 1873 as the ‘effect of light upon resistance of selenium’ was discovered, though selenium was discovered by Jons Jacob Berzelius in 1817, it was only after the experiments done by Willoughbough Smith in 1873 that it was found to possess a high resistance for electrical conduct. This set-forth the chain of curiosity, in 1876, George Carey came up with the idea of “selenium camera” that would let people to “see by electricity” (Abramson, 2003; Burns, 1997; Bell & Gray, 2013).

Several researches were carried out from ‘1878 to 1926’ but would not produce much success to further develop television and were more or less “incapable of immediate practical embodiment and all of them waiting for other inventions and parallel development which would enable them to be incorporated in a practical system” (Garratt & Mumford, 1952). In 1897, German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun invented “cathode ray tube” (CRT) and this played a key role “as the forerunner of the TV picture tube”, initially developed as a device for scanning called “cathode ray oscilloscope”, CRT merged the “principle of the camera and electricity”. It consists of a screen that displays a visible light when it contacts with a “beam of electrons” (University of Minnesota [UOM], 2016).

Another vital invention during this period is the “mechanical scanner system” by German inventor Paul Gottlieb Nipkow. Nipkow’s scanner was “a large, metal flat disk with a series of small perforations arranged in a spiral pattern. As the disk rotated, light passed through the holes, separating pictures into pinpoints of light that could be transmitted as a series of electronic lines.” This scanner would later become the bedrock in which other experiments on transmission of visual images were done. Boris Rosing, in 1907, combined Braun’s CRT and Nipkow’s “mechanical scanner

system” in his experiment with television. He utilized the CRT as the receiver and to display images he used beams of focused electrons, it displayed “crude geometrical pattern” on the screen. Notable contributors during this period include M. Senlacq, John Perry and W.E. Ayrtton, George Carey, Shelford Bidwell, Lazare Weilller, Ll. B. Atkinson and A. A. Campbell Swinton.

2.3 The Birth of Television: Mechanical versus Electrical Television

The ideas and schemes that were developed and put forward before 1920s can be described as a period which act as a backbone for the birth and development of television, they provided the solutions to problems for the progress of television. The development of television accelerated from the 1920s and though a number of individuals pursued their research in developing a functioning mechanical television that could display motion picture, Denes von Mihaly from Hungary, C.F Jenkins of United States, J.L. Baird of Scotland and Herbert Ives and his colleagues at the ‘Bell Telephone Laboratories’ were noteworthy contributors.

The most well-known and called the ‘Father of Mechanical Television’ is ‘Scottish electrical engineer’ John Logie Baird. Baird, in April 1925, had a demonstration for the public where “crude images were transmitted between two machines” and in January, 1926, he displayed an image of a human face with a hint of ‘having tone gradations of light and shade’ to several individuals belonging to the Royal Institution, London- this is also the first public demonstration of a working television system. Using the disk system developed by Nipkow, Baird produced a definition of 30 lines with a repetition frequency of 5 frames/sec. Though the images were filled with intense flickering, the images of individuals faces could be recognized, a feat which was not yet attained till Baird’s demonstration.

Baird expanded his technology in 1928 by sending a signal from London to New York. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) adopted his mechanical technique the next year, and by 1932, Baird had created the first television system that was economically feasible and sold 10,000 units. Mechanical television had a number of technical shortcomings despite its initial popularity. Engineers were only able to achieve a resolution of about 240 lines, which meant that images were always

a little bit fuzzy; in comparison the majority of today's modern televisions create images with a resolution of more than 600 lines. Additionally, the usage of a spinning disc limited the amount of fresh images that could be shown each second, causing significant flickering. In order for the technology to advance, the mechanical nature of television proved to be a drawback that needed to be fixed.

The main shortcoming in Baird's mechanical television was the spinning disc technology and other inventors followed a different approach using the CRT. American inventor Philip Farnsworth discovered that an electronic beam could scan a picture in horizontal lines, recreating the image almost instantly, while working on his father's farm. Farnsworth rotated a single straight line that had been scratched onto a square piece of painted glass by 90 degrees in order to broadcast the first entirely electronic TV picture in 1927. The government banned the sale of TV sets during World War II, and by the time the conflict was done, Farnsworth's original patents were about to expire. As a result, he scarcely made any money off of his invention. However, several of his important innovations were altered by Radio Corporations of America (RCA) after the war and widely used in broadcasting to enhance television picture quality.

Electronic televisions finally started to displace mechanical systems after coexisting for a while. The electronic system was miles ahead of its forerunner and rapidly improving, with higher picture quality, no noise, a smaller size, and fewer visual restrictions. In the United States, electronic transmissions had taken the place of the final mechanical television broadcasts by 1939 and the rest of the world soon followed after the end of the Second World War.

2.4 Television as an Extension of Culture

2.4.1 Understanding the Concept of Culture

Culture is a complex, continually changing process and there cannot be a definitive meaning given or conclusion drawn from a singular statement or elucidation. Several scholars have identified the imperatives to study culture not limiting "to a concept but a complex phenomenon having a historical totality" (Desai, 2022). The word

Culture is derived from the Latin word “Cultura”, and take its root from the cultivation of growing crops or “tillage of land”, and later extended to include “human mind or spirit” in the form of cultivating and learning to broaden one’s mind and enhance critical thinking. Later in the 19th century it was further defined from the anthropological perspective and culture was understood as the lived experiences of individuals in a society that governs their social life (Stepin, 2003).

Sir Edward B. Tylor’s (1871, as cited in Desai and Agrawal, 2009) articulation of culture remains one of the most cited, he defined culture as “culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of the society.” His definition can be critiqued in the sense that it does not encompasses every member of the society, as “man” alone does not constitute a society. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000) expression of culture, which is, “a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs,” adds more context and depth to the meaning of culture (UNESCO, 2000).

Though there are numerous definitions of culture, the term culture will be used or understood in this study as “a whole way of life of a society or group, including values, meanings, identities, traditions, norms of behaviour and ways of understanding the world,” as it includes beliefs, the value system of a society and in particular the role of society in the formation of individual and norms to be followed and identity which is pertinent with the objectives of this study (Hodkinson, 2011). In the age of globalisation, culture is increasingly mediated and reshaped through transnational flows of information, particularly via television. Media texts do not merely reflect culture; they participate in its (re)construction by disseminating lifestyles, ideologies, and norms that may challenge or reconfigure local values (Appadurai, 1996; Hall, 1997). In Mizoram- a region marked by an extremely strong Christian ethos, unique linguistic identity, and traditional Mizo customs and culture- the infiltration of global media content poses significant questions about cultural

preservation, adaptation, and identity formation. Understanding culture in this context thus becomes essential for analysing how transnational television is reshaping value systems and social behaviour in contemporary Mizo society.

2.4.2 Television and Culture: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Television, as a medium, has several layers or forms. Technology being one, the other is what Williams (1975, as cited in Ravindran, 2022) called the “cultural form”. It is the combination of these two forms that makes Television an attractive and influential medium in any social cultural context (Ravindran, 2022). The products of culture can sometimes be seen, touch and felt, while there are times a cultural product is intangible in nature, such as a television serials, films and shows (Aiello, 2014). Hartley (1992, as cited in Mehta, 2020) called television, “the private life of a nation state and noted it cannot be isolated without understanding and examining the socio-cultural context of its production and was extensively used as a tool for nation building in its initial years (Fickers & Johnson, 2010).

Manan (1991) noted Spain, Italy and Germany understood and realised the “appeal and impact films with sound could have on the masses” and exploited the film industry during and after the Second World War as an ideological tool “to build strong nationalistic states and spread fascist ideology”.

In the words of Butcher (2003), “images are used to set boundaries, to reinforce certainty, to reflect a self-image, and to shore up new understandings”, and in particular, for ethnic minorities, television offers a forum for the negotiation and depiction of cultural traditions (Gillespie, 2005). Although the process was gradual and took some time, with some thoughts put into it, Television was finally acknowledged as a component of the public domain (Fiske & Hartley, 2004). Highlighting the relationship between individuals and television, Miller (2010) wrote, “audiences are the opium of television- it craves them, longing to control their time and space.”

As such, television often reflects culture and at the same time act as an influence on culture and society. According to Smythe (1954, as cited in Miller, 2010), television

channels offers a, “flow of representations of the human conditions.” Up until the 70s’, Television was prohibited in apartheid South Africa out of fears that it would disintegrate ‘Afrikaner’ ways of life, and that the public would adopt Marxist ideology and the blacks would then fight for their freedom (Miller, 2010). The events or shows portrayed in television have a close relationship to what happens in the real world- “real events and prevailing social trends and cultural values.” However, television producers tend to select and include certain themes and present them in a way that suits their agendas. Following the above arguments, television then, is not just a mere mirror of society, rather, a selection of reflections of the society. Hodgkinson (2011), noted, “the repeated emphasis on certain opinions, themes, events or practise across media and the constant exclusion of others may have a bearing on future attitudes, identities, behaviour and social patterns.”

Transnational media corporations have expanded their reach and control in the creation and dissemination of information and content from Western countries to different parts of the world. As a result, consumption of different cultures is becoming more and more accessible due to the progress made via the invention of satellite and the internet- offering cheaper and more accessible ways to watch television shows from the so called “Cultural Industry” of the West- namely US and the United Kingdom (Adorno, 2012; Crabtree & Malhotra, 2002; Park et al., 2023). With the advancement in technology, television has now placed itself as “cultural inducers” and plays an implicit role as an agent of “socio-cultural change” (Devadas & Ravi, 2013). As a result of "U.S. cultural imperialism", audiences around the world have been turned into consumers of the U.S. cultural products and this has a detrimental impact affecting the ability of the newly independent nations to produce their own media content that could transmit and communicate their cultural heritage to their citizens (Tanner, 2006). Acknowledging the vast and conquering American 'cultural imperialism', American neoconservative Ben Wattenberg (1991) remarked that the fall of the Soviet Union opened more doors for America to capitalise its cultural goals, he opined, "we are the most potent cultural imperialists in history." Kristol (1997, as cited in Tanner, 2006) also wrote, "The United States has come to dominate the world militarily and culturally"

Fearing cultural imperialism from the West due to the excessive flow of one-sided information, UNESCO wanted to restructure this flow of information. This began the research of communication flow across the globe. A study by Nordenstreng and Varis, Guback and Varis (1974, 1982, as cited in Desai and Agrawal, 2009) confirmed the monopolised, non-reciprocal flow of information have led to the cultural domination of the under-developed countries from the West.

2.5 Transnational Television as a form of Soft Power

As a combination of “technology, culture, commerce and politics” television is a reflection of the society and culture in which it was conceived or produced and acts as an influential instrument in crossing “geographical and political boundaries” (Desai & Agrawal, 2009). This combination of visual and audio formats is also a cultural platform where ideas are exchanged frequently with unexpected results, leading to a change in perspective and interpretation of different cultures, religions and traditions (Mehta, 2020). Furthermore, television enables individuals whose financial condition would not allow them to travel and visit different countries to learn about those cultures and traditions via their “representations on big and small screens” (Huat, 2012). As a result, the export and import of television films, serials and music videos can significantly improve the domestic market and economy, facilitate and build international trade between countries, usher in new tourists and create employment (Kraidy & Al Ghazzi, 2013; Lee, 2019; Ullah et al., 2018; Wei & Rafael, 2021).

Television products, apart from the monetary gains and bridging cultures, also act as a “Soft Power”. A term coined by Joseph Nye in his book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power” first published on 15 April 1990, in his book, Nye talked about the existence of two forms of power i.e. “Soft and Hard Power”. The latter deals with the “power of coercion”, it encompasses a country’s military strength and its superior economic advantages in procuring what it wants and needs. The former, “Soft Power”, is the utilisation of cultural products such as films, music, dance, and “political values” shown through films and “attractive foreign policies” to lure other countries to “imbibe to their culture, admire their values” for them to have

a certain level of dominance in the geopolitics and trade between countries (Aatola, 2014; Tella, 2016). The characteristics of Soft Power are always changing and are embedded with a set of “complex situational scenarios” and many of these do not fall under the purview of the government.

Although Aaltola (2014) argued that the “Soft Power” wielded by the US is “just the by-product of American society, economy and technology rather than direct governmental action,” Tanner (2006) and Schiller (2019) noted American multinational media corporations are backed by the American government in their attempt to impart American cultural values and traditions that transforms itself as a “Soft Power”.

Highlighting the power of Television, Nye (2002) argued that the portrayal of American popular culture in various parts of the world and the ways in which they are accepted or rejected will have a major impact on the level of influence it can exert. There have been some concerns among American citizens that their government policies are hampered by television shows, the excessive portrayal of violence and sex in American television has stood as a stumbling block in establishing diplomatic trade and relations as they are seen as a tool in degrading local culture and traditions (Aaltola, 2014). While Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2012) opines that the public plays a key role in the establishment of “Soft Power” as they are a key factor in the formation of a country’s foreign policies in several countries, Hall and Smith (2013) stated that “public diplomacy” does not play a pivotal in establishing “Soft Power” among most Asian countries.

The rise in the popularity of South Korean (henceforth Korean) cultural products like television films, serials, food and popular music like K-Pop in several parts of the world in the late 90s’ and aided by the restructured and improved cultural industry with heavy assistance from the country’s Culture Ministry witnessed Korean culture firmly established in many Asian countries (Jin & Yoon, 2017; Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021; Kim, 2023). Kanozia and Ganghariya (2021) go as far as to call it “a global phenomenon.” Hoping the approval and demand of the cultural products of Korea, termed Korean Wave (Hallyu), as a tool to further establish the nation's “Soft

Power”, the country’s cultural bureaucrats and cultural producers have redefined Korean identity and Korean cultural products, in the sense that, if the cultural products are produced in such a way that they attract and reflect a positive image of Korea abroad, the “transcultural and hybrid” nature or characteristics of the shows or music are deemed to be Korean and enablers for the birth of “Soft Power” (Kim, 2023; Kim & Lee, 2018).

The global market has been a deciding factor for the emphasis on the “less Korean and more universal” approach as the global commercial market and sales of these products generate more money for the Korean government and media industry. Though the Korean government till the 1980s’ strictly adhered to strict regulations for the country’s media and utilised it as an “ideological tool for reinforcing nationalist ideologies,” it has since lifted many regulations which has aided the Korean cultural industry massively. Even though universality or neutrality has dictated the cultural products of Korea in the last few years, Korean popular culture and its success abroad are still utilised by the government to instil pride and nationalism among its citizens. It is also seen as a way forward in establishing and expanding its “Soft Power” through these cultural products and to show the citizens the might and power of the country’s “political and cultural power worldwide.” Highlighting the importance of the “Korean Wave” as a tool to showcase the nation’s political and economic success and image on the world stage as a tool for “Soft Power”, Kim (2023) remarked,

“The Korean Wave is an ideal tool for the government to demonstrate its political and economic success in the global arena-which has the potential to become a new criterion in redefining Koreanness. Furthermore, successful cultural products became symbols of national image and instruments to expand its political power and strengthen its soft power. In this regard, despite the increasing power of global market forces in Korean cultural businesses and transcultural and universal characteristics of cultural products, the government continues its cultural exploitation to wield strong influence over its population and the country’s perception on the world stage.”

Over the last few decades, Turkey has significantly grown in terms of Television serials it has exported and Turkish television serials are currently marketed and exported to more than 150 countries, making Turkey the second-largest exporter of television series, only behind the United States of America (Acosta-Alzuru, 2021; Bus Dip, 2023; Looch, 2019). Turkey has also significantly improved its diplomatic relations with the Arab countries and this has been attributed to the newfound power that has transpired from the export of Turkish serials to these countries (Kaptan, 2013; Kraidy & Al Ghazzi, 2013). Looking at history, the “Ottoman Empire” ruled Arab countries for more than 400 years and Turkey’s foreign policy has never been in favour towards them- siding with “The United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Israel.” Mustafa Kemal Attaturk, the founding father of Turkey even discarded Arabic alphabets from Turkish and the country has had a fraught relationship with Arab countries.

The Turk-Arab relations have found new foundations since the launch of the “Justice and Development Party” spearheaded by the current President of Turkey “Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul” and under their government “Turkish media underwent a structural transformation” and the state’s broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) actively works to seek out Turkish diaspora in the former Soviet countries and simultaneously attempt to establish transnational influence at the same time as the serials exported and dubbed are filled with “explicitly political themes” to resonate with the Arab audience. Kraidy and Al-Ghazi (2013) noted Erdogan’s government's utilisation of the media and Turkish popular culture in building Turkey as a major cultural force and political player among the Arab countries without “affecting a deep geopolitical shift” is one of the most significant achievements of the “Justice and Development Party” since the party came to power. Yanardagoglu and Karam (2013) also expressed the relationship between Turkish serials and their portrayals of Turkey as a blend of modern and traditional society which serves as an element of the country’s growing “Soft Power”. Television serials offer a chance to have intercultural communication and interaction, transmitting symbols in the form of visuals and audio, which makes it more persuasive and effective in embedding itself into a new culture as individuals

make meaning in relation to their lives. Ozkocak (2016) noted, "TV serials, which affect the traditions, practices and definitions of the reality of social classes by addressing their needs for existence conditions; play a significant role in transmitting cultural symbols." The rise of Turkey as a major player among the Arab countries and the Balkans coincides with the rise in popularity and exports of Turkish serials in these regions (Kaptan, 2013).

2.6 Cultural Changes as a By-Product of Transnational Television: International Studies done on Television and Culture

Asia, in comparison to other parts of the world is known to have a peculiar cultural practices, values, beliefs and "linguistic heritage". These cultural hallmarks are challenged after the proliferation of transnational content after the liberalisation of markets by several countries in the 1990s; Chakravarthy (2004) claimed 'Western' news channels and entertainment channels like MTV have shifted youth to develop an affinity towards traditions and customs practised in the 'West' as seen and portrayed on Television.

Schiller (1976) stressed the ways in which America deploys technology to influence culture and in the process "hegemonise" the local culture. Based on George Gerbner's "Cultivation Theory", which "assumes reciprocal relationships between television exposure and audience conceptions, rather than simple one way casual processes", Kang and Morgan's (1988) study on the relationship between heavy viewing of "American Forces Korean Network" (AFKN) by Korean college students and their cultural leanings and perceptions of American culture reported that female students perspective are particularly influenced when compared with male students. Koreans and Americans have sharp distinctions when it comes to roles to be played by men and women in the family and society. Female viewers of the AFKN programmes are less likely to support and sustain the traditional view and are more "liberal and progressive" compared to male viewers who wanted to protect and consolidate the Korean culture and tradition (Kang & Morgan, 1988). China and America have had little to no similarities when it comes to cultural practices, values and language. Dong et al., (1998) carried out a survey among 439 students in

Chinese public high school to evaluate the cultural and value changes. The results showed that the students did not accept the value system of Americans as portrayed in American shows and films; however, perception of importance of wealth in everyday functionality is recognised. They also noted American shows and films are easily accessible. The findings from Dong et al., (1998) is ratified by Dorfman and Matelart (1971, as cited in Tanner, 2006) who argued that American comics and shows like Disney portrays “the possessive individualism of the American way of life, implied excessive consumerism was the path to happiness, and (like so many colonial texts) constructed non-Americans as culturally savage and primitive” as a way to communicate and impart ideologies and values of the American culture across the globe.

Utilising du Gay et al., (1997, as cited in Illias, 2011) "circuit of culture" theory that highlights five proponents of cultural flow- regulation, representation, identity, production and consumption, Illias (2011) studied the relationship between the rapidly growing Malay television industry, globalization of culture and its effects on Malay culture noted the existence of cultural globalization. He further stated the preference of "Malaysian prime-time television" to show "Western" values which led to the adoption of "foreign" cultural values like "individualism and consumerism" among Malays, in particular the Malay youth. However, he noted the complex process of decoding texts and gauging audience perception is a multifaceted and intricate process indicating that there are ambivalences, as evidenced by the startlingly varied perspectives that several families investigated had on the same television programming. Analysing the critical thinking process of Taiwanese youth (University students) while watching South Korean serials, Wang (2009) noted the students do not notice the cultural practices shown in the serial (*Dae-Jang-Gum*) watched, but are engaged in 'idolism', which is the main aim of the show's producers in trying to influence the behaviours, attitudes and values of Taiwanese youth as these help in selling cultural products of South Korea. She further highlighted the need to incorporate critical thinking and television literacy to better read television texts among Taiwanese youth to avoid “manipulation” from foreign serials.

Palaiologou and Gialmas (2015) paper titled “Review on Building Intercultural Bridges through TV Serial” explored the impact of the Turkish serials in Greece and the explicit or implicit agendas that they carry and if these serials are promoting cultural harmony, and also intercultural understanding between the two nations. They found out that though many participants (all of them students studying at University of Western Macedonia, a regional University in Northern Greece) have a positive attitude towards the Turkish people and their cultural and religious practices, there are other participants who still have a sense of dislike for the Turkish, the invasion by the Ottoman Empire and the enslavement of the Greek people still lingering on the minds of the students, as per the researchers. Looking from the political point of view, the researchers are of the opinion that the participants are sceptical on the hidden agendas of the serials. In the sense these serials are trying to portray Turkey for what it is not, in this case the hardship and sufferings of the farmers and also the strict Sharia laws which continue to be a nightmare for the Turkish women. Herbert Schiller’s influential work on media imperialism (1976) explored how Western media, including television, exerted a hegemonic influence over African cultures. Schiller argued that the influx of Western television programming, particularly American and European content, led to the erosion of indigenous African cultural practices. According to Schiller, television in Africa often promoted Western ideologies and consumerist values, contributing to the cultural dependency of African societies on Western media. Francis Nyamnjoh (2005) examined how African audiences engage with global television content, noting that while Western media influences local cultures, African viewers actively negotiate the meanings of foreign television shows. He also argued that African audiences do not simply accept Western values but instead reinterpret them in ways that align with local traditions and values. For example, he observed that while Western television promotes individualism, African audiences often reframe these ideals in terms of community and familial responsibility.

Ogan’s (2004) study on the impact of television on Nigerian youth revealed that Western television content, particularly soap operas and reality TV shows, influenced the socialization of Nigerian youth. He found that television has

introduced new ideas about relationships, gender roles, and materialism, which sometimes conflicted with traditional African values. However, he also noted that Nigerian viewers selectively adapted these global influences to fit their own cultural context, creating a hybridized form of modernity that blends both local and global elements. In the Philippines, television has played a significant role in shaping beauty standards, particularly through the proliferation of Western-style beauty pageants and advertisements. Tan (2007) examined how the consumption of global media content has influenced the Filipino perception of beauty, leading to the widespread adoption of Eurocentric beauty ideals. These ideals, emphasizing fair skin, slim bodies, and Westernized facial features, have affected local beauty practices and led to the rise of skin-whitening products in the Philippines. Sirimaneewong's (2008) study of Thailand found that television's influence on beauty standards mirrors the dynamics seen in the Philippines. Western television content, particularly beauty-related media, introduced ideals of femininity that contrast with traditional Thai values. However, he also observed that Thai audiences have incorporated elements of these Western ideals into their own beauty standards, creating a hybridized approach to beauty that combines both Western and traditional Thai aesthetics.

Udo (2006) explored the ways in which Nigerian youth engage with Western television content and how it influences their identity formation. He found that Western television programs, particularly American sitcoms and action films, had a significant impact on how young Nigerians perceive gender roles, relationships, and social hierarchies. However, he argued that Nigerian youth do not passively accept these influences; instead, they reinterpret them in the context of their own cultural values. King (2009) examined the impact of television on Caribbean culture, focusing on how global media influences local traditions and social structures. His study found that television in the Caribbean has contributed to the creation of a more consumer-oriented society, especially through the spread of Western advertisements and lifestyle programs. However, he also observed that Caribbean television producers have adapted global content to reflect local customs, creating a form of television that is uniquely Caribbean but still influenced by global media trends.

Larkin (2012) explored the impact of television on cultural hybridity in South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan. He noted that television has become a powerful tool for the dissemination of both global and local cultural practices. While Western television content influences South Asian youth, it is often hybridized with traditional cultural values, creating a new form of popular culture that blends both indigenous and global elements. Larkin suggested that television in South Asia plays a key role in mediating cultural change while preserving local identities. Jaffe's (2006) study on Latin American television examined the role of television in shaping social change, particularly in relation to family dynamics and gender roles. Jaffe found that television programs in Latin America often promoted Western-style family structures and gender norms, which influenced local perceptions of marriage, gender equality, and family life. However, Jaffe also noted that Latin American television producers have adapted global media content to reflect local cultural values, leading to a unique blend of global and local influences. Madianou and Miller (2012) explored the relationship between television and family life in the Philippines. Their study found that television plays a central role in shaping family dynamics and societal expectations. They argued that television reinforces traditional gender roles, particularly the expectation that women should focus on domestic duties, while also exposing Filipino audiences to global concepts of individualism and modernity.

Chen (2010) examined how television in China reflects and shapes local cultural practices. She noted that while Chinese television is heavily influenced by global content, there is a significant effort to localize foreign media to fit Chinese cultural norms. For example, Western-style reality shows are adapted with Chinese values of family, respect for elders, and social harmony, creating a hybridized television culture. Sreberny (2005) examined the role of television in shaping cultural change in the Middle East, focusing on the growing influence of satellite television networks like Al Jazeera. She found that television in the Middle East had become a tool for political expression and social change, allowing audiences to engage with global cultural and political discourses while maintaining a connection to local traditions and values.

2.7 The History and Evolution of Television in India

The presence of television in India could be split into three stages- The first stage from 1959 to 1983 where television was used as an experimental tool for education and development. The second stage was when government owned Doordarshan (DD) had complete monopoly on broadcasting which lasted from 1983 till 1991. The last and final stage began in the early 1990s when the Indian government under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao adopted the New Economic Policy which focuses attention on Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) opening the market for private corporations (Sahu, 2018).

2.7.1 The First Stage

The Indian government after independence saw television as a luxury India cannot afford while half the population of India was living below poverty line, hence the entry of television was stalled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting even after facing pressure from “educational institutions, industrialists, politicians and indeed the from the middle classes in urban areas for the introduction of television” (Kumar, 2000; Sahu, 2018). As a result, it was a decade after independence that the first official broadcasting of Television in India began on 15 September, 1959 from “Akashvani Bhawan” in New Delhi with assistance from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ford Foundation and Philips, a Dutch electronics company. Delhi and the surrounding vicinity were chosen for the “educational broadcast” project and 144 schools were chosen for the installation of 250 television sets. Three years later there were 388 television sets in 192 schools and around 50,000 students benefitted from this educational project. In 1965, a regular one hour “television transmission” was produced regularly which included social education programmes and entertainment and information (Butcher 2003; Desai & Agrawal, 2009)

The year 1967 witnessed an expansion of the medium as ‘Krishi Darshan’, a 20 minute programme was launched for farmers with assistance from the Department of Atomic Energy, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, the Delhi Administration and Haryana and Uttar Pradesh state’s government. The range of transmitter was now longer and could be picked up from 60 km radius, covering Delhi and Uttar

Pradesh. The government further expanded television in 1972 by opening the Bombay Centre, and by 1975 there were stations in Srinagar, Amritsar, Pune, Calcutta Madras and Lucknow, it must be mentioned that these stations are only relay centre. On 1 August 1975, the Indian government in collaboration with the United States government launched the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), the first of its kind “techno-social experiment” using direct broadcasting satellite, aiming to develop rural India. National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) satellite was utilised to telecast programs to 2,332 Indian villages spanning six states, it was estimated to have been watched by 2.8 million people. For SITE, programmes were available in four languages, four studios i.e., Cuttack, Hyderabad and two stations from Delhi, all belonging to Doordarshan were tasked to create programmes to cater the target groups. The first programme comprise of development programmes that includes all ages, caste, religion, socio-economic group and lasted for two-and-a-half hours daily. The second programme was for students aged between five to twelve years that lasted for a twenty-two-and-a-half minute in length. The last was catered for teachers training in topics related to science. Television was viewed as tool to accelerate rural development and foster national integration during this period and emphasis was given to “education and information to farmers, teachers and students”. Commercials began appearing on Indian screens in 1976 and this is also the same year Television broke away from All India Radio (AIR) and started functioning as an independent media unit under Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (Kale, 1973; Saddiqi, 2020; Sahu, 2018; Vyas & Sharma 2002).

2.7.2 The Second Stage

The second stage was when government owned Doordarshan (DD) had complete monopoly on broadcasting which lasted from 1983 till 1991. Delhi hosted the Asian games in 1982 and it was also the year India has its ‘first communication satellite’ in INSAT-1A, which enabled the linking of all “Doordarshan Kendras” (regional centres) which until then serves only the

population within its ranges. It was also an epoch in Indian television history as colours began to appear on Indian screens (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2000; Kumar, 2020; Mitra, 1993; Sahu, 2018).

The educational and development-oriented programmes were augmented with “non-educational programmes.” Several English and Hindi serials were telecasted during this period, though the programmes become increasingly varied they were all deemed as ‘culturally appropriate’ and acceptable. Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata were hugely popular and Hum Log, one of the most watched Hindi serial during this period was aimed at “family planning and national integration” (Mc Millin, 2015; Sulehria, 2017). Hum Log also became the first programme launched by DD to get a commercial sponsor (Thomas, 2005).

Noting the state’s utilisation of Doordarshan to further strengthen national unity and social learning, Sahu (2018) penned, “The state intensified its efforts to deploy Doordarshan in the task of creating a pan-Indian national culture. They also drew from social learning theory and aimed at influencing viewing subjects to ‘adopt’ certain ‘pro-development’ attitudes and behaviours with regard to birth control, literacy and so on.” In 1984, the University Grant Commission (UGC) to warrant a quality education in higher education throughout the country launched an hour length “classroom programme” (Govindaraju & Banerjee, 1999). It was during this period that Hindi programmes became a dominant mode of format, and fears of Hindi to assimilate other language and culture were felt in India’s neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh and also within India, in particular, Bengal and Maharashtra (James & Crawley, 2005; Mitra 1993). Describing the role of the state’s owned broadcaster Doordarshan’s role in shaping the image of India, and also their complicit preferences of Hindi and Hindu religion over other languages and religions, Mitra (1993) wrote, “The image of India that is produced and reproduced by Doordarshan, and circulated as the dominant and preferred one is clearly a Hindu image. The dominant religious practices are indeed Hindu-centric.”

2.7.3 The Third Stage

The last and final stage began in the early 1990s when the Indian government under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao adopted the New Economic Policy which focused attention on Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) opening the market for private players, hence, the entry of transnational television and their contents (Sahu, 2018; Singh, 2004; Thussu, 2007). American broadcaster Central News Network (CNN) grabbed the opportunity of India's deregulations and became the first news channel to enter India via satellite in 1991 and was soon followed by 'STAR TV, Sony and ZEE TV'- all posing considerable threat and challenge to DD, which until then was the sole operator of television content in India, also the threat of "cultural change" become much more visible (Mc Millan, 2015; Thomas, 2005). Commenting on the power and the encompassing nature of the entry of transnational broadcasters, Sahu (2018) wrote, "Liberalisation and the deregulation of Indian economy changed the face of Television in India forever."

2.8 The Rise and Growth of Television in India

Over the years, Television in India has grown at a rapid rate; both in terms of television sets, people watching television and the number of channels that are now available. As of January 12, 2024 India is now the fifth largest television market in the world (Statista Research Department [SRD], 2024). What started as an experiment in transmission, funded by UNESCO and the Ford Foundation from the United States, television broadcasting in India started in September 1959, with help from All India Radio's (AIR) engineers "from a makeshift studio in Delhi with a low-power transmitter and 21 television sets" (Kumar, 2022- Thesis). The experiment programme which was carried out to enhance "social education" lasted for an hour in length and was televised twice a week with 250 TV sets installed in 144 schools in Delhi and its surrounding vicinity. In 1962, the numbers climbed to 388 TV sets in 192 schools. It was noted by the Government of India (GOI, 1963) (as cited in (Desai & Agrawal, 2009) that it reached around 50,000 students.

SITE experiment was started in the year 1975, also the year Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a national emergency which Mitra (1985) called a "desperate

action”. The declaration of a state of emergency at midnight of June 25, 1975, and telecasted on television the next evening by the Prime Minister could have been possibly watched by around six million people, 10 years later, when his son- Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi put up a splendid act in the “National Press Club” in Washington, it was viewed “live” by nearly 60 million Indians from six million television sets; the number of people to have watched her mother 10 years ago (Mitra, 1985). The monopoly of the state-controlled DD and its monotonous broadcast acts as a tool for propaganda for the ruling government, the press called television’s role in India as “tedium is the message.” The government control of DD broadcasting was in full swing during the Emergency (1975-77) and was rightly called a propaganda machine.

Television in India, in the 1970s’, was seen a “status symbol” and was a luxury rather than a commodity. 10 years later, India was sprawling with televisions sets, from the slums of Mumbai to the urban households. In 1965, there were 404 issued licenses and by 1975 the number has soared to 4.5 million, and there were 5.2 million when the licensing system was abolished in 1985, this number differs in records as Desai and Agrawal (2009) noted there were 3.4 million. Delhi hosting the Asian Games in 1982 opened up new doors to adopt new technology as colour TV flooded the Indian market, by the end of 1985, there were 8, 00, 00 colour TV sets and Mitra (1985) put this boom in television into record when he wrote, “crossing the shop counter this year, at least four Indian homes are now acquiring TV sets every minute of the day.

Few countries in the world have seen such expensive bouts of television expansion” Before the commencement of the 1982 Asian Games, there were 16 transmitters, in comparison, in a span of three years there was 164 new transmitters set-up and in function. 1982 is an epoch in Indian television broadcasting as DD who had escaped the extreme clutches of the government in 1976 by having its first Director General started streaming programmes from India’s first satellite INSAT-1A; there was a nationwide broadcast of the 1982 Independence Day celebration and the Asian Games held in Delhi (Singhal et al., 1988; Kumar 2022, Thesis).

Despite no official record after the cancellation of the licensing policy of TV sets in 1985, household that owns Television grew rapidly in India, Desai and Agrawal (2009) noted there was 52.3 million household owning television in 1995 and this number rose to more than 50 per cent to 108 million by 2005 and to another high of 103.3 million by the end of 2008 (Desai & Agrawal, 2009). As per Broadcast India (BI) data, there are 183.1 million households that own Television in 2016, which climbed to 196.7 two years later in 2018. TV Universe Estimates 2020, a study undertaken under Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), India estimates that number has raised to 210.2 million household in 2020 with an increase of 6.9 per cent. There has been an increase of 4 and 9 per cent in Urban and Rural households that owns Television (Broadcast Audience Research Council [BARC], 2020).

The latest data from BARC (2020), estimates that there are around 1.3 billion people in India, with 300 million households, with 2/3rd all of all Indian households owning Television. According to Broadcasting India's (BI) study with the projection date as 1st March 2020, TV penetration stood at 32 per cent in 2001 Census and rose to 47 per cent in 2011 Census. Indian Reader Survey (IRS) noted 54 per cent in 2013, BI remarked another increase to 64 per cent in 2016 and the latest data in Television penetration stands at 66 per cent. Utilising trends of India's census BI also mentions the decrease in family size and increase in number of homes and "States/State Groups" in 2020 have all marked an increase in TV Households (BARC, 2020). With advancement in technology, Direct-To-Home (DTH) and Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) have added numbers of household owning Television as Statista recorded 226 million in 2022 and is expected to grow to 248 million by 2026 (Basuroy, 2023).

2.9 "Invasion from the Sky": The Case of India

In its formative stage, Indian television primarily functioned as a mechanism to foster national cohesion, extend educational opportunities, and support rural upliftment. However, with the economic liberalisation that commenced in the 1990s, the Indian television landscape witnessed a dramatic shift with the entry of foreign television channels. This marked a significant increase in the broadcast of

international programming facilitated through satellite technology. The emergence of globalised television content prompted significant criticism, often being regarded as a "cultural invasion" by various political parties, religious leaders, and social critics. These groups perceived such content as foreign and fundamentally discordant with the domestic programming that had long been dominated by the state-run broadcaster, Doordarshan (Butcher, 2003; Desai & Agrawal, 2009; McMillin, 2001, 2015). A striking example of this opposition occurred in 1996 when India hosted the Miss World beauty pageant in Karnataka. Several regional organisations, including Mahila Jagran, a feminist advocacy group, and Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, a local farmers' union, mobilised against the event, even threatening to self-immolate in protest of what they deemed to be an overt act of "cultural imperialism" (Butcher, 2003; Rai, 1996). Over the following decades, India's culturally conservative society has become increasingly exposed to global customs and behavioural norms through the medium of international television.

As the number of foreign channels grew, the associated cultural transitions sparked extensive academic discourse both within India and internationally. The portrayal of individual autonomy, consumerist lifestyles, and affluence through foreign films and television programmes has disrupted the traditionally collectivist social fabric of Indian families. This disruption is particularly evident in the growing prevalence of nuclear family units, which has gradually undermined traditional values such as reverence for elders and familial responsibility (Prakash, 2022). Johnson (2001), through his ethnographic research in the villages of Danawli and Rajpuri in western Maharashtra, concluded that television had contributed to a diminished capacity of society to regulate individual behaviour. He observed that close familial and community-based relationships were being replaced by national and transnational corporate messages disseminated through advertising and television programmes. Furthermore, Johnson documented that rural youths had begun altering their appearance to emulate the fashion and values portrayed on television, indicating a substantial cultural shift catalysed by media exposure.

One of the more conspicuous consequences of this phenomenon was the increasing trend of youth migrating from rural to urban areas in pursuit of improved lifestyles.

This migration was coupled with a declining interest among young individuals in traditional occupations, particularly those associated with rural and agricultural livelihoods inherited from their families. Simultaneously, early indications of shifting gender relations began to emerge. While men continued to dominate the societal hierarchy, the potential for a reconfiguration of gender norms became increasingly feasible. India's deeply entrenched traditional values began to face unprecedented scrutiny from younger generations, who, through television, now had access to a range of alternative lifestyles and perspectives previously unavailable to their elders. The portrayal of idealised urban life through advertisements and entertainment programming further exacerbated the push towards migration, often setting unrealistic but aspirational standards for viewers. Srivasta (1987, as cited in Singhal et al., 1988) argued that commercial television, primarily driven by advertising imperatives, had exacerbated socio-economic disparities, thereby failing in its intended role as a developmental medium.

Supporting Johnson's (2001) insights, Scrase (2002), through his ethnographic research on changing cultural identities in Bengal, described an ongoing cultural conflict. This conflict involved attempts to preserve traditional Bengali social norms, such as gender roles and hierarchical family structures, in the face of encroaching global influences disseminated through international television. He contended that such media content introduced new paradigms for identity formation and self-expression, which often clashed with pre-existing cultural expectations. Notably, television has also emerged as an important source of knowledge and empowerment for Indian women. It has served as a vehicle for intellectual development and self-assertion, enabling them to challenge the pervasive patriarchal structures of Indian society (Bhandari, 2017; Sharda, 1989). Numerous scholars have acknowledged that one of the most substantial cultural impacts of transnational television in India is its effect on traditional gender identities. These influences often promote more individualistic or Westernised constructions of gender, or at the very least, hybrid versions that deviate from established norms (Chopra & Baria, 1996; Crabtree & Malhotra, 2002; Mankekar, 1999).

Desai and Agrawal (2009), in their analysis of the increasing individualism among Gujarati and Marathi speakers in Maharashtra as influenced by global television, posited that India's historical exposure to Western education and its colonial past rendered Western ideals less alien. In their book *Television and Cultural Crisis: An Analysis of Transnational Television in India*, they argued that media-driven cultural imperialism held limited sway in India. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the disruption of traditional familial hierarchies, with modern values reshaping interpersonal relationships within households. Additionally, they emphasised that individuals' responses to global media content varied significantly based on their socio-economic status and educational background, suggesting that media influence is not uniform but filtered through social contexts. Varma (2000), studying adolescents aged 15 to 18 in New Delhi, examined their attitudes toward sexuality, violence, and the use of alcohol and drugs after being exposed to Western media. He concluded that, while the differences between consumers and non-consumers of Western content were relatively minor, viewers were more inclined toward liberal sexual attitudes, occasional substance use, and a preference for Western dance forms over indigenous ones.

In a separate but related inquiry, Rajagopal (2019) examined how television had transformed familial values in India, a country historically characterised by strong, hierarchical family units. As television became more embedded in daily life, Rajagopal argued that it assumed a dual role—not only as a source of amusement but also as a catalyst for changing societal norms and interpersonal dynamics within the family. He emphasised the shifts in gender expectations and family structures, ultimately presenting television as both a reflection of and an agent for cultural change. Similarly, Chakravartty and Cross (2019), in their research entitled *The Intersection of Media Globalization and Local Cultures in India*, explored the interplay between global media flows and traditional Indian cultural practices. They pointed out the paradoxical nature of India's evolving media ecosystem, which simultaneously accommodates global content and resists cultural homogenisation.

Their analysis revealed that while India has grown into a significant player in the international media market, this has not led to cultural uniformity. Instead, global

content is continually reinterpreted and localised to better align with regional sensibilities. For example, international franchises are often reimagined with Indian narratives, making them more accessible to local audiences. This has resulted in a hybridised media landscape wherein local and global elements coexist. Moreover, they observed the active participation of Indian regulators and government institutions in managing this intersection, striving to strike a balance between protecting local traditions and embracing the globalised media economy. Despite fears of cultural dilution, their study found that globalisation had also reinvigorated some traditional practices by presenting them to broader audiences. Thus, the relationship between global media and Indian culture is not one of simple dominance or resistance but one of dynamic negotiation and adaptation.

India's extraordinary cultural and linguistic diversity serves as a form of resistance to the effects of cultural imperialism, forcing international content producers to adapt their offerings to suit local tastes. Kumar (2021) observed that the early failure of MTV in India was due to its overtly Western orientation. Its subsequent popularity only came after the channel revised its content to reflect Indian preferences and values. Similarly, international broadcasters have adjusted their portrayal of themes such as sexuality in music videos, television dramas, and magazines to make them more palatable to Indian audiences (Mankekar, 2004). This adaptation process reflects a broader trend in which global media conglomerates recognise the necessity of cultural relevance when entering diverse markets (Chalaby, 2005). Employing a postcolonial perspective, Crabtree and Malhotra (2000) discussed how commercially driven television content has altered Indian culture. They acknowledged that while significant resistance exists, particularly against explicit media representations of sex and violence, the influence of cultural imperialism remains palpable within the Indian media landscape.

A recurrent theme in this academic literature is the struggle to reconcile long-standing Indian cultural traditions with the modern values promoted through global media. Crabtree and Malhotra (2002) highlighted a widespread aspiration among Indians to adopt and internalise the ideas of progress and modernity often associated with the West. This desire is not new. As Chatterjee (1993, as cited in Crabtree &

Malhotra, 2002) noted, the intellectual foundations for this cultural transition were laid during the early 19th century through the introduction of Western thought. Mankekar (2004) elaborated on this complex and often ambivalent relationship between postcolonial India and the West, contending that global television has intensified these cultural dynamics by offering a continuous stream of external perspectives and values.

Devdas and Ravi (2013) further expanded on the transformative power of globalised television content. They argued that "Globalised Television has redefined the parameters of culture among Indians especially among the Televised Youth and paved the way for a Cultural Coup d'état, which is local in spirit but global in character. Intentionally or unintentionally the globalised television has brought about significant changes in people's attitude, lifestyle, behaviour and various other elements of culture. Thus globalised TV has become cultural theme." Their commentary captures the essence of how international television, often without explicit intent, has dramatically influenced the cultural consciousness of young Indian audiences. This influence is evident in changes in lifestyle choices, behavioural patterns, and personal aspirations, making globalised television not merely a form of entertainment but a driving force behind evolving cultural identities in contemporary India.

2.10 Culture, Tradition and Gender Roles in the Erstwhile Lushai Hills

The Lushai Hills (present-day Mizoram) were traditionally a mosaic of hill villages ruled by hereditary chiefs (Lal) and organized into clans and sub-clans. Pre-colonial Mizoram was fundamentally an animistic society: villagers believed in a universe populated by spirits of natural objects, mountains, streams, trees, etc. - whose favour or wrath determined fortune. As Bhattacharjee (2017) notes, "[Lushais] believed in animism prior to British arrival in the region and animistic beliefs based on nature [were] ingrained in every aspect of their life... The people shared a relation of interdependence with their natural surroundings... preserv[ing] it through religious norms and social taboos." In practice this meant that seasonal rituals and sacrifices (to propitiate forest spirits or ancestral deities) were central to village life and crop

festivals such as Chapchar Kut, Pawl Kut and Mim Kut marked the jhum (shifting-cultivation) cycle, reflecting the importance of agrarian economy in Mizo culture. Hunting and barter trade with neighbouring plains were also culturally ingrained (trade goods included hides, ivory and forest produce). Notably, folklore and symbolism often invoked nature- for example, the crimson wildflower was universally used to evoke the beauty of young women. Thus in pre-colonial Mizo tradition male and female social identities were cast within an animistic worldview and a subsistence economy of jhumming and head-hunting, where men's prowess in hunting and warfare was highly valued and women's roles were largely defined by household and agrarian fertility.

Society in the Lushai Hills was patrilineal and lineage passed through the male line and descent was reckoned by clan membership in the father's clan. Shakespear's colonial-era ethnography of 1912 titled 'The Lushei Kuki Clans' provides a detailed account: a typical Lushai village comprised an extended chief's family and several subordinate households; sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren lived in the father's household until a son came of age, at which point he would either found a new hamlet or, in the case of a chief's eldest son, succeed as village chief. Among commoners the youngest son customarily inherited the family's land and title, while elder sons often moved out to establish their own farms. Daughters did not inherit land or status; they customarily left their natal village to marry into a husband's community, taking their bride-price to the groom's chief. In short, Shakespear notes that "the general rule is for the youngest son to inherit" the chief's property. Contemporary scholars of Mizo law describe this system as "patriarchal and patrilineal"- a setup in which formal rights and social rank were vested in men. Indeed, analyses of traditional Mizo customary law emphasize that gender, customary laws and power were structured to favour men: women's legal rights in marriage, divorce or inheritance were heavily circumscribed by male-controlled village institutions.

This patriarchy was reflected in everyday practice and gender division of labour. Ethnographic observers report that pre-colonial Lushai households practiced a strict division of tasks: women performed the bulk of subsistence labour while men

focused on hunting, warfare, and ritual leadership. Shakespear (1912) describes how “the women folk fetch the wood and water, cook the food and do the greatest part of the weeding and harvesting; they also make all the clothing for the whole household from cotton grown in the jhums, which they themselves gather, clean, spin, and weave.” In contrast, able-bodied men built the house, cleared new jhum plots and hunted for meat, and afterwards usually gathered for recreation. In one vivid account, after the morning meal “the real work of the day [for women] begins... The women settle themselves to cloth-making, while the men prepare to pass a day of complete enjoyment, lying in the sun and smoking, the younger ones...courting any of the pretty clothmakers.” This pattern was typical: men’s labour in the fields and jungle was comparatively intermittent, whereas women bore continuous household duties, from childrearing to grinding rice and feeding domestic animals as detailed by Shakespear. Buongpui (2013) notes that this marked division reinforced male authority: even small chores could not be presumed shared. As Gangte (2016) finds in her study of Mizo social norms, traditionally, men seldom assisted in the hearth or field; a husband might watch a pot boil over and merely call his wife, who was busy elsewhere, to tend it. The implication was that women shouldered the cumulative drudgery of subsistence, while men enjoyed leisure and status.

Male youth and courtship also followed customary patterns. Unmarried Lushai men lived communally in the Zawlbuk- a bachelors’ dormitory and men’s club that stood opposite the chief’s house. In the Zawlbuk, young men, as Shakespear (1912) notes, “gather...in the evening to sing songs, tell stories, and make jokes” and then visit their sweethearts, returning to sleep there for the night. Villagers of other tribes sometimes used the Zawlbuk as a travellers’ rest-house, but it was primarily “the particular property of the unmarried men of the village” (Shakespear, 1912). The Zawlbuk was strictly a male domain: boys kept its hearth fire and men upheld its cleanliness until they reached puberty and moved out of their parents’ house to join it. In this way young men’s identity was forged in a male-only institution that celebrated warfare, singing and flirtation, while young women remained in family quarters engaged in weaving or farming.

Widows' remarriage was formally allowed but carried financial penalties; otherwise, women's lives were governed by kinship rules that prioritized male ownership of land and livestock. Inheritance likewise recognized only sons: clan chiefs granted each grown son a village or farmland, but daughters passed to their husband's clan. As Gangte (2016) summarizes, "in the patrilineal setup of the Mizo society, the line of descent always follows through the male."

Throughout these customs, traditional attitudes conveyed women's subordinate status. Mizoram's oral lore includes blunt proverbs that reflect the entrenched patriarchal ethos. For example, as recorded by historian Dena (2008), a Mizo proverb states: "A woman and an old fence can be replaced at any time. Just as crab meat is not counted as meat, so also a woman's word is not counted as word." Such phrases underscore how women's presence and opinions were historically regarded as expendable and insignificant. In practice, under traditional Mizo customary law, a husband could assert the right to exact revenge against an unfaithful wife. According to Chatterjee (1995), a man was "at liberty to kill an unfaithful wife and her paramour," highlighting the deeply gendered and punitive moral codes that governed sexual conduct. Customary penalties for adultery, including the mutilation of a wife's lover by cutting off his ears or nose underscore the extreme lengths to which male authority extended in policing female sexuality. Mc Call (2003) also writes, "Even if the seducer is a married man, his wife has no redress on the grounds of his adultery. This unusual tolerance represents one the few cankerous privileges among Lushai men in a country and a society which is very definitely fashioned for men." Within these pre-colonial traditions, women were largely excluded from holding ritual or political authority beyond the domestic sphere. As Gangte (2016) notes, the pre-colonial Mizo legal system was thoroughly "patriarchal and patrilineal" women were "perpetually embroiled...when negotiating their spaces with regard to marriage, divorce and inheritance" and lacked independent rights.

These entrenched gender roles arose from deeper cultural and historical influences. The Lushai economy, cantered on shifting cultivation required intensive farm labour; women's acceptance of that burden gave them a critical economic role, but undercut any claim to authority beyond the hearth. Conversely, a history of head-hunting and

clan warfare valorised masculine strength and aggression, reinforcing male dominance. The Zawlbuk institution and the surrounding warrior ethos meant that men were socialized to value honour, bravery, and even flirtatiousness, while women were raised in relative domestic seclusion (Shakespeare, 1912). The animistic belief system further reinforced this gender divide: men assumed ritual leadership in propitiating spirits and ancestors, whereas women's offerings, typically agricultural produce were considered secondary (Chatterjee, 1995). Geographic mobility further affected gender roles: Shakespeare (1912) reports that Mizo villages were constantly relocating to new jhum sites, a practice that limited property development and encouraged egalitarian subsistence roles (men needed strong wives in the fields) but did not alter patriarchal descent. In sum, pre-colonial Lushai gender roles were shaped by the intersection of subsistence economy, animistic religion, and warrior culture. These enduring patterns of patriliney, male privilege and female domesticity would later form the backdrop against which modern influences (missionaries, colonialism and eventually transnational media) encountered the Mizos. Understanding their early foundations is thus crucial for assessing how contemporary cultural forces (such as transnational television) interact with and sometimes challenge these traditional gender norms in Mizoram.

2.11 Transnational Television in Mizoram

The penetration of transnational television into Mizoram is a recent phenomenon with significant cultural impact. Before the 1990s, television in Mizoram consisted mainly of national broadcasts from Doordarshan. Doordarshan first reached Mizoram during the 1982 Asian Games via a very-low-power transmitter in Aizawl, but it was not until the mid-1990s that television became a prominent mass medium in the state (Muansangkimi, 2015). Doordarshan's programming at that time was limited, focused on development content and occasional entertainment (e.g. the Ramayana and Mahabharata serials) so local audiences yearned for more variety. This gap led to the spread of video cassette recorders in the 1980s. Enterprising individuals used VCRs to show Hindi and English movies (often pirated) for a fee in residential settings (Muansangkimi, 2015). The real shift came with cable television. Skylinks Cable Network began operating on 5 September 1991, becoming the first to

distribute satellite channels to households in Aizawl (Laldinfeli & Ratnamala, 2016; Muansangkimi, 2015). Other local operators followed: LPS Vision Television launched in 1992, and Zozam Cable Network in 1994. By 2004, Zonet Cable Network had further expanded cable infrastructure in Mizoram, leading to widespread television access. With market liberalisation, a flood of foreign content arrived in Mizoram. Households began consuming films and serials from Hollywood, Bollywood, and increasingly from South Korea, Japan, Turkey, and elsewhere. In response, local dubbing studios emerged as cultural intermediaries, translating and adapting these shows into the Mizo language. Agarwala (2018) and Rajshekhar (2015) estimate that nearly 90 per cent of content on Mizo-language channels consists of dubbed foreign serials and films, most processed by studios in Aizawl. The arrival of foreign television content has not been without controversy. Concerns about cultural invasion have deep roots. As early as the 1950s, the Mizo Cultural Society had imposed bans on Hindi songs and non-Mizo music (Zarzosanga, 2021). In the cable-TV era, the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and similar groups have monitored content closely. For example, the popular Hindi serial *Kasautii Zindagii Kay*, dubbed into Mizo by a local studio, was banned after protests by the YMA, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZIP, a student union), and church leaders. They objected to its depiction of Hindu rituals and practices, which they felt clashed with Mizoram's predominantly Christian identity (Kuotso, 2013). Despite such tensions, some foreign content has been embraced in Mizoram. South Korean dramas, for instance, have gained wide popularity. Scholars suggest that many Korean dramas resonate with Mizo audiences because of shared themes like strong family loyalty, modest romance, and restrained aesthetics, which align with Mizo cultural values (Colney, 2020; Lawbei, 2017). Western influence appears in other ways too: for example, cowboy hats and boots have become popular in Mizoram. Lalmalsawma (2022) argues that this fashion trend reflects selective borrowing, as these Western styles align with local ideals of masculinity. Television has also influenced gender and identity norms. Korean serials in particular have reshaped young viewers' ideas about gender roles. Some Mizo youth see these changes as progressive; while others worry they undermine traditional norms (Colney, 2020). These debates reflect a broader generational divide: older and more conservative groups tend to view media

influence with suspicion, while younger people are more open to global cultural flows. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model is useful here: audiences are not passive recipients of media; they actively interpret and negotiate meanings. In Mizoram, this theory suggests that viewers accept, modify or reject foreign TV content depending on their cultural values and contexts. For example, a romantic scene that aligns with Mizo values may be embraced, while one seen as culturally inappropriate may be censored or reinterpreted. Overall, the case of Mizoram indicates that transnational television engenders negotiation rather than uniform outcomes. Foreign content is filtered through Mizo cultural lenses. Dubbing studios, religious institutions, and civil society organisations act as gatekeepers, deciding which content is culturally acceptable. Thus, television in Mizoram is shaped by an interplay of global media and local culture, with audiences acting as active participants in interpreting that content.

2.12 Research Gap

Most scholarship on transnational television focuses either on global media flows in general or on national media landscapes. There is relatively little research on how transnational television is received in peripheral regions like Mizoram. This gap is significant given Mizoram's unique socio-cultural context: a largely Christian society with strong community norms and a history of relative isolation. Very few studies address how Mizo audiences respond to foreign television content. Similarly, there is limited research on the process of localisation in Mizoram. Dubbing studios, the key players that translate and adapt transnational content into Mizo have largely been overlooked in academic work. Yet these studios make crucial choices that shape how global stories are understood locally. This study aims to fill these gaps. It examines the everyday ways Mizo viewers engage with transnational television: not only what they watch, but how they interpret, assimilate, or resist foreign content. In particular, it explores how viewers relate this content to their own gender roles, cultural values, and religious beliefs, and how dubbed adaptations mediate these encounters. By focusing on Mizoram, we extend the literature on media and culture to a previously understudied region, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between global media and local culture.

Chapter III

Transnational Television in Mizoram: Assessing Alterations in Traditional and Cultural Practices and Gender Roles

3.1 Introduction

What unfolds when transnational television narratives permeate the intimate spaces of Mizo households? How do these transnational broadcasts influence the cultural tapestry and gender dynamics of a society deeply rooted in tradition and communal values? In the contemporary media landscape of Mizoram, such questions are not merely academic; they resonate with the lived experiences of Mizo people and their broader society and culture.

Mizoram is a picturesque state located in the north-eastern region of India. It is bordered by the Indian states of Manipur, Tripura, and Assam, as well as by Myanmar to the east and Bangladesh to the west. The state is known for its lush green landscapes, rolling hills, and rich cultural diversity. Mizoram is one of the Seven Sister States of northeast India, each of which is unique in its social, cultural, and ethnic composition. The state capital, Aizawl, sits at the heart of Mizoram and functions as its political and economic hub. Mizoram offers a unique blend of indigenous practices, traditions, and modern influences that make it a culturally significant region in India.

Television made its initial foray into Mizoram during the 1982 Asian Games, relayed by Doordarshan through its first very low power (VLP) transmitter installed at Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl. However, it was not until the mid-1990s that television emerged as a prominent mass medium in the state. The limited programming of Doordarshan, primarily consisting of developmental content and a few entertainment shows like *Ramayan* (1987–88) and *Mahabharat* (1988–89), left audiences yearning for more diverse content. This gap led to the proliferation of videocassette recorders (VCRs) in the 1980s, where enterprising individuals showcased films in residential settings for a fee, offering a mix of Hindi and English movies (often pirated). The landscape shifted dramatically with the advent of cable television. Skylinks Cable

Networks, launched on 5 September 1991, pioneered cable TV services in Mizoram, distributing satellite channels to select households in Aizawl. This initiative was soon complemented by local content production, with the LPS Vision Television Production Studio commencing operations in 1992, followed by Zozam in 1994.

With the advent of cable and satellite television, audiences in Mizoram, like many other parts of India, gained access to a wide variety of international and Indian television channels. These included popular global networks such as the Cable News Network (CNN), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Star TV, and many more. Television programmes from countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and even regional content from Southeast Asia became readily available. However, this increasing exposure to global media has also raised concerns about the erosion of traditional Mizo cultural values. Older generations, in particular, fear that the younger population's immersion in global television content could undermine the Mizo language, customs, and societal values. For instance, while Mizo language channels are broadcast, there is a growing preference for English and Hindi language content, especially among the youth. As different cultures and traditions are exposed via television, Korean serials have changed the perception of how a predominantly Christian state views gender and sexuality. While some regard this as a positive change, others consider these shifts a stumbling block to cultural preservation. This trend reflects a broader cultural shift, where the influence of transnational media might be overshadowing local cultural expressions.

Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and drawing on theories of cultural hybridity and glocalisation, this chapter asks: does the arrival of transnational television lead to transformations in established gender roles, cultural values, and practices in Mizo society? The chapter further explores how Mizo audiences actively negotiate, resist, or assimilate global media messages, with attention to how these processes manifest in societal dynamics, gender expectations, and cultural identity.

3.2 The Gospel and the Classroom: Colonial Modernity and Cultural Realignment in Mizoram

Long before the arrival of transnational television, Christian missionaries catalysed profound shifts in Mizo cultural values and social practices. The formal arrival of Christianity in Mizoram began with the missionary work of James Herbert Lorrain and Frederick William Savidge in 1894, as these two Welsh missionaries not only introduced the Roman script to the Mizo language but also spearheaded literacy campaigns and evangelism that would transform the region (Pachau, 2002). The rapid conversion of the Mizo population from animist traditions to Christianity marked a seismic shift in identity and cultural self-perception. Within three decades, Christianity became the dominant religion, supplanting traditional belief systems such as spirit worship (sakhua), the performance of chants and sacrifices, and the centrality of 'Thangchhuah' (feasts of merit in community life). Chronicling the immense and immediate cultural impact that the Christian missionaries and Christianity had on the Mizos, Lalhmangaihzaupa (2023) writes, "The next few decades after the arrival of Christianity witnessed mass conversion. The influence of the white man was so strong that it had an overbearing impact on all the cultural practices of the Mizos, and they started to develop, almost inherently, new perspectives in various aspects of their lives. For instance, the khuang, the Mizo traditional drum, was not allowed to be used in Christian worship because it was associated with the pre-Christian rituals and festivals, which, in the past, were celebrated with traditional rice beer. Consumption of rice beer suddenly became unacceptable, and it has since been considered by the Mizo Christians as a sin, though it was a regular practice during the pre-Christian era. This indicates that the arrival of Christianity among the Mizos was a point of transformation that reshaped Mizo tradition, practices and identity in numerous ways."

Rather than obliterating indigenous identity, Christianity recontextualised it, as Kipgen (1997) highlights how values such as 'Tlawmngaihna'- the Mizo ethical principle of selflessness and social obligation were retained but reinterpreted through Christian virtues like humility, service, and charity. Traditional communal systems, such as the Zawlbuk (a bachelor's dormitory serving as a socialising institution), lost

their relevance as churches and Sunday Schools replaced them as sites of moral formation and collective identity. In this sense, Christianity acted as an ideological gatekeeper, controlling the transition from an oral and animist culture to one based on print literacy, institutional religion, and middle-class aspirations.

Pachau (2002) argues that the Christianisation of Mizoram served both emancipatory and assimilative purposes. While it led to improved health, education, and socio-political consciousness, it also embedded colonial modernity and Western norms into Mizo society. The transformation of sacred spaces, death rituals, and gender expectations reflect this duality. Moreover, the replacement of indigenous symbols with Christian metaphors created a form of cultural displacement that continues to shape the Mizo worldview.

Parallel to evangelism, the introduction of Western-style education played a critical role in redefining intellectual hierarchies and social mobility. According to Kipgen (1997), pre-colonial Mizo society valued oral traditions, communal decision-making, and indigenous knowledge. The new education system, with its emphasis on written texts, individualism, and punctuality, reoriented Mizo epistemology. Pachau (2002) elaborates on this shift by highlighting how mission schools became sites of cultural negotiation. They were instrumental in producing a new elite class of educated Mizos who were both agents of modernity and custodians of Christian morality. These individuals played a critical role in mediating between traditional values and colonial-imposed norms, and in many ways, they laid the groundwork for the ambivalent reception of modern media today. However, the Christianisation process also triggered deliberate displacements of traditional culture. As Rohmingmawii (2014) notes, the church discouraged or outright prohibited many traditional practices, including the use of drums, indigenous dances, tunes, and the consumption of rice beer- once considered sacred in Mizo rituals. Christians who participated in such activities were subject to excommunication and this transformation extended to appearance and dress: male Christians were expected to cut their hair short, and women were discouraged from wearing traditional ivory earrings (Sangkhuma, 1995, as cited in Rohmingmawii, 2014). These shifts marked not only a break from

animism but also a deliberate re-signification of identity to visually distinguish Christians from non-Christians (Lloyd, 1991, cited in Rohmingmawii, 2014).

The Zawlbuk, long a cornerstone of communal instruction and social discipline for young Mizo men, was also delegitimised. While British administrators occasionally sought to revive the institution, the Mizo Christian populace viewed it as antithetical to modern progress and chose to abandon it (Rohmingmawii, 2014). Similarly, the ceremonial status of Thangchhuah- bestowed upon brave, selfless men and traditionally marked by drinking bouts- declined in relevance as the church enforced abstinence and rejected zu (rice beer), a substance once central to Mizo religion and ritual (McCall, 1977; Lloyd, 1991; Zairema, 1978, as cited in Rohmingmawii, 2014).

The shift towards Christian values was seen by many as synonymous with modernisation. Education, tied closely to the mission, became a powerful vehicle for upward mobility. As Rohmingmawii (2014) recounts, newly educated Christians, often employed in mission or colonial administration, challenged the traditional social order. These individuals, often from commoner backgrounds, displaced chiefs and emerged as community leaders, scribes, teachers, and pastors, thus redefining authority based on merit rather than hereditary privilege. The decline of chieftainship in 1954, with the rise of the Mizo Union (also called the ‘Commoners’ Party’), marked a political turning point deeply tied to these cultural and educational transformations.

Furthermore, access to education, missionary service, and experiences outside Mizoram-including those gained during the First World War through the Lushai Labour Corps- contributed to a dramatic reorientation of Mizo worldviews. Christianity, paired with Western education, reclassified traditional beliefs as superstition and marginalised indigenous epistemologies. The result was a comprehensive cultural realignment that continues to shape how Mizo society navigates new forms of modernity, including those ushered in by transnational media.

Thlanga (2014) further notes that as early as the 1920s, Mizo parents prioritised formal education over indigenous institutions such as the Zawlbuk “considering the

benefit of education, parents preferred to send their children to school than to Zawlbuk, hoping that their children would one day become a Babu.” This historical embrace of modernity demonstrates that societal negotiation with external influences predates transnational television, situating contemporary media shifts within a longer trajectory of cultural realignment.

These foundational disruptions to traditional practices and institutions created a context of cultural negotiation that did not end with colonialism or Christianisation. Instead, they laid the groundwork for how Mizo society would later encounter, interpret, and incorporate global media forms- from television to the internet- within frameworks already shaped by earlier waves of cultural transformation.

3.3 Gendered Spaces and the Role of Mizo Women: Tradition, Christianity, and the Limits of Reform

In the words of McCall (2003), it was clear that Mizo society is male-dominated. He wrote, “Without any ambiguity, Lusei has been, and still is, a country for men before it is one for women and children.” This blunt assessment reflected not only the observable gender hierarchy but also the internalisation of patriarchal values within social structures and cultural discourse. Derogatory sayings, such as ‘hmeichhia leh pal chhia chu an thlak theih’- translated as “women and old fences are replaceable” further illustrate the deeply rooted gender biases embedded in traditional Mizo thought.

Pre-colonial Mizoram, or the erstwhile Lushai Hills, was governed by patriarchal norms wherein men held authority in virtually all domains i.e., familial, communal, political, and ritual. Women, by contrast, were excluded from the institution of the Zawlbuk, a male-exclusive dormitory that functioned as a centre for education, discipline, and leadership training. This exclusion symbolised their marginalisation from communal decision-making and public life and customary law reinforced these dynamics. Inheritance was patrilineal, and daughters were denied rights to ancestral property. The practice of Mo Man (bride-price) framed women as economic dependants, transferring value from one household to another and while divorce was

permitted, it was socially stigmatised and economically debilitating for women (Dena, 2010).

Lalmangaihzaiva (2023) provides a nuanced analysis that challenges the widespread assumption that Christianity and colonial modernity emancipated Mizo women. He argues that although Christianity altered some aspects of social life, it did not dismantle patriarchal structures but rather re-inscribed them under new cultural and religious frameworks. For instance, early Christian teachings advocated spiritual equality, and missionary interventions did introduce limited reforms, particularly through the establishment of girls' schools. These schools granted girls access to literacy and, eventually, certain forms of formal employment but these developments were slow and often met with resistance at the level of village courts and customary councils, where male dominance remained the norm (Census of India, 2011).

According to Lalmangaihzaiva (2023), the church became a new site for the negotiation of gender roles but not necessarily one of liberation. While women were included in auxiliary functions such as Women's Fellowship groups or Sunday School teaching, they were systematically excluded from leadership roles like pastors, elders, or deacons. These exclusions reflected the internalisation of biblical interpretations that reinforced male authority, thus mirroring the hierarchical norms of the pre-Christian era. Ralte (2013) similarly observes that the rise of women in Mizoram has consistently been challenged by a male-defined hegemonic order that is zealously protected by cultural and religious institutions.

The gendered division of labour, too, persisted even after the advent of Western education and Christian ethics. Lalrofel (2023) argues that the post-Christian Mizo society continued to perpetuate biased notions of women's work, relegating women to unpaid domestic roles or limiting their professional engagement to feminised sectors such as nursing or teaching. In this sense, missionary education, while symbolically transformative, was not structurally radical. It opened doors for individual advancement without necessarily dismantling the ideological architecture of patriarchy.

While the Mizo Marriage, Divorce, and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014, marks a significant shift in acknowledging women's inheritance rights, these rights remain circumscribed by conditions not imposed on men. The preferential treatment of the eldest son, conditional eligibility for daughters and widows, and moral standards imposed on female heirs reflect a continuation of patriarchal values, thereby limiting full gender equality in property succession (Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014). Although the Indian Constitution grants equal legal status to all citizens, Mizo customary law remains influential in civil matters. This dual legal system, in which formal equality exists alongside entrenched traditional norms, continues to disadvantage women in key areas of property, family, and legal recognition. Folklore and literary narratives have also historically contributed to the marginalisation of women as Lalmangaihzaiva (2023) notes that Mizo oral traditions and early Christian literature seldom celebrated female agency. Instead, women were typically depicted as loyal wives, self-sacrificing mothers, or tragic figures, rarely as autonomous subjects with voice or authority and this symbolic marginalisation further reinforced their subordination in real-life contexts.

Nonetheless, the mid-20th century did witness slow, state-sponsored shifts in women's roles. As education became more accessible and employment opportunities expanded, particularly in government and healthcare sectors and Mizo women began to carve out spaces beyond domestic boundaries. Yet even these gains were uneven, and often contingent on a woman's class background, marital status, or proximity to urban centres. As Lalmangaihzaiva (2023) underscores, progress has been layered and inconsistent, shaped as much by social resistance as by structural reform.

Taken together, this body of literature paints a complex picture of Mizo gender relations, one marked by historical continuity, religious reinterpretation, and limited reform. The patriarchal foundations of traditional Mizo society have not been simply displaced by Christianity or colonial modernity; rather, they have been reconstituted in ways that continue to circumscribe women's autonomy and participation in public life. Understanding these layered transformations is essential for assessing the present-day gender dynamics in Mizoram, where symbolic equality may coexist with deeply entrenched inequality..

3.4 Transnational Television in India: Cultural Disruption and Negotiated Identities

In its formative stage, Indian television primarily functioned as a mechanism to foster national cohesion, extend educational opportunities, and support rural upliftment. However, with the economic liberalisation that commenced in the 1990s, the Indian television landscape witnessed a dramatic shift with the entry of foreign television channels. This marked a significant increase in the broadcast of international programming facilitated through satellite technology. The emergence of globalised television content prompted significant criticism, often being regarded as a "cultural invasion" by various political parties, religious leaders, and social critics. These groups perceived such content as foreign and fundamentally discordant with the domestic programming that had long been dominated by the state-run broadcaster, Doordarshan (Butcher, 2003; Desai & Agrawal, 2009; McMillin, 2001, 2015). A striking example of this opposition occurred in 1996 when India hosted the Miss World beauty pageant in Karnataka. Several regional organisations, including Mahila Jagran, a feminist advocacy group, and Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, a local farmers' union, mobilised against the event, even threatening to self-immolate in protest of what they deemed to be an overt act of "cultural imperialism" (Butcher, 2003; Rai, 1996). Over the following decades, India's culturally conservative society has become increasingly exposed to global customs and behavioural norms through the medium of international television.

As the number of foreign channels grew, the associated cultural transitions sparked extensive academic discourse both within India and internationally. The portrayal of individual autonomy, consumerist lifestyles, and affluence through foreign films and television programmes has disrupted the traditionally collectivist social fabric of Indian families. This disruption is particularly evident in the growing prevalence of nuclear family units, which has gradually undermined traditional values such as reverence for elders and familial responsibility (Prakash, 2022). Johnson (2001), through his ethnographic research in the villages of Danawli and Rajpuri in western Maharashtra, concluded that television had contributed to a diminished capacity of society to regulate individual behaviour. He observed that close familial and community-based relationships were being replaced by national and transnational

corporate messages disseminated through advertising and television programmes. Furthermore, Johnson documented that rural youths had begun altering their appearance to emulate the fashion and values portrayed on television, indicating a substantial cultural shift catalysed by media exposure.

One of the more conspicuous consequences of this phenomenon was the increasing trend of youth migrating from rural to urban areas in pursuit of improved lifestyles. This migration was coupled with a declining interest among young individuals in traditional occupations, particularly those associated with rural and agricultural livelihoods inherited from their families. Simultaneously, early indications of shifting gender relations began to emerge. While men continued to dominate the societal hierarchy, the potential for a reconfiguration of gender norms became increasingly feasible. India's deeply entrenched traditional values began to face unprecedented scrutiny from younger generations, who, through television, now had access to a range of alternative lifestyles and perspectives previously unavailable to their elders. The portrayal of idealised urban life through advertisements and entertainment programming further exacerbated the push towards migration, often setting unrealistic but aspirational standards for viewers. Srivasta (1987, as cited in Singhal et al., 1988) argued that commercial television, primarily driven by advertising imperatives, had exacerbated socio-economic disparities, thereby failing in its intended role as a developmental medium.

Supporting Johnson's (2001) insights, Scrase (2002), through his ethnographic research on changing cultural identities in Bengal, described an ongoing cultural conflict. This conflict involved attempts to preserve traditional Bengali social norms, such as gender roles and hierarchical family structures, in the face of encroaching global influences disseminated through international television. He contended that such media content introduced new paradigms for identity formation and self-expression, which often clashed with pre-existing cultural expectations. Notably, television has also emerged as an important source of knowledge and empowerment for Indian women. It has served as a vehicle for intellectual development and self-assertion, enabling them to challenge the pervasive patriarchal structures of Indian society (Bhandari, 2017; Sharda, 1989). Numerous scholars have acknowledged that

one of the most substantial cultural impacts of transnational television in India is its effect on traditional gender identities. These influences often promote more individualistic or Westernised constructions of gender, or at the very least, hybrid versions that deviate from established norms (Chopra & Baria, 1996; Crabtree & Malhotra, 2002; Mankekar, 1999).

Desai and Agrawal (2009), in their analysis of the increasing individualism among Gujarati and Marathi speakers in Maharashtra as influenced by global television, posited that India's historical exposure to Western education and its colonial past rendered Western ideals less alien. In their book *Television and Cultural Crisis: An Analysis of Transnational Television in India*, they argued that media-driven cultural imperialism held limited sway in India. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the disruption of traditional familial hierarchies, with modern values reshaping interpersonal relationships within households. Additionally, they emphasised that individuals' responses to global media content varied significantly based on their socio-economic status and educational background, suggesting that media influence is not uniform but filtered through social contexts. Varma (2000), studying adolescents aged 15 to 18 in New Delhi, examined their attitudes toward sexuality, violence, and the use of alcohol and drugs after being exposed to Western media. He concluded that, while the differences between consumers and non-consumers of Western content were relatively minor, viewers were more inclined toward liberal sexual attitudes, occasional substance use, and a preference for Western dance forms over indigenous ones.

In a separate but related inquiry, Rajagopal (2019) examined how television had transformed familial values in India, a country historically characterised by strong, hierarchical family units. As television became more embedded in daily life, Rajagopal argued that it assumed a dual role—not only as a source of amusement but also as a catalyst for changing societal norms and interpersonal dynamics within the family. He emphasised the shifts in gender expectations and family structures, ultimately presenting television as both a reflection of and an agent for cultural change. Similarly, Chakravartty and Cross (2019), in their research entitled *The Intersection of Media Globalization and Local Cultures in India*, explored the

interplay between global media flows and traditional Indian cultural practices. They pointed out the paradoxical nature of India's evolving media ecosystem, which simultaneously accommodates global content and resists cultural homogenisation.

Their analysis revealed that while India has grown into a significant player in the international media market, this has not led to cultural uniformity. Instead, global content is continually reinterpreted and localised to better align with regional sensibilities. For example, international franchises are often reimagined with Indian narratives, making them more accessible to local audiences. This has resulted in a hybridised media landscape wherein local and global elements coexist. Moreover, they observed the active participation of Indian regulators and government institutions in managing this intersection, striving to strike a balance between protecting local traditions and embracing the globalised media economy. Despite fears of cultural dilution, their study found that globalisation had also reinvigorated some traditional practices by presenting them to broader audiences. Thus, the relationship between global media and Indian culture is not one of simple dominance or resistance but one of dynamic negotiation and adaptation.

India's extraordinary cultural and linguistic diversity serves as a form of resistance to the effects of cultural imperialism, forcing international content producers to adapt their offerings to suit local tastes. Kumar (2021) observed that the early failure of MTV in India was due to its overtly Western orientation. Its subsequent popularity only came after the channel revised its content to reflect Indian preferences and values. Similarly, international broadcasters have adjusted their portrayal of themes such as sexuality in music videos, television dramas, and magazines to make them more palatable to Indian audiences (Mankekar, 2004). This adaptation process reflects a broader trend in which global media conglomerates recognise the necessity of cultural relevance when entering diverse markets (Chalaby, 2005). Employing a postcolonial perspective, Crabtree and Malhotra (2000) discussed how commercially driven television content has altered Indian culture. They acknowledged that while significant resistance exists, particularly against explicit media representations of sex and violence, the influence of cultural imperialism remains palpable within the Indian media landscape.

A recurrent theme in this academic literature is the struggle to reconcile long-standing Indian cultural traditions with the modern values promoted through global media. Crabtree and Malhotra (2002) highlighted a widespread aspiration among Indians to adopt and internalise the ideas of progress and modernity often associated with the West. This desire is not new. As Chatterjee (1993, as cited in Crabtree & Malhotra, 2002) noted, the intellectual foundations for this cultural transition were laid during the early 19th century through the introduction of Western thought. Mankekar (2004) elaborated on this complex and often ambivalent relationship between postcolonial India and the West, contending that global television has intensified these cultural dynamics by offering a continuous stream of external perspectives and values.

Devdas and Ravi (2013) further expanded on the transformative power of globalised television content. They argued that "Globalised Television has redefined the parameters of culture among Indians especially among the Televised Youth and paved the way for a Cultural Coup d'état, which is local in spirit but global in character. Intentionally or unintentionally the globalised television has brought about significant changes in people's attitude, lifestyle, behaviour and various other elements of culture. Thus globalised TV has become cultural theme." Their commentary captures the essence of how international television, often without explicit intent, has dramatically influenced the cultural consciousness of young Indian audiences. This influence is evident in changes in lifestyle choices, behavioural patterns, and personal aspirations, making globalised television not merely a form of entertainment but a driving force behind evolving cultural identities in contemporary India.

3.5 Transnational Television and Local Culture: A Global View

Asia is often regarded as culturally distinct when compared to other global regions, particularly due to its unique traditions, values, belief systems, and rich linguistic heritage. However, these cultural identities have increasingly come under pressure following the global spread of media content that accompanied market liberalisation in many nations during the 1990s. Chakravarthy (2004) asserted that the emergence

of Western-based media outlets, such as news broadcasters and entertainment platforms like MTV, has notably swayed the youth in Asia towards adopting and admiring Western lifestyles and customs as represented on television.

Schiller (1976) critically examined how the United States utilises technological advancements to culturally influence other societies, effectively imposing American cultural norms over indigenous ones, a process he termed “hegemonisation.” In a similar vein, Kang and Morgan (1988) applied George Gerbner’s “Cultivation Theory,” which posits a reciprocal relationship between television viewership and the audience's worldviews, rather than a straightforward causal effect. Their investigation into how South Korean university students responded to programming from the American Forces Korean Network (AFKN) revealed that female students were particularly susceptible to cultural influence, exhibiting more liberal and progressive views in contrast to their male counterparts, who were generally more inclined to preserve traditional Korean values. The study underscored how cultural perceptions, especially around gender roles, diverged significantly between American and Korean societies.

Dong et al. (1998) conducted a study involving 439 students from public high schools in China to examine whether prolonged exposure to American media content altered cultural values. Their findings indicated that while the students did not entirely embrace American values as depicted in television shows and films, there was a noticeable acknowledgement of the role of material wealth in everyday life. Furthermore, American content was observed to be widely accessible in China. These results were consistent with the arguments of Dorfman and Matelart (1971, as cited in Tanner, 2006), who claimed that American media, particularly comics and Disney programming, promotes a culture rooted in individualism and consumerism. This portrayal often equates happiness with consumption and depicts non-Western cultures as primitive, thereby transmitting American ideological and cultural dominance globally.

Drawing upon du Gay et al.’s (1997, as cited in Illias, 2011) “circuit of culture” framework which includes regulation, representation, identity, production, and

consumption- Illias (2011) analysed the impact of the rapidly expanding Malay television industry on cultural globalisation and its implications for Malay identity. His findings revealed that prime-time television in Malaysia tends to favour Western cultural narratives, which in turn encourages the assimilation of foreign values such as individualism and consumerism among Malay youth. Nevertheless, he stressed that the interpretation of television content is highly nuanced and context-dependent, as demonstrated by the diverse reactions of various Malay families to the same media material.

In a study of Taiwanese university students watching South Korean dramas, Wang (2009) highlighted that while these students did not consciously engage with the cultural practices represented in the series (e.g., *Dae-Jang-Gum*), they were captivated by a phenomenon termed “idolism.” This strategy, employed by the producers, aims to subtly shape the behaviours, beliefs, and aspirations of young viewers in ways that promote South Korean cultural products. Wang advocated for the inclusion of media literacy and critical thinking within educational curricula to equip youth with the tools needed to critically interpret such content and resist external ideological manipulation.

Palaiologou and Gialmas (2015) examined the influence of Turkish television series in Greece, particularly exploring whether these programmes facilitated intercultural understanding or perpetuated underlying political and historical tensions. Their study, conducted among university students in Northern Greece, discovered a duality in perspectives: some participants held favourable views of Turkish culture and religious practices, while others harboured historical resentment linked to Ottoman rule. Politically, the researchers noted a degree of scepticism regarding the potential propagandistic motives of these serials, particularly in how they might misrepresent social realities in Turkey, including issues such as rural hardship and the application of strict Sharia laws affecting women.

Schiller (1976), in his seminal work on media imperialism, investigated the dominance of Western media in African societies, arguing that the influx of American and European television content contributed to the erosion of indigenous

cultural traditions. He maintained that television in Africa predominantly showcases Western consumerist ideologies, fostering a sense of cultural dependence. In contrast, Nyamnjoh (2005) offered a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that African audiences actively negotiate the meanings of imported media. Rather than passively absorbing Western values, these viewers reinterpret such messages in ways that resonate with local norms, for instance, transforming individualistic ideals into expressions of community and family loyalty. Ogan (2004) explored the impact of Western television, especially soap operas and reality shows, on Nigerian youth. His findings indicated that television introduced new perspectives on relationships, gender expectations, and material aspirations, many of which clashed with established African values. Nonetheless, Nigerian audiences did not merely imitate these global trends; they incorporated select elements to form hybrid cultural identities that combine both local and global influences.

In the Philippines, television has played a major role in redefining beauty standards, primarily through global media's emphasis on Eurocentric aesthetics. Tan (2007) argued that increased exposure to Western beauty ideals, such as fair skin and slender physiques has led to widespread changes in local beauty norms, including the popularity of skin-whitening products. Similarly, Sirimaneewong (2008) observed parallel developments in Thailand, where Western media introduced new standards of femininity that contrasted with traditional Thai values. However, Thai audiences were found to adopt a hybridised model of beauty, integrating elements of both Western and local ideals. Udo (2006) focused on how Nigerian youth interact with Western media and the implications for identity formation. He discovered that American television shows, particularly sitcoms and action movies, significantly influenced young Nigerians' perceptions of gender, relationships, and social hierarchy. Yet, rather than uncritically accepting these portrayals, Nigerian youth adapted them within the framework of their cultural traditions.

King (2009) investigated how global television content affects Caribbean culture, particularly in terms of traditional practices and societal structures. He found that Western advertisements and lifestyle shows have contributed to the rise of consumerism in the region. However, he also noted that Caribbean producers have

responded by localising global content to better reflect regional customs, thereby creating a culturally unique form of media that still acknowledges global influences.

Larkin (2012) examined television's role in promoting cultural hybridity in South Asia, especially in India and Pakistan. He posited that television operates as a conduit for blending global and local cultural expressions, resulting in a hybridised form of popular culture. While Western media continues to influence South Asian youth, local traditions are preserved and merged with global narratives through this media form. Jaffe (2006) turned his attention to Latin America, where he explored the influence of television on social change, particularly in relation to gender and family roles. He found that Western representations of family life and gender equality were frequently promoted, influencing local understandings. Nevertheless, Latin American television producers have also localised global content, producing hybrid media that reflects both indigenous and Western cultural elements.

Madianou and Miller (2012) explored how television shapes family life in the Philippines. They concluded that media plays a central role in defining gender roles, often reinforcing traditional expectations that women remain focused on household duties. However, these narratives coexist with newer global values around individualism and modernity, creating a complex cultural tapestry. Chen (2010) examined how Chinese television interacts with global content while maintaining local relevance. She found that although foreign media is influential, Chinese broadcasters often adapt these programmes to align with national values such as filial piety, respect for elders, and collective harmony. The result is a unique, hybridised media culture that preserves Chinese traditions while integrating global forms. Sreberny (2005) addressed television's role in facilitating cultural transformation in the Middle East, particularly through satellite networks like Al Jazeera. Her analysis suggested that television in the region acts as a platform for both political dialogue and cultural continuity, enabling viewers to engage with global debates without abandoning local traditions.

3.6 Themes and Discussion

With the historical and cultural foundations established- tracing the impact of Christian missionaries and their missions, Western education, and broader Indian and global media flows-four interrelated themes emerge from thirty in-depth interviews. These themes illuminate how transnational television has intersected with, and at times transformed, key aspects of Mizo social life. Each theme represents a distinct register of cultural negotiation, ranging from shifts in communal solidarity and ritual practice to the selective adoption of globalised festivities and the endurance of gendered hierarchies. Collectively, they reveal the complex processes by which Mizo audiences actively interpret, resist, and assimilate mediated images and narratives, thereby reshaping traditional values even as they preserve core elements of identity.

3.6.1 Erosion of Tlawmngaihna and Aia Upa Zah (Age-Based Authority): Negotiating Altruism in the Era of Transnational Media

Central to the Mizo communal ethos is ‘Tlawmngaihna’- the principle of selfless service and altruism that binds individuals to collective welfare. Yet many participants contend that this ethic has waned amid modern communication technologies and transnational media influences. As interviewee, *16, a 49-year-old male Civil Servant and author observed:

“Though I find it hard to put all the blame on transnational television, I do think it plays a role in leading individuals, especially youth, to prioritise themselves and their own comfort before others. Also, the theme of individualism and personal freedom displayed in Western films might have an influence.” This sentiment echoes Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of habitus, whereby ingrained dispositions evolve under shifting socio-cultural conditions, catalysed by global media narratives.

The traditional practice of ‘Zualko’- a swift communal notification of death by runners has likewise been supplanted by telephones and motorcycles, as interviewee *2, a 54-year old, male Professor noted:

“Before the telephone and later the cell phone, Zualko had to run several miles, sometimes the whole night, just to give information. Now it is just one phone call

away or a one-hour motorcycle ride, as modernity and accessibility have relegated those needs or practices” This shift illustrates Robertson’s (1995) notion of glocalisation, whereby global technologies reconfigure local rituals in uneven ways.

Age-based authority, once sacrosanct in Mizo society, also faces contestation. Interviewee *29, a 69-year old, male retired Civil Servant and author of a book once chosen as ‘Book of the Year’ lamented:

“The respect we had for our elders back in our days was paramount... Youth today have this opinion that respect has to be earned, not given, but it was never like this. Maybe television and its portrayals of foreign cultures have corrupted our youth to a certain extent, especially after the dawn of the internet and social media.” Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model illuminates how younger audiences negotiate media messages: rather than uncritically accepting portrayals of autonomy, they renegotiate respect norms to align with new values of individual agency.

Together, these accounts reveal a negotiated tension between enduring communal values and emergent individualist orientations and transnational television does not simply erode *tlawmngaihna* and age hierarchies; it provides new symbolic frameworks through which Mizos actively redefine altruism, obligation, and respect in a rapidly globalising world.

Furthermore, while certain communal practices have been modified, their underlying ethos persists. As interviewee 9*, 54-year old, male journalist explained:

“*Thlan laih* (the digging of graves) is still practised and is still carried out involuntarily by youth of the community, but we have to accept the gradual changes it is experiencing. As of today, *hnatlang* (social work) is called to dig graves even if dead bodies are not to be buried on that particular day. The practice is different, but the ethos is still the same.” This exemplifies Kraidy’s (2005) concept of cultural hybridity, where local traditions adapt new forms while preserving core values.

3.6.2 Tradition Re-scripted: Transnational Television and the Transformation of Mizo Festivals

Traditional festivals such as Chapchar Kut, Mim Kut, and Pawl Kut once served as integral expressions of Mizo cultural identity. These events embodied agricultural cycles, communal solidarity, and spiritual significance. However, the spread of Christianity led to their suppression or reconfiguration. As early as the 1960s, festivals like Chapchar Kut were revived, yet re-scripted to exclude animistic elements. By 1973, Chapchar Kut had shed its overt spiritual symbolism and was celebrated in forms acceptable to Christian sensibilities, reflecting broader efforts to align traditional practices with a modern, religiously conformist Mizo identity.

With the arrival of transnational television, these festivals underwent another wave of transformation. The celebratory practices associated with Chapchar Kut have increasingly absorbed elements of global popular culture. Western music, cosplay of foreign television characters, and dances detached from Mizo traditions now dominate festival performances. Interviewee 17*, a 56-year old, reputed male journalist captured the resulting disillusionment:

“I have not attended the Chapchar Kut Festival for an extended period of time... it has now become a circus I wanted to avoid. I am not against Western music or dance... but these songs and dances do not have any connection with our festival, and we should not entertain this pattern.”

This negotiation between cultural inheritance and mediated global influences exemplifies what Bhabha (1994) calls the third space- a site of hybrid cultural production where meaning is neither purely traditional nor wholly foreign. Festivals like Chapchar Kut now operate within this third space, where cultural practices are not abandoned but reimagined through new aesthetic and symbolic forms.

For some, this signals a loss of authenticity; for others, it affirms cultural evolution. Interviewee 7*, a 45 year-old female Civil Servant expressed this latter view with a generational lens:

“No culture is static, and every culture is evolving along with the progress of time. While others might begrudge the way we have now celebrated Chapchar Kut, one must be reminded that ‘The Times They Are A-Changing’... (Smiles)”

Such reflections resonate with Stuart Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model as audiences and practitioners do not passively receive global cultural codes- they decode and reframe them according to local sensibilities and emerging generational values. Bhabha’s (1994) notion of mimicry is also useful in interpreting these transformations: festival practices that adopt Western aesthetics might appear as imitation, but they represent “almost the same, but not quite” enactments that subvert and localise global meanings. Chapchar Kut becomes less a preserved relic of the past and more a mediated, performative negotiation of Mizo identity in the age of global television.

3.6.3 Imported Celebrations: The Rise of Western Festivities in Mizo Cultural Life

The increasing visibility of Western-origin celebrations in Mizoram, such as Valentine’s Day, Halloween, and Prom Night, reflects a notable shift in how global cultural practices are being assimilated into local life. Prior to the arrival of transnational television, these events were virtually unknown to Mizo society. Today, however, they are actively celebrated in schools, restaurants/cafes, and social venues. These celebrations are no longer niche or limited to elite urban spaces; they have become cultural phenomena, especially among the younger population.

While these changes reflect global cultural flows, they also prompt anxiety over the dilution of indigenous traditions and values. Interviewee 13*, a 52-year old, female Professor, reflected on the cultural contradictions embedded in this transformation:

“The love and admiration we hold towards the White skinned people are unfathomable to me. It seems we are longing for their guidance and their continued presence; they changed the way we dress, the way we sing and compose songs- shifting/diverting us away from our culture and tradition of our forefathers. Yet, a certain section today wants to celebrate a festival that has no cultural significance for us.”

This view aligns with Pachuau's (2017) argument that "the colonial legacy... continues to this day because the conventional Mizo has a decided fetish for the white man and has little or no regard for his own roots." Such critiques reveal a deeper tension, where the symbolic legacy of colonial modernity, once mediated through Christianisation and education, now manifests through the aesthetics and rituals of global consumer culture.

The public display or performance of affection on Valentine's Day, the costumed theatrics of Halloween, or the glamour of Prom Nights in schools exemplify what Appadurai (1996) terms mediascapes- transnational flows of imagery that reshape aspirations and social practices. These celebrations arrive not only as rituals but as symbols of modern belonging, reinforcing affective ties to a globalised imaginary.

Yet these cultural imports do not go uncontested. Another participant 26*, a 37-year old female Civil Servant offered a more reconciliatory interpretation:

"I do not celebrate these festivals which are foreign to our culture. Having said that, we have to learn to inculcate or draw similarities with our culture and tradition if and when possible. For example, Mim Kut is not celebrated anymore, but since Halloween and Mim Kut are both linked to the concept of honouring and remembering the dead, it could be an opportunity for younger kids to re-learn our culture. We can even localise it to fit into our culture."

This perspective aligns with Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, which emphasises that audiences do not simply absorb media messages; they reinterpret them based on local values, generational perspectives, and cultural frameworks.

The suggestion to revive Mim Kut through a creative association with Halloween demonstrates an instance of cultural negotiation, not capitulation. Thus, rather than viewing the rise of Western festivities as straightforward cultural erasure, it is more accurate to frame them as contested and negotiated spaces. While some adopt these celebrations as aspirational acts of modernity, others seek to reinterpret or reframe them in ways that affirm local identity. Transnational television, in this sense,

becomes a stage not only for imitation but also for reimagination- a site where cultural memory, aspiration, and resistance all coexist.

3.6.4 Pervasive Patriarchal Notion of Gender Roles

Despite the profound cultural realignments driven by Christianity, education, and transnational media, the patriarchal underpinnings of Mizo society remain deeply entrenched. As McCall (2003) observes “Without any ambiguity, Lusei has been, and still is, a country for men before it is one for women.” Customary laws continue to privilege male authority over inheritance, religious office, and public status, reinforcing a gendered division of labour that limits women’s autonomy (Rokhum, 2013). Interviewee 1*, a 67-year old, female social activist, reflecting on her experience as a social activist noted:

“In my line of work as a social activist, I’ve encountered several instances where I would be ill-treated just for the fact that I am a woman. The derogatory things they have said mostly concern the fact that I am a woman. Not everyone, but most men, expect me to stay at home and care for my family rather than tackling social issues. This further proves that gender-based roles and responsibilities are still deeply entrenched in our society.”

This testimony illustrates the symbolic violence that Bourdieu (2001) describes- social structures that legitimise male dominance and render women’s public agency invisible. Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of gender performativity further helps us see how these expectations are repeatedly enacted and naturalised in everyday interactions.

Although women’s access to education has increased dramatically- female literacy in Mizoram stands at 86.7per cent (Ralte, 2013) - legal and social sanctions still constrain women’s rights. As interviewee 30*, a 34-year old, female scholar and journalist scholar recounted:

“While I admit that I have had a better opportunity to pursue higher studies and to progress my career compared to my mother and grandmother, it would be naive of me to say that Mizo women are now emancipated from their traditional roles,

responsibilities and social responsibilities. A good example of Mizo society still being largely favourable to men is in the case of adultery. If you are a man who has committed adultery, it will be forgotten in a few months or a year and would be deemed an honest mistake- the same cannot and will never be said for us.”

In line with this, McCall (2003) writes, “Even if the seducer is a married man, his wife has no redress on the grounds of his adultery. This unusual tolerance represents one of the few cankerous privileges among Lushai men in a country and a society which is very definitely fashioned for men.” This double standard underscores how legal frameworks and moral codes continue to enforce male prerogatives.

The institutional church further perpetuates gendered hierarchies. As interviewee 22*, a 65-year old Pastor and author explained:

“In contemporary Mizo society, the Church, at times, is more powerful than the state government itself. Since the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of churches in Mizoram, women have never had a prominent role in the church when compared to men. The Presbyterian Church is the largest denomination in the state and has hundreds of churches with thousands of church elders and pastors. Yet, you will not find a woman church elder or pastor in these churches. They might be one per cent, if there are any. This could only mean one thing: Mizo men do not want their women to have the same platform and power as them.”

Thus, while modern education and exposure to global media narratives offer Mizo women opportunities to redefine their roles, entrenched patriarchal structures continue to impose significant constraints on the realisation of gender equality in practice.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that Christianity and Western education did not simply displace indigenous systems; they reconfigured Mizo values through a process of reinterpretation and selective retention (Kipgen, 1997; Pachuau, 2002). By dismantling social institutions such as the Zawlbuk and recasting Tlawmngaihna in Christian terms, missionaries and colonial educators laid the groundwork for a

modern habitus in which print literacy, individual aspiration, and moral discipline became paramount. In this light, transnational television enters a cultural field already conditioned to negotiate foreign influences rather than to absorb them wholesale.

Mizo festivals, once grounded in cultural significance, agrarian cycles and spirit worship, have been successively Christianised and are now being reimagined through the lens of global popular culture. The emergence of Western celebrations such as Valentine's Day and Prom Night underscores how mediascapes (Appadurai, 1996) introduce novel scripts for social performance. Yet rather than signalling pure cultural erosion, these imported festivities provoke reflection on authenticity, offering opportunities for re-localisation- Mim Kut's thematic resonance with Halloween being the most vivid example.

Despite expanded educational access and exposure to alternative gender norms on-screen, patriarchal underpinnings continue to govern inheritance, public office, and moral sanction. Women's increased literacy and professional engagement coexist with symbolic violence that confines them to domestic spheres and denies them ecclesial leadership. This enduring gendered division of labour attests to the resilience of institutional and normative structures, and suggests that media-induced shifts in attitudes may advance only incrementally without concomitant reform in legal, religious, and familial domains.

Ultimately, instead of seeing local and global locked in a tug-of-war, we observe a richly textured negotiation in which tradition persists through transformation and new narratives are woven into the very fabric of communal life. Such processes underscore the resilience of Mizo identity and the creative capacities of audiences to chart their own cultural futures.

Chapter IV

Voicing the Global, Localising the Moral: Dubbing Studios as Cultural Intermediaries in Mizoram

4.1 Introduction

The Mizos were prompt and acutely aware in the act of cultural assimilation. The "Mizo Cultural Society" was formed in 1958 to preserve Mizos "customs, traditions and values." As early as the 1950s', Mizos have banned "non-Mizo songs and music" as Hindi songs could, if unregulated, eventually lead to "cultural invasion" (Zarzosanga, 2021). In spite of this, the period from 1970 to 1980 saw the emergence and boom of Cinema Halls in Mizoram. Though this was a period of severe turbulence in the state as MNF had declared independence from India on 1st March, 1966, there were throng of audiences in Cinema halls and films were screened thrice a day and if there was no curfew imposed by the Army, films would be screened even on Sundays. The heyday of the cinemas lasted a good decade but the events that were unfolding in these halls caught the attention of the Church and civil societies, and it was soon scowled upon Church leaders and elders of the society. Lalmuanpuui (2017), also noted Western and Hindi songs and films were popular and their styles imitated by audiences, which can be deemed a cultural influence, and precisely what the "Mizo Cultural Society" fear would happen. But what led to the downfall of these cinemas, among many, were the screening of pornography and brazen consumption of liquor in a public place. Not long after, like other parts of the country, Television arrived in Mizoram in the 1990s', the small screen replaced the giant screens and has since become dominant.

Post media globalisation with the arrival of Star TV and cable television, Mizoram witnessed a growth of television viewership. Houses in Mizoram have proliferated with television content dubbed in Mizo local language and dubbing studios have played a major role in bringing Mizo version of Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean, Turkish and Japanese serials and movies. Close to 90 per cent of the content in Mizoram's local television channels are foreign films and serials dubbed by various dubbing studios in the capital city Aizawl (Agarwala, 2018; Rajshekhar, 2015). This

chapter attempts to narrate how dubbing studios acts as a form of Cultural Gatekeepers in Mizoram and also answers research question number three i.e. What are the nature and roles played by Mizo dubbing studios in the ‘localization’ of transnational television content and how they act as Cultural Gatekeepers?

4.2 Contextualizing Dubbing

In an increasingly globalized world, media content crosses borders with unprecedented ease, influencing audiences far beyond the origin of the content and one method of managing and controlling this influence is dubbing: replacing the original audio track of a media product with a new one in a different language. This practice has implications for cultural sovereignty and national identity, as it helps mitigate the influence of foreign media on domestic audiences.

Recent scholarship also highlights the growing sophistication of dubbing audiences, who are more discerning than ever before. As Kapsaskis (2020) notes, there is an increasing expectation for dubbed content to maintain authenticity, lip synchronisation, and emotional fidelity to the original. This shift pushes dubbing practitioners to balance linguistic accuracy with performative integrity, an especially significant factor in Mizoram, where audiences are becoming more critically engaged with transnational media content.

Dubbing is not simply the act of translating words and languages; it is the ‘rewriting’ of the accepted cultural norms of the target audience and it acts as a form of ‘Cultural Gatekeeping’ (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021). In this case or study, cultural norms and practices accepted by the Mizos. Dubbing may be understood as the process of replacing the audio from the original source with the spoken language of the target audience, it is considered to be the ‘most comprehensive’ mode of translation by experts and scholars due to the complexity involved (Gonzalez, 2009). Censorship and manipulation are used in dubbing to control what the audiences see and hear, and it is utilised to protect the target audience from culturally inappropriate content. Censorship is also regarded as a tool to preserve and the preference for the national language and “its unchallenged political, economic and cultural power within the nation’s boundaries” (Danan, 1991).

Chaume (2004) noted that that dubbed versions of media often include localized jokes, cultural references, and expressions that make the content more relatable to the audience and this not only aids in preserving cultural identity but also enhances the viewing experience by making the content feel more familiar and relevant. Dubbing, unlike subtitling, removes the opportunity for foreign audiences to grasp the cultural meaning of the films watched and eliminates the scope for cultural comparison and the possibility of cultural influences (Ruiz & Garcia, 2021). According to Pérez-González (2014), dubbing allows for greater control over the cultural context of media content by translating and adapting dialogues, cultural references, and idioms, dubbing helps to create a version of the media that aligns more closely with local values and norms. Canu (2014), argues that dubbing is an important tool to resist the influences of other cultures seen in films and an instrument to fight against cultural hegemony, she further states that dubbing offers an insight into different cultures and learn about their practices without being ‘Americanized’ and argues that the lack of dubbing in non-American films compared to American films signifies the ‘cultural supremacy’.

4.3 Evolution of Dubbing Studios in Mizoram

There were two turning points in the history of television in Mizoram. The first point was when Asian Games, 1982, which was relayed by DD, Aizawl from their first VLP Transmitter which was located at Tuikhuahtlang. This live telecast, albeit a success, was watched by a few individuals as TV sets were expensive and treated as a luxury item during this period. The second point was when Skylinks Cable networks started giving out satellite TV channels through cable networks in 1991. Before this, a few Mizos who owned television sets would watch Bangladeshi channels as there was no Mizo content to be watched. In the 1980s’, Mizos in Delhi would sing carol songs during Christmas which was then telecasted in Doordarshan, Aizawl and this remains the only time where Mizos could consume Mizo content (Agarwala, 2018).

Mizoram experienced a boom in television after 1990. On 5 September, 1991 ‘Skylink Cable Networks’ began its satellite-based television channels which was

soon followed by “local original transmission” content provided and operated by LPS Television production studio in 1992, Zozam followed their footsteps in 1994 by starting their own cable network. “Zonet cable network” was also started after the dawn of the millennium in the year 2004 (Laldinfeli & Ratnamala, 2016; Muansangkimi, 2015). By the turn of the century, there were several local cable operators in numerous districts and villages, but they were all dependent on content to “Head-ends Cable Operators” in Aizawl (Laldinfeli & Ratnamala, 2016; Muansangkimi, 2015). The cable operators in Mizoram have eight to ten local channels, but the problem lies in the programmes that could fill up the hours. In 2003, LPS Studio became the first studio to dubbed “Kasautii Zindagii Kay” and was a viral hit in the State and although it was later banned it became the guiding light for cable owners in finding new ways to source programmes. Due to technical and financial constraints dubbing has been the go-to content source for these cable producers in Mizoram. Vanneihluanga, who was the former head of programming at Zonet, confessed it was an expensive trade to make Mizo films. At the same time, as the audiences had formed a taste in accordance to the movies and shows shown in Hollywood and BBC it is easier for them to dub films and serials than to produce it themselves (Rajshekhar, 2015). Highlighting the importance of the first serial or film dubbed in Mizo, Agarwala (2018) writes, “In Kasautii lies the genesis of the dubbed television industry in Mizoram.”

Dubbing, prior to Kasautii, was foreign to the Mizo audiences, but since the first episode of the Hindi serial was screened, it has become a mainstay in Mizoram television scene. Since then- Korean, Thai, Japanese, Turkish, Hindi serials and Hollywood, Bollywood films have all been ‘localized’ to speak the local language. The two biggest cable operators in Mizoram i.e., Zonet and LPS are heavily dependent on dubbing studios to fill channels with dubbed Mizo films and serials. At present, both LPS and Zonet have more than 10 local cable channels and both of them have slotted or arranged five local channels each for dubbed Mizo contents.

4.4 Dubbing as a tool for Cultural and Religious Preservation in Countries around the World

Across the world, countries have employed dubbing as a strategic tool to mediate the cultural impact of transnational media and in Muslim-majority countries like Iran and Egypt, dubbing functions as a mechanism of religious preservation. According to Naficy (2001), Iranian television heavily regulates dubbed content, ensuring that foreign media aligns with Islamic values, and this often involves editing scenes, altering narratives, and choosing voice actors whose tonal delivery aligns with cultural expectations. Religious authorities frequently oversee dubbing guidelines, reinforcing moral codes through audio-visual storytelling. Dubbing, in such contexts, becomes a tool of ideological reinforcement as much as a linguistic one. Similarly, in Egypt, the translation of religious and cultural messages is often central to the dubbing process, with Islamic ethics guiding the selection and adaptation of content for television audiences (El-Aswad, 2013).

Latin America countries also provide another illuminating example. In countries like Mexico and Argentina, the dubbing industry has flourished not only as a commercial enterprise but also as a cultural institution but the focus here is less on religious preservation and more on national identity, dubbing still plays a role in protecting cultural sensibilities. As Díaz-Cintas (2005) notes, Latin American dubbing often adapts idioms, humour, and social norms to reflect local culture, avoiding content that might alienate viewers due to foreign customs or controversial moral themes. In this way, dubbing serves as a buffer between global content and local reception. Additionally, the tone and emotional register of dubbed voice actors are adapted to reflect cultural preferences, making foreign characters more relatable and preserving the region's narrative traditions (Ramière, 2006).

In East Asia, particularly in Japan and South Korea, dubbing has traditionally been less prevalent than subtitling, yet it plays a meaningful cultural role where applied. In South Korea, for instance, dubbed religious animations and historical epics are often tailored to promote Confucian values, national pride, and familial hierarchy (Lee, 2012). Even when foreign content is dubbed, it rarely violates collective moral codes,

ensuring that the dubbed version conforms to local expectations around propriety, social harmony, and intergenerational respect. In Japan, where anime is a globally consumed cultural product, outbound dubbing often carries subtle changes that reflect Japanese values of perseverance, discipline, and group cohesion, even as the material is localised for non-Japanese audiences (Iwabuchi, 2002).

The role of dubbing in cultural preservation becomes particularly evident in societies with strong civil institutions or religious oversight as many African nations, where postcolonial identity politics intersect with global media flows, dubbing has become a way to reassert linguistic and cultural sovereignty. In Nigeria, for instance, dubbed content into Hausa or Yoruba often undergoes significant transformation to reflect indigenous values and moral teachings, acting as both a form of resistance and adaptation (Adejunmobi, 2019). These localised versions do more than translate; they affirm identity and validate local worldviews. In the western African countries of Kenya and Tanzania, Swahili-dubbed content is filtered through frameworks of Christian ethics and community morality, shaping the ways foreign stories are received by predominantly religious audiences (Mugambi, 2018).

Elsewhere, in predominantly Catholic nations like the Philippines, religious overtones play a significant role in the dubbing process as media content is often adapted to ensure it does not conflict with Christian values, and elements perceived as culturally inappropriate, such as explicit language, sexuality, or occult themes are either modified or entirely omitted. Dubbing thus acts as both a protective barrier and an editorial tool that aligns global narratives with local spiritual norms. This has become especially relevant in the case of content streamed through global platforms like Netflix or Amazon Prime, which often require regional adaptation teams to align with national regulatory standards (Gonzalez, 2020).

The Arab Gulf states also offer pertinent examples of how religious and cultural preservation are embedded in dubbing practices. In countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait dubbed animation and children's content are manipulated to conform to Islamic teachings and social norms. In many cases, themes such as

gender mixing, dating, or supernatural elements are removed or softened to suit the moral expectations of conservative societies (Al-Hejin, 2012).

The implications for cultural and religious preservation are profound as dubbing is not just a reactive process; it is a proactive form of cultural authorship. By controlling the language, tone, and even content of transnational media, local dubbing institutions reinforce a sense of continuity in rapidly changing media environments. This is particularly vital in culturally conservative or religiously devout societies, where unfiltered foreign media could otherwise challenge deeply held beliefs or social norms and dubbing enables local cultures to retain interpretive control, turning the act of translation into a site of cultural negotiation and identity affirmation.

However, dubbing is not without its critics as some argue that excessive localisation can lead to cultural insularity or the distortion of original narratives. While this critique holds merit, it underestimates the agency of local cultures to interpret and appropriate media in ways that are meaningful to them. As Baker (2018) asserts, translation is always an act of negotiation and dubbing stands as one of the most influential mediums through which this negotiation occurs in contemporary media landscapes. When guided by cultural sensitivity and ethical awareness, dubbing becomes a means of cultural preservation, rather than dilution or distortion.

Furthermore, dubbing serves not only as a linguistic bridge but also as a cultural and religious filter because it allows communities to engage with global media without eroding their core values. Whether in the streets of Tehran, the cities of Mexico, the towns of Lagos, or the media rooms of Manila, dubbing has emerged as a vital tool in the cultural toolkit of localisation. It exemplifies how translation, when executed with cultural consciousness, becomes a form of preservation rather than loss. Through dubbing, the global becomes not an imposition but an encounter, where contents are mediated, softened, interpreted, and reshaped by the moral and cultural fabric of each society.

4.5 Themes and Discussions

The analysis in this chapter is grounded in thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with six dubbing studio owners in Aizawl. As detailed in the introduction chapter, themes were identified through an inductive coding process to capture recurring patterns related to the localisation of transnational television content in Mizoram. Following the analysis of the transcribed data, four key themes emerged, illustrating how Mizo dubbing studio owners glocalise or indigenise transnational television content into dubbed Mizo versions, thereby acting as cultural gatekeepers.

4.5.1 Cultural Censorship and Linguistic Manipulation

In a culturally distinct state like Mizoram, dubbing studios play a crucial role in adapting transnational television content for local consumption and their responsibilities go beyond linguistic translation, they are the gatekeepers of cultural values, selectively modifying foreign films and serials to align with Mizo social norms and values. This form of cultural censorship and linguistic manipulation is neither accidental nor secondary; it is a strategic, intentional process aimed at safeguarding the community's cultural sensibilities.

Transnational television content often contains portrayals of cultural behaviours, language, fashion, and social dynamics that do not seamlessly resonate with the moral and cultural expectations of Mizo society. As Mizoram continues to consume a growing volume of transnational television content, dubbing studios have responded with strategies to “cleanse” or modify content to preserve cultural familiarity and avoid discomfort among local audiences. One dubbing studio owner (2) explained:

“As far as possible, we try to cut scenes that portray foreign cultural practices that are not in line with our societal values and norms. But there are instances where we cannot do so, as that would destroy the story or plot of the movie or serial. Since our shows are watched by everyone- from young children to older generations- we try to make our dubbed films and serials as clean and family-friendly as possible. Sometimes, words are manipulated into safer alternatives to protect our audiences.

For example, words like ‘Son of a Bitch,’ ‘Motherfucker,’ and ‘Fuck You,’ along with other derogatory terms, are translated into more sensible and acceptable Mizo language.”

This statement makes clear that cultural adaptation is rooted in both moral sensibility and audience consideration. In Mizoram, television is often a shared family activity. The wide age range of viewers, spanning children, parents, and grandparents, necessitates the careful modulation of tone, language, and behaviour within dubbed content.

The censorship practices adopted by dubbing studios reflect a wider global trend where audio-visual translators engage in “soft censorship” a subtler, less institutional form of control over content based on perceived cultural appropriateness (Ranzato & Zanotti, 2019). The manipulation of expletives and sexualised language, for instance, is common across conservative or family-oriented broadcasting spaces. In the Mizo context, dubbing becomes a protective shield, a cultural filter that not only translates foreign content but sanitises it for community consumption. Another dubbing studio owner (4) elaborated:

“Of course, there are a few scenes which are left in, depending on the films and serials, but in these rare cases, we only telecast those films after 11 p.m.”

This comment reveals that censorship also extends into scheduling decisions. Scenes or films deemed culturally risky or morally questionable may be retained, but their viewing is restricted to late-night time slots when children are less likely to be watching. This aligns with global practices where content unsuitable for younger viewers is shifted to post-watershed time slots to minimise public backlash or moral panic (Mills, 2009). In addition to modifying language and visuals, dubbing studio owners also underscore the importance of language itself as a cultural vehicle. As studio owner (1) observed:

“Languages around the world change or evolve with time, and the same is true for Mizo. However, there are basic rules to follow when writing or speaking certain words. Since the Mizo language is tonal, pronunciation means everything. Because

of this, our employees are carefully selected and trained, we want them to help promote and preserve our language. Our dubbed films and serials are watched by the Mizo diaspora worldwide, and many use them to learn or re-learn the language. So, it's imperative that we use proper Mizo.”

This insight captures the deep-rooted relationship between language and cultural preservation. Linguistic choices in dubbing are not merely stylistic but foundational to maintaining cultural continuity. This form of cultural framing is what Venuti (1995) describes as the invisible hand of the translator shaping the ideological reception of foreign texts. Through the strategic use of idiomatic Mizo expressions, local metaphors, and culturally grounded intonations, dubbing studios ensure that the content resonates with local values.

The strategic editing of content, both visual and verbal, underscores the agency of dubbing studios as cultural curators. Their decisions are not random; they are based on implicit cultural codes and shared expectations among Mizo audiences. In this way, dubbing studios act similarly to traditional cultural institutions by protecting communal values and reinforcing behavioural norms.

The linguistic manipulation mentioned by the studio owner, particularly the translation of expletives, is also significant. Expletives carry a strong emotive and cultural charge. According to Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), the translation of taboo language in audio-visual content requires delicate judgement because a direct translation may offend, confuse, or alienate local audiences. In many cases, dubbing professionals employ what scholars call “euphemistic equivalence” translating harsh or vulgar language into less offensive, more contextually appropriate terms. In Mizoram, this strategy is essential, especially considering the conservative nature of public discourse and the centrality of community values in shaping entertainment norms.

As O’Sullivan (2011) notes in his work on cultural adaptation and translation, localisation efforts often depend more on translators' intuition and immersion in the target culture than on technical fidelity to the original. In this context, Mizo dubbing studios function as intuitively responsive agents. They understand, often implicitly,

what is too much, what is risky, and what will be rejected. Scenes that challenge Mizo gender norms, social decorum, or everyday speech are either removed, softened, or repositioned. The original content is thus transformed, not only linguistically but culturally, into a text that aligns with local expectations.

Additionally, cultural censorship and linguistic manipulation in Mizo dubbing studios serve not only a protective function but a transformative one. They enable the safe reception of global media while maintaining the boundaries of local cultural identity. By cutting scenes, sanitising dialogue, and adapting scheduling, these studios are not just responding to audience expectations, they are actively shaping them. As cultural intermediaries, they filter global content through a distinctly Mizo lens, creating a media experience that is at once transnational and deeply local.

4.5.2 The Rewriting of Religion: Language as a Cultural Filter

In a region where religion forms the bedrock of both individual and community identity, the work of dubbing studios in Mizoram goes far beyond linguistic translation or cultural adaptation. It involves navigating a highly sensitive religious landscape where Christianity is not only the majority religion but also a powerful influence on media content regulation and public perception. According to the 2011 Census, over 87 per cent of Mizoram's population identifies as Christian, and this demographic fact plays a central role in shaping how foreign media is received, filtered, and ultimately localised.

Dubbing studios in Mizoram operate under an unspoken but deeply internalised understanding: any content that portrays religious practices or iconography from non-Christian traditions, especially Hinduism and Islam, must be scrutinised, modified, or removed. This careful gatekeeping is not state-mandated but socially and culturally enforced, primarily by dominant religious institutions and civil society actors. One dubbing studio (4) owner reflected candidly on this practice:

“Religion is a sensitive topic in our state and around 85 per cent or more of Mizoram's population follows Christianity. In the initial years of dubbing, one of the reasons why *Kasautii* was banned was because of their excessive portrayal of Hindu

religious practices and wedding processions that does not sit well with the Church leaders in Mizoram. We try to cut as much scene as possible where religious proceedings of other religions other than Christianity is displayed. But there are times where that cannot be followed. In those cases, we translate ‘Allah’ and other religious gods into Christian God.”

This quote is emblematic of a larger pattern in which dubbing studios consciously take on the role of protectors of the Christian moral order. The decision to substitute non-Christian deities with references to the Christian God reflects a calculated linguistic manipulation that aims to neutralise religious diversity in favour of preserving spiritual homogeneity. It also demonstrates what Bassnett (2002) describes as “translation as rewriting” an act not of linguistic equivalence but of ideological realignment. The cultural tension is intensified by the historical memory of specific media controversies. The banning of the Hindi serial *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* in the early 2000s serves as a cautionary tale. While the show gained popularity among Mizo viewers, its repeated depictions of Hindu marriage rituals and temple scenes triggered backlash from church groups and student organisations, ultimately leading to its removal. This incident has had a lasting effect on how dubbing studios approach religious content today, prioritising caution, strategic omission, and subtle substitution. Another dubbing studio owner (6) articulated this cultural responsibility even more directly:

“I think it is our duty as Christians to safeguard our religious practices from other religions and we will continue to practise this in years to come. As films are a by-product of the culture and religion of the producing countries, it is their duty and aim to try and popularise their culture and religion. It is, in turn, our duty as dubbing studio owners to eliminate these threats which in the long run, if unchecked, can and will lead to cultural and religious disorder.”

These practices can be productively interpreted through the lens of Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model (1980). According to Hall, media texts are not fixed in meaning; rather, they are subject to varying readings i.e., dominant, negotiated, or oppositional, depending on the position and cultural framework of the audience. In

the case of Mizoram, dubbing studios engage in what can be considered negotiated or oppositional readings of transnational content. While the original encoding by media producers may carry religious or ideological assumptions foreign to Mizo Christian values, local dubbing artists selectively reject, reframe, or substitute these elements to align with their community's dominant worldview. The replacement of non-Christian religious symbols with Christian terminology is not simply a linguistic shift, it represents a deliberate reinterpretation of meaning that asserts the ideological primacy of local faith and moral codes. This reframing transforms foreign content from a passive import into an active site of cultural resistance and reinterpretation.

This sense of religious vigilance positions dubbing studios as moral agents, upholding the values of the community and resisting what is perceived as religious infiltration. The reference to “cultural and religious disorder” is indicative of a broader fear of dilution, a fear that the continued exposure to non-Christian rituals and symbols through entertainment media could destabilise religious identity and social cohesion.

This practice finds parallels in other deeply religious societies where dubbing and subtitling are subjected to cultural and religious scrutiny. Al-Hejin (2012), studying Saudi Arabian media, highlights how translators alter or omit religious references deemed inappropriate for Islamic audiences. Similarly, González (2020) points out that in the Philippines, Catholic sensibilities influence the editing of foreign content to ensure alignment with religious norms. In translation studies, this act of filtering religious content can be understood through the lens of “cultural substitution,” as defined by Newmark (1988). When a concept or term has no culturally acceptable equivalent, or might cause offence, translators often replace it with something more familiar or ideologically safe. In Mizoram, this results in the Christianisation of foreign religious terminology, a practice that, while effective in reducing conflict, raises important questions about representation and cultural erasure.

Baker (2018) suggests that such practices are not merely technical choices but “discursive constructions,” shaping how audiences understand the world. By consistently replacing religious references from Islam and Hinduism with Christian

equivalents, dubbing studios contribute to an epistemic framework in which Christianity is normalised as the default and other religions are either rendered invisible or reinterpreted through a Christian lens.

The relationship between religion and media censorship in Mizoram is also a reminder of what Naficy (2001) describes as “accented cinema” a form of media shaped not by its origin but by the political, cultural, and religious contexts in which it is consumed. In Mizoram’s case, the “accent” is overtly Christian, and all dubbed content is filtered through this dominant worldview.

This raises critical questions for translation ethics, Tymoczko (2007) warns that translation should not merely serve ideological conformity, especially when it suppresses the plurality of voices and experiences. Yet, in deeply religious communities, such normative pressures are difficult to resist, particularly when media professionals are themselves embedded within the religious culture they are responding to.

Despite these challenges, dubbing studios in Mizoram exhibit a high degree of intentionality in their choices and their actions are not arbitrary but shaped by an acute awareness of audience expectations, institutional surveillance, and cultural memory. As Venuti (1995) asserts, translation is an act of identity formation. In this case, it is both a protective shield and a selective lens, allowing foreign media to enter while stripping away elements deemed alien or threatening to religious identity.

Furthermore, the role of dubbing studios in Mizoram is inseparable from the region’s religious fabric. They do not merely translate; they interpret, filter, and moralise, ensuring that what enters the public sphere reinforces rather than disrupts the community’s spiritual coherence. Through strategic omissions, linguistic substitutions, and ideological framing, these studios act as cultural and religious gatekeepers, transforming transnational content into something that aligns with local values and beliefs.

4.5.3 Diminishing Institutional Control

For decades, Mizoram's civil society organisations and Churches functioned as powerful moral gatekeepers, playing a critical role in shaping public values and media consumption. Institutions like the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA), the largest civil society organisation in the state with a membership that accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the population, actively worked to preserve and promote Mizo culture and identity (Saikia, 2018). Described by Ratnamala and Malsawmzuala (2021) as "moral watchdogs," such bodies were instrumental in maintaining communal values, especially during the early years of television in the state.

The Church, particularly the Presbyterian denomination, has been equally influential in guiding not only religious practice but also social and political life. It has often extended its moral authority into electoral affairs and community regulation, notably through its collaboration with civil society groups in forming the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF) to oversee fair elections (Parashar, 2018; Vanlalthabera et al., 2020). As Mihai (2020, as cited in Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021) explains, these institutions intervene in both the official and intimate spheres of Mizo life, acting as stewards of traditional values and as a buffer against perceived cultural erosion.

In the early years of television in Mizoram, this moral authority extended directly into content regulation. Dubbed serials and films, particularly those depicting religious or cultural practices perceived as foreign or inappropriate were subject to public scrutiny and even censorship. A striking example is the banning of the Hindi serial *Kasautii Zindagii Kay*, which provoked backlash from Church leaders and civil society due to its portrayal of Hindu religious rituals and cultural practices. Critics, majority of them Church leaders and civil society leaders, feared that the series, popular among Mizo women, was contributing to a decline in Church attendance and weakening Christian observance (Agarwala, 2018; Kuotsu, 2013). In a region where Christianity is deeply tied to the Mizo national identity, such content was seen as threatening not only religious beliefs but also cultural cohesion.

During this time, control over dubbed media was easier to maintain, as distribution was limited to local channels and DVDs. As dubbing studio owner (3) explained:

“During the initial years of dubbing, there were no smartphones. YouTube and streaming platforms were foreign to us. The main driver of foreign cultural and religious practices was dubbing studios or dubbed films. It was easier back then to control what the public was viewing. With the introduction of the internet, it became impossible for the civil societies or the Church to control or guide what one wants to see, and it becomes harder to exert their power or guidance to the Mizo community to maintain our traditional values and practices.”

This reflection illustrates a pivotal transition in Mizoram’s media landscape. The introduction of internet access, smartphones, and global streaming services fragmented the once-centralised control of cultural narratives. While civil society and the Church continue to hold sway over traditional broadcast and print media, their ability to monitor or influence online content consumption has significantly diminished. In response to the backlash against earlier content like *Kasautii Zindagii Kay*, dubbing studios began to adapt. From around 2004 onward, Korean serials became highly popular in Mizoram, seen as more socially acceptable due to their modest portrayals of romance and conflict compared to Bollywood or Hollywood productions. More importantly, local dubbing studios began intentionally reshaping narratives to suit Mizo cultural and religious sensibilities. A dubbing owner (5) illustrated:

“Our serials and films undergo thorough checking to ensure that it is family and children friendly. Certain cultural practices and traits shown in these contents, but which are deemed taboo are either cut or edited to fit Mizo sociocultural and religious context. One example is a film called PK. In the latter part of the film where the protagonist decided to raise questions and challenge gods of various religions including Christianity, I decided to edit that part as a bit like a Church sermon and erased the part which might question our God and religious belief, as I deem that scene as a potential threat to younger audiences.”

Such interventions reflect a shift in the role of dubbing artists and studios from mere translators to cultural gatekeepers. Unlike earlier media, which provoked resistance due to its perceived incompatibility with Mizo values, these edited versions of

foreign content were more easily accepted by audiences and institutional leaders alike. Nevertheless, the scale and scope of media available through the internet which are uncensored, unedited, and unfiltered has made it increasingly difficult for civil institutions to assert the same level of control they once did. As global content flows into even the most remote areas, traditional cultural safeguards are being tested. Civil society and Church leaders now find themselves reacting to trends rather than shaping them.

Ratnamala and Malsawmzuala (2021) aptly summarise this tension: “The media and Mizoram civil society are, as a matter of fact, intertwined, and Mizo civil society regulates and legitimises media coverage....” While this still holds true for legacy media, the rise of internet-based content has introduced a new cultural dynamic- one that resists easy regulation.

What emerges is not a story of collapse, but of transformation. Civil institutions, once the sole arbiters of cultural acceptability, now share that space with dubbing studios, audience preferences, and digital platforms. While institutional influence may have waned in the digital domain, it continues to assert itself in other areas- often shaping how foreign media is adapted, localised, and interpreted. But the days of absolute gatekeeping are over. Instead, Mizoram now finds itself negotiating identity, morality, and culture within an increasingly decentralised and interconnected media world.

4.5.4 Piracy, Ethics, and the Politics of Sourcing

One of the most compelling revelations in this study is the pragmatic approach taken by dubbing studios in Mizoram toward sourcing content for localisation. The issue of piracy emerges not only as a technical or legal concern but also as a deeply embedded ethical and economic negotiation shaped by regional limitations, global media hierarchies, and local cultural responsibilities. This tension is revealed in the candid admission by dubbing studio (1) owner:

“The whole population of our state is around 10 lakhs, there are more beggars in the metropolitan cities than us. Even if our dubbed movies are watched by the whole

population of Mizoram, it still would not amount to anything. Besides, less than one third of the people watch our shows. So, it seems it does not bother the producers of Bollywood or foreign serial producers as I have not faced any problems in regard to piracy and copyrights. I am not saying this is the best practise, but right now it seems to be the most feasible way for us.”

This statement reveals a multidimensional justification. On one level, it illustrates how the relatively small economic scale of Mizo viewership means that piracy is seen as inconsequential by major content owners. On another level, it points to an ethical rationalisation of piracy as a means of cultural survival and relevance in the face of limited access and economic precarity.

Adding further nuance, another dubbing studio owner reported that after establishing contact with the producers of a well-known Hindi serial, instead of receiving threats or legal notices, they were actually encouraged to continue their practice. The Hindi serial producers, well aware of the low market size in Mizoram, recognised that pirated dubbing was inadvertently increasing the show’s popularity and reach. They expressed that even though the content was being sourced through informal channels, the expanded audience was beneficial and contributed positively to the brand’s image in the region. This cooperative stance from established producers underscores a pragmatic acceptance of piracy in contexts where global media conglomerates see little risk and even potential advantage in the informal circulation of their content.

In other global contexts, similar rationales have been documented. Lobato (2012) discusses the concept of "informal media economies" in the Global South, where unauthorised access to media is often not viewed as theft but as a form of democratised access. In places like Nigeria and Indonesia, local producers frequently adapt pirated films and series into new formats, creating content hybrids that both localise and appropriate global narratives for community-specific consumption. These practices are rarely prosecuted and are often tolerated because they fulfil cultural needs that formal media economies fail to address.

The situation in Mizoram fits into this broader narrative of peripheral media systems operating largely outside the direct gaze of global intellectual property enforcement.

What distinguishes the Mizo case is the added layer of cultural gatekeeping. Even while sourcing pirated content, dubbing studios here commit themselves to editing and translating foreign shows in accordance with local cultural and religious values. This dual role, a combination of piracy and cultural preservation places them in a morally complex position: they are, on one hand, infringing on international copyrights, yet on the other, acting as custodians of Mizo cultural integrity

This paradox echoes what Liang (2010) describes as the “moral ambiguity of piracy” in low-income or marginalised regions. In his research on media circulation in China, he finds that local media distributors often occupy a dual role by disseminating content illegally while simultaneously adapting it to suit local audiences. The act of piracy, therefore, is not merely exploitative; it is generative as it creates access and cultural resonance where there was previously a void.

Furthermore, the political dimensions of content sourcing come into sharper focus when considering the infrastructural and geopolitical realities in Mizoram. Bordered by Myanmar to the east, Mizoram benefits from informal cross-border trade routes that facilitate the easy and cheap inflow of pirated media. DVDs of Korean dramas, Thai films, Chinese action series, and Hollywood blockbusters are widely available on the streets of Aizawl and other district towns, often sold at very low prices. These physical copies, though illegal, are often of high visual quality and serve as the initial media source for many dubbing studios. In a region largely disconnected from the commercial flows of officially licensed media, such material forms a *de facto* content pipeline.

In addition to physical formats, the expansion of internet access in Mizoram has opened further pathways for procuring pirated content. With increased connectivity, studio owners and local enthusiasts alike have turned to torrent websites, streaming platforms, and file-sharing communities to download foreign series and films and these digital networks have made accessing international content much faster, broader, and cheaper, further entrenching piracy as a practical and convenient means of sourcing. Dubbing studios often acquire raw content online and then localise it

through careful dubbing, reinforcing their dual role as both informal distributors and cultural mediators.

As Karaganis (2011) notes in his cross-country study on piracy, the scarcity of legitimate distribution platforms often fuels alternative networks of circulation. These networks include everything from torrents and file-sharing websites to physical DVDs purchased in neighbouring countries. In Mizoram, such informal networks serve not only as channels of distribution but also as sites of cultural encounter and transformation. The normalisation of pirated DVDs as part of everyday media consumption highlights the significant disconnect between formal legal frameworks and the lived realities of audiences.

In this sense, piracy becomes an infrastructural workaround, a method to bypass systemic exclusions. The question then shifts from one of legality to one of legitimacy: Who has the right to access global media, and on what terms? For dubbing studios in Mizoram, the answer lies in the community-centric purpose their work serves. By dubbing foreign content into the Mizo language, they provide not only entertainment but also a cultural buffer that filters foreign ideologies through a local lens. This, in turn, amplifies their legitimacy in the eyes of the community, even though it may undermine their legality on paper. There is also an important socio-economic dimension. As noted, Mizoram is not a metropolitan hub. The socio-economic context in this region differs drastically from that in cities such as Mumbai or Delhi. Sundaram (2009) argues that mainstream copyright discourse often fails to account for the realities of smaller, culturally distinct regions, where piracy is less considered a crime and more seen as a legitimate mode of participation in global culture.

Thus, dubbing studios in Mizoram do not perceive piracy as an act of defiance; rather, it is regarded as a necessary compromise. They source foreign content from both physical networks, such as cheap DVDs sold on the streets, and digital platforms, enabled by the expanded access provided by the internet. They do so with an acute awareness of their responsibility to adapt the content ethically and culturally, thereby exposing the limitations of mainstream media governance and

demonstrating an alternative model where access, ethics, and identity coexist in complex, negotiated ways.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the evolving role of dubbing studios in Mizoram as cultural intermediaries- institutions that do far more than translate language. They are gatekeepers of meaning, tradition, and moral order, standing at the intersection of global media flows and local cultural sensibilities. In an age where transnational content circulates with unprecedented ease, these studios act as filters, selectively modifying, sanitising, and adapting content to align with deeply held communal values, linguistic norms, and religious ideologies.

What emerges from this analysis is a media ecology defined not by passive reception but by active transformation. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, dubbing studios in Mizoram are not merely decoding dominant global messages for local consumption, they are re-encoding them through a distinctly Mizo lens. This process often involves cultural substitution, soft censorship, and euphemistic language transformation, echoing Venuti's (1995) notion of "invisible" translation where the translator (or dubbing artist) shapes reception through unspoken ideological framing.

The empirical accounts from dubbing studio owners point to a robust editorial intuition: what O'Sullivan (2011) terms the "translator's gut" which functions as both a cultural compass and a social safeguard. Their decisions are rarely arbitrary; rather, they respond to the layered expectations of a conservative, Christian-majority audience that continues to view media as a shared moral and linguistic space. In doing so, these studios uphold the unspoken cultural codes of Mizo society, demonstrating remarkable agency in resisting what Canu (2014) and Chalaby (2005) would call cultural homogenisation or deterritorialised media flows.

However, this model is not without tensions and the chapter revealed that dubbing studios often navigate moral ambiguity and legal grey zones, especially in the informal sourcing of foreign content. Piracy, rather than being solely an act of

defiance or illegality, is reframed here as an infrastructural necessity and cultural workaround, one that reflects the asymmetrical access to content experienced by smaller media regions like Mizoram. This places studios in a complex ethical position: they may transgress international copyright regimes, yet their cultural legitimacy is rooted in their service to community values and linguistic continuity.

Religion emerges as a powerful structuring force and the Christianisation of religious references in dubbed content reflects both a form of ideological sanitisation and an effort to maintain spiritual coherence in a region where Christianity is deeply entwined with ethnic identity. This selective erasure or reinterpretation of other faiths raises critical questions about translation ethics, cultural representation, and the limits of pluralism within localised media.

As the chapter has shown, dubbing studios today function within a fractured institutional environment. The decline in control once wielded by the Church and civil society organisations, due in large part to the advent of internet access and streaming services has positioned dubbing studios as the new cultural sentinels. Yet, this decentralisation also presents challenges. Studio owners are increasingly aware that their traditional practices must evolve to meet the expectations of younger, digitally native viewers whose values may not fully align with older cultural scripts.

Ultimately, dubbing studios in Mizoram illustrate how local media agents can reclaim agency within transnational flows as they do not merely import content, rather they reconstitute it. They translate not just language, but worldview and they do so with an instinctive awareness of what resonates, what offends, and what endures. In this way, they perform a subtle yet powerful form of cultural authorship—negotiating identity, religion, and modernity in every dubbed line.

This analysis of Mizoram's dubbing ecosystem reveals not only how global content is domesticated but also how localisation itself becomes an act of preservation, resistance, and adaptation. As cultural pressures continue to shift and media consumption becomes increasingly personalised and decentralised, the future of dubbing studios will depend on their ability to retain cultural authenticity while responding to the changing rhythms of a globalised media landscape. The challenge

ahead is not just technical or legal, it is existential: how to remain faithful to a community's moral and linguistic fabric while navigating the porous borders of transnational imagination.

Chapter V

Mediated Fascinations: Cultural Curiosity, Religious Boundaries, and the Appeal of Dubbed Transnational Television in Mizoram

5.1 Introduction

What happens when Hollywood meets Aizawl, or when Korean stars speak fluent Mizo? In today's globalised media environment, international audio-visual content reaches even the most remote cultural spaces, reshaping local viewing habits and social dynamics. One of the most prominent tools facilitating this cultural exchange is dubbing- the replacement of the original audio track of a media product with one in another language. Beyond merely translating dialogue, dubbing functions as a complex form of cultural mediation as it not only facilitates access to global content but also transforms it in ways that align with the cultural, moral, and linguistic expectations of local audiences (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021).

Dubbing is widely regarded as the most comprehensive form of audio-visual translation, involving more than just linguistic conversion. It requires attention to emotional tone, cultural relevance, voice casting, and narrative coherence (Gonzalez, 2009). In many contexts, including India, dubbing is used as a form of subtle censorship and content regulation to shield audiences from culturally inappropriate material and to preserve dominant national languages and values (Danan, 1991). This cultural gatekeeping function is particularly significant in regions such as Mizoram, where strong efforts have historically been made to maintain cultural identity and resist external influences.

Mizoram provides a compelling case study of this dynamic. The Mizo Cultural Society, founded in 1958, sought to preserve indigenous customs and values at a time when Hindi and Western media were becoming increasingly accessible (Zarzosanga, 2021). In the 1970s and 1980s, cinema halls flourished in the state despite political unrest. Yet concerns soon arose regarding the moral implications of such entertainment and incidents involving the public screening of explicit content and visible alcohol consumption led to widespread condemnation from Church leaders

and civil society, eventually contributing to the decline of local cinema culture (Lalmuanpuii, 2017).

The arrival of transnational television in the 1990s, followed by media liberalisation and the expansion of cable networks such as Star TV, marked a major shift in Mizoram's media landscape along with other states in India. Foreign television content- especially Korean and Hollywood productions became increasingly available, dubbed into the Mizo language by local studios. These dubbed programmes gained immense popularity, particularly among women younger audiences. Today, nearly 90 per cent of content broadcast on Mizo-language television channels comprises dubbed films and serials (Agarwala, 2018; Rajshekhar, 2015).

Given this trajectory, a critical question arises: why are Mizo audiences drawn to dubbed transnational television content, and how does this influence their perception of different cultures and religions? This chapter explores this question by examining the appeal of dubbed media among Mizo viewers. It investigates the role of language familiarity, cultural proximity, star power, and narrative structure in shaping audience preferences. In doing so, it aims to decode the complex relationship between global media content and localised viewing practices in Mizoram.

5.2 Dubbing as Cultural and Emotional Mediation in Mizoram

In the age of global media consumption, dubbing has evolved beyond a simple translation mechanism to become a powerful form of cultural and emotional mediation. It not only facilitates linguistic accessibility but also actively reshapes the reception, interpretation, and cultural significance of media across different regions. This phenomenon is particularly significant in Mizoram, where dubbed films and serials have gained widespread popularity, creating a distinctive pattern of media consumption that reflects both language familiarity and cultural negotiation. Mizoram, a north-eastern state of India, has witnessed a growing appetite for dubbed international content, particularly from Korean, Thai, Turkish, Bollywood, and Hollywood productions. The preference for dubbed films and television serials in the Mizo language is driven by several interrelated factors, including language

accessibility, cultural affinity, and emotional engagement. As a state with a strong linguistic identity, where Mizo is the dominant language, dubbing serves as a bridge that enables audiences to engage with foreign narratives in a manner that feels intimate and locally grounded. Unlike subtitling, which requires continuous reading and visual multitasking, dubbing allows seamless immersion into the narrative world, enhancing the emotional and cognitive experience of viewing. While countries such as France and Germany have long embraced dubbing as a preferred mode of localisation (Vervent & Luyten, 2016), Mizoram presents a unique case in how dubbing not only serves practical needs but also meets deeper emotional and cultural expectations. The effectiveness of dubbing lies in its ability to integrate linguistic and cultural elements into foreign content, making it emotionally resonant and socially acceptable. Chaume (2018) argues that dubbing achieves narrative immersion by adapting not only words but tone, rhythm, and cultural nuances. In Mizoram, this process is evident in the localisation of Korean dramas and Hollywood films, where dialogue is modified to reflect Mizo idioms, speech patterns, and moral codes. These adaptations enable foreign narratives to be internalised more fully by the audience, encouraging emotional investment and reinforcing cultural comfort. A particularly revealing case was the dubbing of the Hindi serial *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* into Mizo during 2006–2007. The serial was immensely popular among viewers, especially young women, who reportedly adopted fashion trends from the characters- such as kurtas and Kolhapuri chappals and this clearly suggests not just consumption but emotional identification. However, the serial also triggered a cultural backlash as NGOs, Church leaders, and sections of the public viewed it as a threat to Mizo tradition and a sign of cultural degradation. Criticism surfaced in local newspapers and public feedback programmes, leading to a collective decision by local channels to withdraw the serial. The Director of Zonet remarked, “The basic Mizo fabric is still there,” indicating that the decision was seen as a restoration of cultural integrity. This case demonstrates how dubbing, while facilitating access, can also provoke cultural tension, necessitating a mediation process that goes beyond translation (Muansangkimi, 2015).

In contrast, Korean dramas have been embraced enthusiastically, with many dubbed into Mizo and dominating local television slots and this preference reflects what Straubhaar (2007) calls “cultural proximity”- audiences are more drawn to content that resonates with their own cultural values, narratives, and aesthetics. A local media editor observed that Mizos may feel a stronger connection with South-East Asian cultures than with mainland Indian culture, possibly due to shared physical features and lifestyle sensibilities. Such affinity allows for greater emotional absorption of dubbed Korean content, underscoring dubbing’s role in bridging identity gaps and enabling affective resonance (Muansangkimi, 2015; Kuotsu, 2013). However, this rise has not gone unchallenged Halliday (2013) noted it has prompted a conscious movement towards cultural preservation and documents the efforts of the Mizoram Film Development Society (MFDS) and the state government to promote indigenous storytelling through training camps and competitions based on Mizo folk tales. These initiatives reflect a strategic attempt to reaffirm cultural identity amidst fears of erosion by foreign media influences. Halliday’s observations reveal that cultural resistance in Mizoram is not reactionary isolationism but a proactive, creative engagement with tradition, aiming to negotiate a balance between global exposure and local authenticity (Halliday, 2013). Dubbing also plays a crucial role in aligning content with religious and moral frameworks. As a predominantly Christian state, Mizoram maintains conservative values in public life, and media content is often filtered through religious lenses. Local channels feature a high volume of Christian programming, including dubbed devotional shows which regularly attract high viewership. On Sundays, most channels dedicate their airtime to sermons, gospel music, and religious films dubbed into Mizo. These programmes are more than entertainment; they reaffirm communal beliefs and provide spiritually and culturally safe spaces for viewers. The dubbing process here involves not only linguistic adaptation but also moral mediation, ensuring that religious values remain intact. The role of dubbing in Mizoram also intersects with informal modes of audience feedback. Since most local channels lack formal audience research mechanisms, they rely on text and whatsapp message, and handwritten letters to gauge public opinion. Programmes that feature viewer opinions on current affairs and television content are a regular part of the broadcasting schedule. These

responses are often aired with minimal editing, providing a transparent channel for cultural negotiation between viewers and producers. While this practice may seem informal, it highlights the participatory nature of audience engagement in Mizoram, where public sentiment directly influences content, including the acceptance or rejection of dubbed programmes. From a psychological perspective, dubbing enhances the emotional impact of audio-visual content. As Chaume (2018) notes, dubbing creates an illusion of authenticity that allows viewers to experience media as though it were originally produced in their own language. This is particularly effective in Mizoram, where viewers may have limited proficiency in English or Hindi. The use of familiar voices, local speech rhythms, and culturally specific expressions allows for deeper narrative immersion and identification with characters. Caeiro (2019) further explains that subtitled content requires viewers to divide their attention between text and image, which may hinder emotional engagement. Dubbing removes this cognitive barrier, offering a more fluid viewing experience that is particularly advantageous for younger and older viewers. Voice casting also plays a critical role. As Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) emphasise, matching the vocal tone and emotional expression of the original characters is vital to audience reception. In Mizoram, dubbing studios take great care to select voice actors who can convey the full emotional range of the characters, ensuring that the dubbed version retains its affective depth.

In short, dubbing in Mizoram functions as a layered and dynamic form of cultural and emotional mediation. It allows foreign narratives to be emotionally internalised, morally accepted, and culturally aligned with local values. Whether in the rejection of Hindi serials due to cultural anxieties or the embrace of Korean dramas for their perceived closeness, dubbing facilitates a constant negotiation between global media and local identity. It is a tool not only for understanding but also for belonging.

5.3 Mapping Transnational Viewership Trends: Situating the Mizo Experience in the Indian Context

India's dubbing industry has experienced a seismic shift over the past two decades. Once considered a peripheral domain, it is now a central pillar of media consumption

and although this chapter focuses on Mizoram, it is impossible to ignore the broader national trends that inform and contextualise Mizo viewership preferences. Across India, audiences have increasingly gravitated towards dubbed content, not merely as a linguistic necessity but as a cultural and emotional bridge.

The rise of Hindi-dubbed South Indian films, for example, has been more than just a fleeting phenomenon. According to Srivatsan (2020), the success of films such as *Chandramukhi* and *AAa* in Hindi-dubbed versions revealed a latent demand for regional cinema that could transcend language boundaries. These films, initially restricted to native language audiences, gained immense popularity across northern India once dubbed. In some cases, their dubbed versions outperformed their original theatrical releases in terms of viewership. Platforms like YouTube became essential distribution channels, transforming how films reached and engaged audiences.

Several titles exemplify this shift. *Raatchasi*, retitled as *Madam Geeta Rani*, and *Srinivasa Kalyanam* both achieved unprecedented reach through their dubbed versions. These films, once modest earners at the box office, found enormous success online, where cultural themes and moral narratives resonated with family-oriented viewers. Anecdotal evidence and digital analytics confirm that dubbed versions are often perceived as more relatable, especially in Tier-II and Tier-III towns.

The economic implications of this trend are equally significant. Dubbing has become not just a localisation tool but a market strategy. According to Patel (2023), India's dubbing industry is now worth over ₹150 crore, with over 100 Korean films dubbed and released in Indian single-screen theatres each year. Revenue is increasingly driven by online monetisation models. For instance, a film that garners 100 million views on YouTube may generate substantial ad revenue, often rivalling that of traditional satellite rights. The accessibility of dubbed films makes them particularly appealing to audiences who cannot afford Over-The-Top (OTT) subscriptions, thus broadening the content's demographic reach.

Voice artists have emerged as celebrities in their own right. Sanket Mhatre, who lends his voice to numerous South Indian and Hollywood films in Hindi, has developed a loyal following and when his voice was absent from a recent film, fans

launched a social media campaign demanding his return. This attachment underlines the intimate connection audiences form not just with visual content, but with the voices that bring it to life. Bhatt (2018) notes that voice identity has become critical in building viewer loyalty, often influencing whether a dubbed version succeeds.

Meanwhile, global studios have refined their localisation strategies. Marvel Studios, for example, now commissions high-profile Indian voice actors to dub its major releases. Rana Daggubati's role as Thanos in the Telugu version of *Avengers: Infinity War* was not just about accuracy—it was a branding decision. Approximately half of Marvel's Indian box office earnings now come from dubbed versions (Bhatt, 2018). These figures highlight how international franchises have embraced regional markets with serious intent.

Another emerging trend is the move from literal translation to culturally embedded adaptation. Jain (2018) describes how dubbing writers no longer merely convert scripts word-for-word. They localise names, idioms, and cultural cues. In one case, “Dim and Sum” from *Kung Fu Panda* became “Gol and Gappa” in Hindi, increasing relatability. This process is crucial in making foreign content feel domestic. It also reveals that audiences respond not just to narratives, but to how comfortably those narratives inhabit their cultural environment.

In Mizoram, these national patterns intersect with unique cultural conditions. While audiences across India often consume dubbed films for spectacle, Mizo viewers are drawn to emotional depth and moral clarity. As discussed earlier, Korean dramas dubbed in Mizo have become staples due to their perceived cultural compatibility. Viewers resonate with themes such as familial duty, social respectability, and spiritual modesty. Unlike the North Indian market, where action-packed ‘masala’ films dominate, Mizo audiences favour content that aligns with their religious and community values.

Moreover, while commercial factors drive dubbing decisions in most Indian states, in Mizoram, civil society plays an influential role. NGOs, Church bodies, and local elders often weigh in on what is suitable for broadcast. The rejection of Hindi serials such as *Kasauti Zindagi Ki*, once wildly popular underscores this point. The content

was deemed culturally invasive and ultimately pulled from broadcast. Such gatekeeping mechanisms are less prominent in other regions, where market forces alone determine content viability.

Nevertheless, both contexts illustrate the growing demand for dubbed content and the cultural meaning-making involved in its reception. As regional audiences grow more vocal and platforms continue to expand, dubbing is no longer secondary to the content—it is integral to how stories are told and received. In this way, Mizoram is not an exception to national trends but a distinct expression of them, shaped by its values, language, and worldview.

5.4 Themes and Discussions

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the analysis of qualitative data collected through focus group discussions with Mizo audiences. These themes shed light on the cultural, emotional, and linguistic factors that shape the consumption of dubbed transnational films and serials in Mizoram. The discussion is grounded in audience narratives and is supported by relevant theoretical frameworks in translation studies, media reception, and cultural proximity.

The themes explored include the influence of star power, language familiarity, cultural proximity, narrative structure, and the negotiation of cultural and religious identity. Together, these findings provide a deeper understanding of the motivations behind Mizo audiences' preferences for dubbed content and how such content is internalised within the broader socio-cultural context of Mizoram. By examining these dimensions, this section aims to address the core research question and situate the Mizo media experience within the dynamics of global media flows and local cultural negotiation.

5.4.1 Star Power

A significant theme that has emerged from this study is the influence of star power on the appeal of dubbed films and serials. Star power refers to the ability of well-known actors to attract and engage audiences based on their established popularity and credibility (Dyer, 1998). Participants in this study expressed a strong inclination

toward watching dubbed content featuring actors they recognize and admire. One participant noted,

“As I am not blessed with beauty, I’ve never had a romantic relationship in my life. As a result, I’ve missed out on a lot of feelings and emotions for a woman my age. I’ve formed this para-social relationship with Lee Min-ho (Korean actor) to negotiate these feelings. I think I’ve watched all the serials and films he’s been casted, most of which are borne out of his performance in these films, rather than the plot.”

This phenomenon highlights the broader impact of celebrity culture on media consumption, where familiar faces serve as a major draw for audiences, even when the content originates from a foreign cultural context.

The concept of star power is well-documented in media studies. According to Austin and Barker (2003), celebrities function as key figures in audience decision-making, influencing preferences, engagement levels, and even interpretations of media narratives. For Mizo audiences, the recognition of actors, either through exposure to their previous works or their presence in popular entertainment media plays a crucial role in determining which dubbed films and serials they choose to watch. The association of certain actors with quality performances or engaging storylines reinforces audience loyalty and contributes to the sustained popularity of dubbed content.

One of the ways in which star power operates in dubbed media is through the emotional connection audiences develop with actors. Research by Redmond and Holmes (2007) suggests that the parasocial relationships audiences form with celebrities, where they feel a personal connection despite the absence of real-life interaction, significantly impact their media consumption habits. In the case of Mizoram, audiences may initially be drawn to a film or serial due to the reputation of its original actors, but their engagement is further solidified by the dubbing process, which localizes the content and enhances relatability.

Moreover, the appeal of star power in dubbed films is not solely based on the original actors but also on the voice actors who bring these characters to life. As

Luyken et al. (1991) argue effective dubbing involves more than just linguistic translation; it requires skilled voice actors who can convey the emotions, intonations, and personalities of the original performances. In Mizoram, certain voice actors have gained their own following, with audiences recognizing and appreciating their distinctive dubbing styles. This phenomenon mirrors trends in other dubbing cultures, such as in Spain and Italy, where prominent voice actors become celebrities in their own right (Matamala & Orero, 2018).

The global film and television industry has long relied on star power to drive audience engagement. For instance, research on Hollywood blockbusters has shown that films starring well-known actors tend to perform better at the box office, even when other factors such as critical reception or genre are taken into account (De Vany & Walls, 1999). Similarly, the Bollywood industry has leveraged star power to maintain a loyal fanbase both domestically and internationally (Ganti, 2012). The influence of star power in dubbed content follows this pattern, where recognizable faces and, in the case of dubbing, recognizable voices enhance audience appeal and encourage continued consumption.

In the context of Mizoram, the role of star power in the consumption of dubbed films and serials highlights the intersection of global entertainment trends and local media preferences. The popularity of certain actors whether from Korean dramas, Bollywood, or Hollywood creates a built-in audience for dubbed versions of their work. Additionally, the emergence of local dubbing artists as recognizable figures further contributes to the sustained interest in dubbed media. As media globalization continues to shape viewing habits, the interplay between star power and localization efforts will remain a critical factor in the appeal of transnational content.

5.4.2 Language Familiarity

The appeal of dubbed films and serials among the Mizo audience is significantly influenced by familiarity with the language used in the dubbing process. In the context of media consumption, familiarity fosters comfort, accessibility, and emotional engagement with content that might otherwise feel foreign or culturally distant. Participants in this study overwhelmingly cited their preference for dubbed

content due to the ease of understanding narratives, dialogues, and cultural nuances when presented in their mother tongue.

Language familiarity plays a crucial role in audience engagement and comprehension. Studies on media reception suggest that individuals are more likely to engage with content when it is presented in a language they are comfortable with (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). Research by Antonini et al. (2017) also highlights that audiences develop stronger emotional connections with characters and storylines when they are able to fully grasp the linguistic and contextual meaning embedded in dialogues and this phenomenon is particularly evident in linguistically homogeneous societies like Mizoram, where the predominance of a single mother tongue fosters a collective preference for dubbed content over subtitled or original-language versions. One participant said,

“As our film industry is still in its nascent stage, quality films are rarely produced. So, it is hard to find a Mizo film that can rival these dubbed films and serials. It is hard to put into words what language does to you, but watching foreign stars communicating in Mizo is quite soothing and relaxing.”

Moreover, the sense of familiarity provided by dubbed content reduces cognitive effort, allowing viewers to focus more on the storyline and emotional aspects of the narrative rather than struggling with linguistic comprehension. The concept of cognitive fluency, as discussed in the work of Lee and Labroo (2020), posits that when individuals encounter familiar linguistic patterns, they experience greater ease in processing information, which enhances their overall enjoyment and retention of media content. In the Mizo context, the presence of familiar linguistic structures in dubbed media ensures that audiences can immerse themselves in narratives without the distraction of translation or subtitle reading.

Similar studies have found that dubbed content is widely favoured in regions where audiences prefer linguistic accessibility in their entertainment choices. For instance, research on European television audiences found that countries with strong dubbing cultures, such as Spain, Germany, and Italy, have consistently shown higher engagement with dubbed media over subtitled alternatives (Matamala & Orero,

2018). This aligns with the findings in Mizoram, where dubbing serves as a cultural bridge that facilitates media consumption without language barriers.

Overall, the theme of familiarity as a driver of preference for dubbed films and serials underscores the fundamental role of language in shaping media reception. The strong inclination toward dubbed content in Mizoram reflects broader global trends, reinforcing the argument that linguistic accessibility enhances audience engagement and emotional investment in transnational media.

5.4.3 Cultural Proximity

Another significant theme that emerged in this study is cultural proximity, which plays a crucial role in shaping audience preferences for dubbed films and serials in Mizoram. Cultural proximity refers to the sense of closeness or shared cultural traits between the audience and the media content they consume (Straubhaar, 2021). Participants in this study highlighted that beyond linguistic familiarity, they were drawn to dubbed content that reflects or aligns with their own cultural values, traditions, and social norms. This alignment fosters a deeper connection with the narratives and characters, making the viewing experience more relatable and engaging. One participant expressed, “Over the years, we have watched a lot of Hollywood and Bollywood films and serials, as they look nothing like us. Moreover, our cultural practices and values are extremely different. With Korean serials, they look like us, they social behaviour is similar to us.”

Cultural proximity influences media consumption by reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging. According to the cultural proximity theory proposed by Straubhaar (1991), audiences tend to prefer media that reflect their cultural experiences, even when engaging with transnational content. In Mizoram, the preference for dubbed films and serials is not only a linguistic choice but also a cultural one, where viewers appreciate storylines that resonate with their local values and social structures. Research by Kuipers (2011) supports this, indicating that audiences in culturally cohesive societies are more likely to consume foreign media that has been adapted to their cultural context through dubbing.

Furthermore, the significance of cultural proximity is evident in the adaptation processes undertaken by Mizo dubbing studios, which often modify dialogues, expressions, and references to better suit local sensibilities. This phenomenon aligns with research by Luyken et al. (1991), who argue that dubbing not only serves as a linguistic translation but also as a means of cultural adaptation, making foreign content more digestible for regional audiences. For instance, references to Western holidays, idioms, or social customs in original content may be replaced with equivalents familiar to the Mizo audience, thus enhancing cultural relevance and audience engagement.

Similar trends can be observed in other parts of the world where cultural proximity influences media reception. Studies on Latin American audiences, for example, have shown that viewers prefer dubbed telenovelas from culturally similar regions over those from vastly different cultures, even when the original language is understood (Sinclair & Straubhaar, 2013). In Asia, the popularity of Korean dramas in regions like India and China is partly due to their cultural themes, which resonate more closely with local traditions and values than Western media (Jin, 2019). These findings highlight the global relevance of cultural proximity in shaping audience preferences for dubbed content.

In the case of Mizoram, cultural proximity is further reinforced by shared themes in storytelling, such as familial bonds, community values, and respect for traditions. Viewers find it easier to relate to narratives that reflect their lived experiences, even when the source material originates from a different cultural setting. The work of Castelló (2010) emphasizes that audiences selectively engage with transnational media by interpreting it through their own cultural lens, a process facilitated by dubbing.

Ultimately, the influence of cultural proximity on the preference for dubbed films and serials in Mizoram underscores the importance of cultural adaptation in media consumption. By aligning foreign narratives with local cultural expectations, dubbing not only bridges linguistic gaps but also fosters a sense of familiarity and belonging

among audiences. This reinforces the idea that media is not consumed in isolation but is deeply embedded within the cultural fabric of its audience.

5.4.4 The Primacy of Narrative

The narrative structure of a film is a crucial determinant of audience engagement, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers. Scholars in film studies and media theory have long argued that a compelling plot is central to the cinematic experience (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019). The global success of various cinematic industries, from Hollywood to Bollywood and the South Korean films, demonstrates that audiences seek structured storytelling, character development, and thematic depth. However, the absence of a strong Mizo film industry with narratively rich productions has led to an increased reliance on dubbed foreign films and serials among Mizo audiences.

According to Chatman (1978), narrative is the essential vehicle through which films communicate meaning. His work on narratology underscores that both story (what happens) and discourse (how it is told) are integral to audience engagement. A strong plot structure fosters emotional investment, allowing viewers to form connections with characters and anticipate resolutions (McKee, 1997). This is evident in global blockbusters like "Inception" (2010) or "Parasite" (2019), which captivated audiences not just through visual spectacle but also through intricate storytelling.

Further, studies in cognitive film theory reveal that audiences engage with films cognitively and emotionally based on narrative coherence and thematic resonance (Plantinga, 2009). Even within non-Western cinematic traditions, such as those in China and Iran, storytelling remains the driving force behind a film's reach and longevity (Nagib, 2006). The universality of narrative structure, rooted in Aristotle's three-act paradigm, suggests that audiences, regardless of geography, seek films that offer compelling conflicts, character arcs, and resolutions (Field, 2005).

The Mizo film industry remains underdeveloped in terms of both production quality and narrative sophistication. Scholars in media and cultural studies have noted that when local industries fail to provide compelling content, audiences turn to external

sources (Straubhaar, 2007). This is precisely the case with Mizoram, where the dominance of dubbed South Korean, Thai, and Indian films reflects a gap in the local industry's ability to meet audience expectations. The preference for foreign films, particularly South Korean dramas, can be attributed to their emotionally complex plots and well-developed character arcs (Kim, 2021).

Moreover, dubbing studios in Mizoram function as cultural intermediaries, selectively adapting content that resonates with local audiences. This selective appropriation suggests an underlying demand for well-structured narratives, a demand that Mizo filmmakers have yet to adequately meet. The absence of high-quality local films has created a cultural dependency on external narratives, reinforcing the dominance of foreign media (Gans, 1999).

5.4.5 Negotiating Cultural and Religious Identity Through Dubbed Media

One of the most significant, and often overlooked, dimensions of Mizo engagement with dubbed transnational content is the influence it has on their perceptions of foreign cultures and religious values. While viewers in Mizoram are not passive consumers of cultural media, their reception of dubbed content is deeply intertwined with communal norms, religious identity, and moral expectations shaped and conditioned by Christianity.

Participants expressed that their preference for Turkish and Korean dramas over Hindi or Western serials was not based solely on stylistic choices or entertainment value, but on how these narratives reflected social norms they considered acceptable. The restraint in romantic depiction, strong emphasis on family relationships, and moral clarity in many Korean dramas were frequently cited as reasons for their appeal. These values, according to majority of the respondents, were perceived to be closely aligned with Mizo Christian sensibilities, especially among female and middle-aged viewers. This perception reinforces a sense of cultural proximity that goes beyond ethnicity or geography, it is a proximity rooted in shared values and ideological comfort.

In contrast, content from mainland India, particularly some Western (Hollywood) films, was seen by many as incompatible with Mizo culture and religious worldview. Instances of excessive romanticisation, the portrayal of polygamous or extramarital relationships, and open displays of alcohol consumption were flagged by participants as morally problematic. The banning of *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* by local cable operators following community backlash is a clear example of this cultural boundary enforcement. While such shows were undeniably popular at first, the eventual pushback revealed the limits of cultural assimilation in the face of perceived moral threat. Nevertheless, participant responses also revealed a level of critical awareness and personal conviction when exposed to religious representations outside of Christianity. As one viewer noted,

“There are instances where different religion and their god perform miracles for them in the serials and films we watched. But I do not think it will ever shake my belief in God and it will not leave a lasting impression on me, furthermore these scenes are so few and far between.”

This quote reflects how viewers are capable of distinguishing between narrative device and doctrinal truth, accepting cultural representations without feeling spiritually threatened. Additionally, audiences showed a selective openness to exploring foreign religious and cultural themes, provided they did not directly contradict or undermine core beliefs. The success of dubbed Christian programmes such as ‘The Ten Commandment’ and ‘The Passion of the Christ’ illustrates how dubbed content can also affirm, rather than dilute, religious identity. These programmes not only entertained but reinforced communal values, often becoming family viewing staples in households across Mizoram.

Crucially, viewers also expressed a reflective curiosity about global cultures, albeit with a critical lens. One participant shared,

“Of course, I would like to experience new culture- who would not. Sometimes the sense of freedom they have cannot be compared to our society. But then, every culture has its own pros and cons- our culture and how it’s governed is nothing to complain, if we really look at the bigger picture.”

This articulation of cultural curiosity, tempered with self-assuredness, demonstrates that the encounter with dubbed media is neither one of uncritical assimilation nor rejection, but of active interpretation. This pattern of acceptance and resistance suggests that dubbed content is not consumed in a cultural vacuum. Instead, Mizo audiences actively negotiate the meanings embedded in transnational media. Dubbing, in this context, becomes not only a linguistic adaptation but also a cultural filtering mechanism. It facilitates a selective process of cultural borrowing, one that privileges alignment with existing religious frameworks while rejecting that which is seen to contradict or undermine them.

Moreover, the act of dubbing itself- performed by Mizo voice actors using local idioms and speech patterns serves to domesticate foreign content. This not only makes global stories more accessible but also enables the audience to experience them without compromising their cultural or religious grounding. In this sense, the dubbed voice becomes a protective layer, allowing viewers to remain culturally rooted while engaging with distant worlds.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter offer a layered understanding of Mizo engagement with dubbed transnational media and the preference for such content reflects more than linguistic convenience- it underscores emotional, cultural, and ideological negotiations shaped by both global flows and local norms.

Star power continues to shape audience loyalty, with Mizo viewers forming parasocial relationships with actors from Korean, Bollywood, and Hollywood media. This attachment often extends to voice actors in the dubbed versions, reflecting the emotional and psychological investments embedded in global media consumption (Redmond & Holmes, 2007).

Language familiarity further enhances this engagement as audiences reported a sense of comfort and immersion when foreign content was delivered in their mother tongue. Dubbing, in this context, enables both comprehension and connection, it

reduces cognitive load while facilitating deeper emotional access (Lee & Labroo, 2020).

Cultural proximity emerged as a key mediator of preference. Korean and Southeast Asian dramas, for instance, resonate strongly due to shared values around modesty, family, and respect. Mizo audiences gravitate towards content that mirrors their social world, and dubbing helps reinforce this alignment (Straubhaar, 1991). By adapting expressions and references to fit local sensibilities, dubbing localises global content without erasing its origin.

Crucially, the data show that Mizo audiences engage with dubbed media through a critical, value-driven lens. Some content, particularly from West (Hollywood) or Hindi films and serials are rejected for moral or religious reasons. Yet, this resistance does not preclude openness. As one viewer noted, depictions of other religions do not challenge their faith; instead, they are seen as fictional elements, not ideological threats. In this way, dubbed media becomes both a cultural bridge and a cultural filter.

However, dubbing also raises questions of authenticity and editorial intervention. While localisation fosters familiarity, it can lead to selective rewriting that alters the original tone or meaning (Munday, 2016). Some voices in translation studies warn that this gatekeeping, while preserving cultural coherence, may limit the ideological range audiences are exposed to (Karam, 2016; Wang, 2017).

Finally, the long-term implications of dubbed content warrant further scrutiny. Though it promotes the use of Mizo as a dubbing language, the increasing reliance on foreign narratives may shape speech patterns and subtly influence linguistic norms over time (Salama-Carr, 2019). This underscores the tension between preserving local identity and absorbing global content as dubbing in Mizoram is not merely a means of access, it is a mechanism for negotiating identity, values, and belonging. As global media continues to reach regional audiences, the interplay between localisation and reception in places like Mizoram will remain central to understanding how culture is adapted, contained, and transformed through media.

Chapter VI

Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1 Introduction

The present study examined how transnational television influences cultural values, social practices, and identity in Mizoram, guided by Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework and concepts of cultural change. Drawing on in-depth interviews with dubbing studio owners, scholars, writers, and focus groups, this research demonstrated that Mizo audiences do not passively absorb global media content; rather, they actively interpret and negotiate it. Transnational television enters a cultural field already conditioned by prior waves of Christianisation and colonial modernity, meaning global media effects are mediated through a resilient local habitus. In this sense, Hall's (1980) model is confirmed: local viewers and media agents assume negotiated or oppositional positions, re-encoding foreign narratives to fit Mizo values. Nye's (2004) notion of soft power also applies, as global content operates as a vehicle of cultural influence beyond borders, yet its impact in Mizoram is shaped by local norms and agency.

6.2 Cultural Continuity amid Change

Mizoram's traditional values have been repeatedly reinterpreted rather than erased. Colonial-era Christianity and education reconfigured practices, creating a foundation in which new media could be negotiated. Transnational television now operates in this context: Mizo festivals and rituals have absorbed global elements (such as Western music, dance, and cosplay) yet remain recognisably local. Newly celebrated festivals such as Valentine's Day and Halloween have been contested and localised rather than adopted wholesale. Some viewers see these imports as diluting authenticity, while others interpret them creatively in line with Hall's encoding/decoding model.

Despite exposure to alternative models on screen, deeply patriarchal gender norms in Mizoram still persist. Male authority over inheritance, ritual offices, and social status remains largely unchanged and although women's education and mobility have

improved, enduring symbolic structures continue to confine them to domestic roles. In short, global media have catalysed incremental shifts, but entrenched legal, religious, and familial structures continue to enforce male prerogatives. Media-induced attitude changes advance gradually and are mediated by long-standing institutions.

6.3 Dubbing Studios as Cultural Gatekeepers

Chapter IV revealed that local dubbing studios in Aizawl function as active cultural intermediaries and these studios do far more than translate language; they filter content through a Mizo cultural and religious lens. Through in-depth interviews, the study identified practices of cultural censorship and linguistic manipulation, religious rewriting, and decentralised control. Studio owners systematically cut or alter scenes and dialogue that conflict with Mizo norms. Profanity and sexual content are routinely sanitised into family-friendly equivalents, and entire scenes are removed or repositioned for youth audiences.

Religion emerges as a particularly potent filter in a Christian dominated state like Mizoram and dubbing studios consciously modify or omit non-Christian religious references. Substitutions such as portraying foreign deities as the Christian God align foreign religious content with local faith. In Hall's terms, studios perform negotiated or oppositional decodings of original media, actively censoring and reframing content to uphold community moral codes.

An important finding concerns the pragmatic approach to piracy and sourcing. Facing a tiny market, studios typically use informal (pirated) copies of foreign shows, often with the tacit consent of overseas producers. Owners justified piracy ethically, arguing that the economic scale is so small it poses little real concern, and serves community needs. Thus, studios occupy a complex ethical position—informally violating copyright while fulfilling a cultural preservation mandate.

This chapter also documented the erosion of Church and civil society control in the digital age. With internet streaming and smartphones, media consumption has decentralised. While legacy media remain subject to some oversight, younger

viewers freely access global streams. The result is a shared gatekeeping environment: dubbing studios, audiences, and digital platforms now collectively negotiate cultural norms, replacing earlier eras of centralised censorship.

6.4 Audience Reception and Cultural Proximity

The last chapter of this thesis underlines why Mizo audiences are drawn to dubbed transnational television. The findings show that star power, language familiarity, cultural proximity, and narrative quality are key factors for Mizo audiences. Viewers form parasocial attachments to global celebrities, often following shows because of admired stars. Effective voice acting further strengthens these bonds, with some voice actors achieving local celebrity status.

Familiar Mizo dialogue and idioms make foreign stories feel accessible and soothing as this comfort reduces cognitive load and allows viewers to focus on emotional engagement. Crucially, cultural proximity determines preference: content resonating with Mizo social norms such as modesty, family honour, and moral clarity is largely favoured. Korean and Turkish dramas are praised for these qualities, while certain Bollywood and Hollywood content portraying alcohol, extramarital relationships, or excessive sensuality are rejected.

Audiences thus consume global media with a critical, value-driven lens, selectively accepting or resisting elements depending on cultural fit. This demonstrates active negotiation, affirming that dubbed media serve simultaneously as cultural bridges and filters.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

A number of constraints temper the strength of these conclusions.

- **Geographic Focus:** The study is specific to Mizoram, primarily urban Aizawl, and findings cannot be automatically generalised to other regions.

- **Sample Size:** The qualitative data of 30 in-depth interviews, six dubbing studio owner interviews, and five focus groups is rich but not statistically representative.
- **Cross-sectional Nature:** The research captures a snapshot from 2023–2024; media landscapes are rapidly evolving, especially with internet proliferation.

6.6 Scope for Future Research

This study opens multiple avenues for further inquiry.

- **Comparative Studies:** Examining transnational television's impact in other North-eastern states or tribal areas could illuminate broader patterns.
- **Longitudinal Research:** Tracking evolving media preferences and cultural negotiations over time would enrich understanding.
- **Mixed Methods:** Combining surveys with interviews could enhance breadth and generalisability.
- **Digital Media Focus:** Studying social media sites and internet streaming platforms' influence on culture, identity, and religion would capture emerging trends.
- **Economic and Policy Research:** Exploring the ethics of media piracy and intellectual property rights in peripheral markets could inform regulatory frameworks.
- **Language and Identity Studies:** Analysing the long-term linguistic impacts of dubbing practices on the Mizo language and dialects could shed light on cultural sustainability.

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APPENDICES

The following appendices contain the guiding questions used during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted as part of this research. These instruments were designed to elicit detailed insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations relevant to the study's core themes. The questions were semi-structured in nature, allowing for flexibility in responses while ensuring consistency across sessions. They served as crucial tools in gathering qualitative data to support the analysis presented in the thesis. It also contains the consent form of participants from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions that constitute an extensive data of this thesis.

APPENDIX-I

Dubbed Television Content Audiences

- What aspects of dubbed transnational television content do you find most appealing or engaging?
- Do you think the dubbing of foreign content into the local language influences your interest in and understanding of these programs?
- In what ways has watching dubbed transnational television changed your perception of different cultures?
- Can you share any specific examples of how transnational television has altered your view of other cultural practices or traditions?
- Can you provide an example of how a specific television show or movie has influenced your views on another culture or religion?
- Have you noticed any changes in yourself or how people in your community view different religions or religious practices as a result of watching dubbed transnational television?
- How has your personal experience with dubbed transnational television content affected your interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds?

- How do you think the consumption of dubbed transnational television content is affecting cultural and religious perceptions within the Mizo community as a whole?

APPENDIX-II

Transnational Television: Changes in Traditional Value, Cultural Practises and Gender Roles

- How would you describe traditional Mizo society, particularly in terms of its core cultural values and gender roles?
- How have attitudes toward gender roles evolved in Mizo society/community in recent years?
- Do you think the younger generation in Mizo society perceives traditional cultural values differently compared to older generations? If so, what kinds of differences have you observed?
- To what extent do you think transnational television has influenced these changing perceptions among different generations?
- Can you describe any specific television programs, channels, or genres that have significantly influenced Mizo cultural practices or values?
- How has the content of transnational television- such as entertainment, news, or advertisements- influenced the way people in Mizo society dress, speak, or interact socially?
- In what ways has transnational television influenced Mizo society/community understanding or perception of other cultures beyond Mizoram?
- Do you think young people in your community are affected by the representation of gender and sexuality in transnational television programmes?
- Have you personally noticed any changes in how Mizo society/Community views gender roles or sexuality since the increased exposure to transnational television?
- Do you feel that transnational television has created any cultural conflicts or tensions within the Mizo community? If so, how have these manifested?

APPENDIX-III

Dubbing Studio Owners

- Can you tell me how and when you first ventured into the practice of dubbing?
- In the early days of dubbing, Church and civil society leaders were often critical of the practice. Have these perceptions changed over the years?
- How do you source the serials and films that are eventually dubbed into Mizo?
- What are the steps or processes involved in localising foreign content for Mizo-speaking audiences?
- Do you often replace English songs, idioms, and adages with Mizo equivalents in order to make the content more relatable?
- What efforts are taken to preserve Mizo culture, language, and religious sentiments during the dubbing process?
- How extensive is censorship in the dubbing process, and who determines what should be censored?
- Have you encountered any issues related to piracy or censorship that have impacted your work?

APPENDIX-IV

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Title of Research:

A Study of Transnational Television in Mizoram

Researcher:

Nicky Lalrinsanga Lotlai

Doctoral Candidate

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Email: lotlaijune@gmail.com

Phone: 8132814420

Supervisor:

Dr. V. Ratnamala

Email: ratna2maya@gmail.com

1. Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research study aimed at ‘A Study of Transnational Television in Mizoram. The study involves collecting data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gain insights into how transnational television influence Mizos tradition, culture and established gender roles in a patriarchal Mizo society.

2. Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

Take part in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately [X] minutes/hours.

Participate in a focus group discussion lasting approximately [X] minutes/hours.

Allow the researcher to audio-record the sessions for transcription and analysis purposes.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to take part in one or both components (interview and/or focus group).

3. Confidentiality

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential.

Your name and any identifying details will be removed from transcripts and replaced with a pseudonym.

Audio recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on password-protected devices and will be destroyed after the study is completed.

Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

4. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You may also decline to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

5. Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with this study. While you may not receive any direct benefit, your participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact and influence of transnational television in Mizoram, which may benefit the wider community or field of study.

6. Consent Statement

By signing below, you acknowledge that:

You have read and understood the information above.

You have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____

Date: _____

BRIEF BIO-DATA OF THE CANDIDATE

Personal Details

Name : Nicky Lalrinsanga Lotlai
Date of birth : 25th June, 1995
Gender : Male
Nationality : Indian
Permanent Address : College Veng, Lawngtlai, Mizoram
Mobile no : 8132814420
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Father's name : Sanghluna Lawtlai (L)
Mother's name : Lalbiakdiki (L)

Education

Mizoram University:

Master of Arts with 8.36 CGPA

Pachhunga University College:

Bachelor of Arts (Public Administration) 67.7 per cent

Publications:

Lotlai, N. (2021). Coverage of Sports in Mizo dailies. International Journal of Current Humanities and Social Science Researches (IJCHSSR), 6(1).

Lotlai, N. L., Ratnamala, V., & Hangsing, M. (2022). Gender and sports: Representation of Women Athletes in Mizo dailies. Journal of North East India Studies, 12(2), 27–44.

Lotlai, N. L. (2023). Decoding Mizos Love for Turkish Serials. South India Journal of Social Sciences, 21(24), 167–169.

Paper Presented:

“Gender and Sports: Representation of Women Athletes in Mizo Dailies” presented at the two-day virtual seminar on Realities of Marginalisation and Marginality in Media, organised by Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University on 21-22 April 2022.

“Transnational Television in Mizoram: A study on the Popularity of Turkish Serials among the Mizos” presented at the two-day International Conference on Borderless Communication: Reimagining Global Mediascapes, organised by the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University on November 17-18, 2022.

“Dubbing Studios as Cultural Gatekeeper in Mizoram” presented at the two-day national seminar on Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Media in North East India, organised by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, North-Eastern Hill University, on 16-17 May, 2024.

PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

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DEPARTMENT : MASS COMMUNICATION

TITLE OF THESIS : A STUDY OF TRANSNATIONAL
TELEVISION IN MIZORAM

DATE OF ADMISSION : 26 JULY 2019

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2. BOS : 12 MAY 2020

3. SCHOOL BOARD : 29 MAY 2020

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EXTENSION (IF ANY) : NIL

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Department of Mass Communication

ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION IN MIZORAM

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

NICKY LALRINSANGA LOTLAI

MZU REGISTRATION NO.:1700048

Ph.D. REGISTRATION NO.: MZU/Ph.D./1397 of 26.07.2019



**DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT
AND INFORMATION SCIENCE**

MAY, 2025

A STUDY OF TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION IN MIZORAM

BY

NICKY LALRINSANGA LOTLAI

DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION

SUPERVISOR

Prof. V. RATNAMALA

Submitted

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

Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis explores the intersection between global media flows and local cultural dynamics through a focused investigation into the role of transnational television in shaping socio-cultural transformation in Mizoram, India. Building on the foundational view that television is not merely a medium of entertainment but a powerful cultural force, the study interrogates how the proliferation of transnational television content has reshaped cultural values, social practices, and gender norms in the Mizo context. Chapter I begins by establishing the socio-historical significance of television as a unique medium that merges auditory and visual stimulation, granting it unparalleled influence in constructing social realities. Tracing scholarly concerns from the 1940s to contemporary critiques, the chapter illustrates television's capacity to reflect and reconstruct cultural narratives and power structures.

The conceptual framework of “transnational television” is discussed with reference to Jean Chalaby's characterisation of global media flows as systems of commodity exchange that transcend national boundaries. The chapter emphasises the multi-directional movement of televisual content and the consequent hybridisation of cultural experiences. Particular attention is given to the deregulation of India's television landscape post-1990, which facilitated the entrance of multinational broadcasters like STAR, CNN, and Sony, resulting in the increasing visibility of foreign television genres across the country, including in Mizoram. The uniqueness of Mizoram- a region distinguished by its high Christian population, rich cultural traditions, and strong civil society institutions makes it a compelling site for examining the nuanced reception of transnational media.

The chapter then engages with the concept of culture, drawing from anthropological, historical, and sociological perspectives and culture is understood not as a fixed entity but as a lived, dynamic system encompassing values, beliefs, traditions, and social behaviours. The study positions television as both a mirror and maker of culture, actively participating in the circulation and reshaping of meanings. Stuart

Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory forms the core of the theoretical framework, offering a lens through which to understand how Mizo audiences interpret transnational content. Hall's model disrupts the notion of passive viewership, suggesting instead that audiences engage with media from dominant, negotiated, or oppositional positions based on their socio-cultural contexts.

The chapter further situates the emergence of television in India within a tripartite historical framework: (1) its initial use as an educational tool during the postcolonial development era (1959–1983), (2) the monopolistic phase under Doordarshan (1983–1991), and (3) the liberalised media landscape post-1991 that catalysed the influx of transnational content. Special focus is given to the case of Mizoram, where television gained prominence in the 1990s through local cable networks like Skylinks, LPS, and Zonet. The cultural conservatism of Mizo society, guarded by entities like the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), the Church, and the Young Mizo Association (YMA), produced a complex media ecology wherein certain foreign programmes were banned while others, especially Korean dramas, were embraced.

Chapter I also delineates the research questions, which centre on the impact of transnational television on Mizo cultural practices, the mediating role of dubbing studios as cultural gatekeepers, and the shifting perceptions of foreign cultures and religions among Mizo audiences. The methodology is qualitative and exploratory, employing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and thematic analysis. A total of 41 individuals across five focus groups and 30 key informants (balanced by gender), including six dubbing studio owners, formed the primary data base. Thematic coding was performed using NVivo 15, allowing for rigorous analysis of patterns and meaning-making among viewers.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature across five thematic domains: the origin and technological evolution of television; its dual function as a cultural reflector and constructor; its operation as a tool of soft power; its role in mediating cultural change globally; and its specific history and reception in India and Mizoram. The origins of television are traced from early electrochemical experiments to mechanical and finally fully electronic systems. Television's function as an extension of culture is underscored through theories of representation, cultural construction, and narrative framing, with scholars like Raymond Williams, Silverstone, and Fiske offering seminal insights.

The review then turns to television's deployment as soft power, particularly the strategic cultural exportation by countries such as the United States and South Korea. Joseph Nye's framework is invoked to explain how media, when dissociated from coercion, becomes a tool for ideological and cultural influence. Numerous international case studies, spanning South Korea, China, Malaysia, and India illustrate the ambivalent reception of foreign media. While some audiences resist, others negotiate or adapt foreign cultural codes, particularly in gender portrayals, consumer behaviour, and identity formation. These cases help contextualise the Mizo experience within a broader global pattern.

The evolution of television in India is explored in depth, outlining how its transformation from an educational tool to a commercial-cultural industry parallels shifts in public attitudes and governance strategies. The entry of STAR TV and other foreign players in the 1990s disrupted the hegemony of Doordarshan and opened Indian viewers to global lifestyles and ideologies. The "invasion from the sky" metaphor captures the fears of cultural imperialism that emerged during this transition. Concerns about the erosion of traditional values, family structures, and linguistic diversity continue to animate public discourse.

The chapter concludes by identifying a critical research gap: while much attention has been given to transnational television's impact in urban or pan-Indian contexts, there is a paucity of scholarship focusing on peripheral and culturally distinct regions like Mizoram. Moreover, dubbing studios, crucial intermediaries in the localisation of global content remain understudied. By addressing these gaps, the thesis seeks to offer a grounded and culturally sensitive analysis of how global televisual narratives are selectively interpreted, indigenised, or resisted by Mizo audiences.

Chapter III:

Transnational Television in Mizoram – Assessing Alterations in Traditional Cultural Practices and Gender Roles

This chapter explores the layered impact of transnational television on the cultural and gendered landscape of Mizoram, a society historically shaped by Christian missionary influence, colonial education, and communal solidarity. Drawing on Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and enriched by theorisations of cultural hybridity, glocalisation, and postcolonial identity, the chapter interrogates how global television content, particularly Korean dramas, Western films, and Indian serials interacts with Mizo traditions and moral frameworks. It opens by establishing the historical trajectory of television in Mizoram, from its rudimentary introduction during the 1982 Asian Games to the transformative cable television boom of the 1990s. This media expansion brought a flood of global content into Mizo homes, raising fears among older generations regarding cultural erosion and the decline of indigenous values such as Tlawmngaihna and Aia Upa Zah.

Section 3.2 traces the groundwork of cultural reconfiguration to the arrival of Christian missionaries in the late 19th century, whose efforts in script development, evangelisation, and education profoundly altered indigenous beliefs, rituals, and gender relations. Christianity did not obliterate traditional norms but recontextualised them, recasting Tlawmngaihna within Christian ethics and dismantling institutions like the Zawlbuk while privileging middle-class Christian values and patriarchal hierarchies. This colonial-modernist transformation was reinforced through Western-style education, which redefined epistemic authority, altered ritual life, and opened new spaces for upward mobility. However, it also marginalised oral traditions and indigenous gender structures, laying the foundation for an ambivalent relationship with modern media.

Section 3.3 foregrounds the gendered dimensions of Mizo society, outlining the persistence of patriarchal norms from pre-colonial times to the present. Women's roles were historically circumscribed by patrilineal inheritance, bride-price customs,

and exclusion from political or ritual authority. Although education and Christianity allowed incremental progress, the cultural logic of male dominance continues to shape everyday life, including media reception and representation.

Section 3.4 situates Mizoram within broader Indian media transformations post-liberalisation. As India opened up to foreign broadcasters in the 1990s, global entertainment replaced Doordarshan's didactic programming, triggering moral anxieties around consumerism, gender transgression, and cultural Westernisation. Ethnographic studies from across India reveal a complex pattern of cultural negotiation, where audiences both assimilate and resist foreign values, especially in matters of gender roles, familial norms, and moral conduct.

In Section 3.5, the chapter extends its lens globally, reviewing comparative case studies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to show how audiences across postcolonial societies engage in selective appropriation of global television. While Schiller's media imperialism thesis posits cultural domination by the West, more nuanced frameworks by Tomlinson, Bhabha, and Hall suggest processes of hybridisation and negotiated identities. Case studies from the Philippines, Nigeria, China, and Thailand illustrate how local values inflect global content through adaptation, reinterpretation, or resistance.

Section 3.6 offers a synthesis of thematic insights derived from 30 in-depth interviews and 5 focus group discussions with Mizo viewers and cultural stakeholders. Four major themes emerge. The first documents the erosion, but not disappearance of Tlawmngaihna and age-based authority, as global media introduces individualistic ideologies that young people partially internalise, often prompting generational dissonance. Yet, cultural practices like thlan laih (grave-digging) endure, albeit in modified forms, evidencing cultural hybridity. The second theme addresses the re-scripted nature of traditional festivals such as Chapchar Kut, which have shifted from their agrarian and animist roots to incorporate Western music, cosplay, and global aesthetics. Some mourn this transformation as inauthentic; others embrace it as evolution. The third theme explores the proliferation of Western celebrations like Valentine's Day and Prom Night, previously unknown in Mizoram,

now widely adopted in schools and cafés. These imported festivities raise concerns about colonial mimicry and identity dilution, yet also offer opportunities for cultural reimagining and syncretism as in efforts to link Mim Kut with Halloween as a shared ritual of remembrance. Finally, the chapter addresses the persistent patriarchal configurations within Mizo society, which remain largely impervious to the emancipatory potential of global media. Despite higher female literacy rates and professional achievements, women remain excluded from church leadership, face double standards in morality, and experience symbolic violence in public discourse.

In its conclusion, the chapter underscores the continuity of cultural negotiation as a central dynamic in Mizo modernity. Rather than depicting transnational television as a homogenising force, the findings emphasise the active role of Mizo audiences in decoding, adapting, and filtering global narratives through their own socio-cultural frameworks. Transnational media enters a context already shaped by Christianity, colonial education, and community ethics, resulting not in wholesale adoption or rejection, but in layered reinterpretations that retain, reshape, and sometimes contest inherited meanings. The chapter reveals the Mizo engagement with global television as a deeply situated practice, neither passive consumption nor simple resistance, but a dynamic and evolving dialogue between global flows and local identities.

Chapter IV:

Voicing the Global, Localising the Moral – Dubbing Studios as Cultural Intermediaries in Mizoram

This chapter shifts the analytical lens from audience reception to media production, focusing on the pivotal role of dubbing studios as cultural gatekeepers in Mizoram's evolving televisual ecosystem. It examines how these studios mediate the influx of transnational television content, particularly from Korean, Turkish, Hollywood, and Bollywood sources by localising it through dubbing, censorship, and ideological reframing to align with Mizo linguistic, moral, and religious sensibilities. Anchored in Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and drawing on theories of glocalisation, translation studies, and cultural preservation, the chapter explores the ethical, religious, and institutional contours of dubbing practices in a deeply Christian society negotiating modern media flows.

Section 4.1 offers a historical overview of Mizoram's engagement with global media, tracing shifts from cinema halls in the 1970s–80s to the rise of television and the eventual dominance of dubbed foreign content post-liberalisation. The chapter positions dubbing studios as successors to earlier cultural watchdogs such as the Church and the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA), now responsible for filtering media through a Mizo-Christian lens. The chapter frames its central research question: in what ways do dubbing studios function as cultural intermediaries and moral regulators in the localisation of transnational media?

Section 4.2 contextualises dubbing as a global practice of media translation that goes beyond linguistic conversion to involve deep cultural adaptation. Referencing scholars such as Pérez-González, Chaume, and Canu, the section underscores how dubbing can protect cultural sovereignty, resist cultural hegemony, and function as an editorial process that rewrites narratives to suit local values. Globally, dubbing has been employed in contexts as diverse as Iran, Nigeria, and the Philippines to preserve religious values, national identity, or linguistic purity. This international

overview sets the stage for understanding the uniquely local dimensions of dubbing in Mizoram.

Section 4.3 narrates the evolution of Mizo dubbing studios, beginning with the breakout success of the dubbed Hindi serial *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* in 2003. Despite its eventual ban due to Hindu religious imagery, *Kasautii* ignited a dubbing movement that now sustains the bulk of local cable programming. Studios like LPS and Zonet rely heavily on dubbing to fill airtime, as financial constraints and audience preferences render original local content impractical. This historical account is crucial for understanding how dubbing became institutionalised as both a commercial strategy and a cultural function.

Section 4.4 explores comparative global practices in religiously devout societies. From Iran and Egypt to Japan and Latin America, dubbing is used to filter media through religious or nationalistic values. These global parallels underscore dubbing's dual function as a shield against ideological intrusion and a tool for cultural pedagogy. The Mizoram case aligns with these patterns but stands out due to the powerful role of the Church and civil society in shaping media ethics and monitoring content acceptability.

Section 4.5 presents empirical insights derived from interviews with six dubbing studio owners in Aizawl, structured through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Four major themes emerge. First, studios engage in cultural censorship and linguistic manipulation, strategically sanitising offensive language, omitting sexual content, and editing visual scenes to ensure family-friendliness. This is done not merely for legal compliance but to uphold the moral expectations of a multi-generational, conservative audience. Second, dubbing functions as a religious filter, with Christian references often substituted for Hindu or Islamic terminology, and scenes depicting non-Christian rituals routinely excised. This process reflects a deliberate ideological framing aimed at protecting the community's spiritual coherence. Third, dubbing studios acknowledge a diminishing institutional control in the digital age. Whereas civil society and Church once wielded strong influence over media, the rise of internet streaming platforms has decentralised content

consumption. Dubbing studios have inherited much of the moral gatekeeping function, shaping content before it reaches households, yet they also confront their limitations in regulating online exposure. Fourth, the chapter addresses the ethics of piracy and the politics of sourcing, revealing that many studios acquire content informally due to economic and infrastructural limitations. Though this breaches copyright law, studio owners justify it as a necessary compromise for cultural service and access, echoing global debates around informal media economies and the moral ambiguity of piracy.

Section 4.6 concludes that Mizo dubbing studios are not mere translators but powerful agents of cultural transformation. They perform soft censorship, religious filtering, and euphemistic translation to create dubbed content that is not only intelligible but morally and culturally resonant. Their work exemplifies Venuti's (1995) notion of "invisible" translation, where the mediator shapes meaning while appearing neutral. Through these practices, studios re-encode global narratives into local formats, producing what might be called a "Mizo media moral order."

In sum, this chapter reveals the intricate cultural labour involved in media localisation. Dubbing studios in Mizoram operate at the nexus of global entertainment and local morality, recoding transnational content through a web of religious, linguistic, and ethical imperatives. Their work highlights how global media, far from being passively consumed, is actively reconstituted in the everyday practices of translation, censorship, and audience care. These studios embody the tensions and possibilities of cultural sovereignty in a hyper-connected media age.

Chapter V:

Audience Reception and the Emergence of Cosmopolitan Imaginaries

This chapter shifts the analytical focus from the production side of transnational media to the lived experiences and interpretive practices of Mizo television audiences. It explores how transnational television content, particularly Korean, Japanese, Turkish, and Western dramas has influenced viewers' perceptions of self, community, and the global other. Through the lens of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory and informed by scholarship on cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridity, and identity negotiation, the chapter foregrounds the agency of Mizo viewers in navigating and responding to global media flows. It interrogates how new cosmopolitan imaginaries emerge not through cultural erasure but through affective alignment, aspirational identification, and moral discernment.

The chapter begins by contextualising the emergence of global television consumption within Mizoram's socio-cultural milieu. With increased internet access, exposure to OTT platforms, and the proliferation of dubbed transnational content, Mizo audiences, especially youth and urban populations are now embedded in a media environment that transcends linguistic, geographic, and religious boundaries. These changes have catalysed new ways of imagining the self in relation to global narratives and lifestyles, generating a complex terrain of identification, rejection, and selective adaptation.

The data, gathered through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, reveals that audience reception in Mizoram is deeply mediated by factors such as age, gender, religiosity, and cultural capital. Participants from different generational cohorts decode media texts in divergent ways. Older viewers often express anxiety about moral decay, cultural dilution, or religious contamination, concerns that mirror earlier societal reactions to Hindi serials and cinema. In contrast, younger viewers exhibit a more nuanced engagement with foreign content, blending admiration for global aesthetics with a strong sense of cultural rootedness. This dual sensibility aligns with Ulrich Beck's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism," in which global

openness is not antithetical to local allegiance but rather coexists in negotiated harmony.

One significant theme explored is the formation of aspirational modernities, wherein Mizo viewers draw on the lifestyle representations, gender dynamics, and emotional vocabularies of foreign television to recalibrate their aspirations. Korean serials, in particular, are perceived as models of emotional subtlety, romantic decorum, and aesthetic sophistication. These dramas offer alternatives to both the hypermasculine Bollywood hero and the moral rigidity of conservative Christian expectations. Viewers identify with characters not necessarily because of cultural similarity but because of the emotional intelligibility and moral plausibility of their narratives. This dynamic suggests the emergence of what Appadurai (1996) calls “imagined worlds,” where individuals align with affective communities beyond the nation-state.

Another key finding pertains to gendered readings of television content. Female viewers often see transnational media as a space to challenge patriarchal constraints and imagine alternative gender roles, even as they acknowledge the limits imposed by Mizo custom and church doctrine. Some articulate a desire for greater public representation and emotional expression, finding resonance with female protagonists in Korean and Western dramas. Yet, this identification is not uncritical, viewers selectively internalise values that affirm dignity, reciprocity, and emotional depth, while rejecting elements seen as overly liberal, vulgar, or spiritually inappropriate. Male viewers, on the other hand, exhibit ambivalence, often oscillating between admiration for global sophistication and defensiveness about perceived cultural emasculation. These gendered responses reveal how television functions not only as entertainment but as a site of identity rehearsal and social critique.

Importantly, the chapter documents the persistence of religious filtering among viewers, even in informal settings. Despite access to uncensored streaming content, many Mizo Christians remain vigilant about religious references, particularly those involving non-Christian deities or rituals. While some viewers skip scenes they find offensive, others reinterpret them through a Christian lens or discuss them critically in peer groups. This indicates a deep-seated moral compass that shapes even private

viewing habits, reinforcing the church's enduring influence in the moral imagination of Mizo audiences.

A fourth theme explores the rise of media-enabled cosmopolitan ethics. Several participants describe how exposure to global suffering, diversity, and relational complexity in transnational television has expanded their sense of empathy and ethical awareness. Shows that address issues such as disability, elder care, class conflict, and mental health prompt reflective dialogue and recalibration of personal values. Rather than leading to cultural alienation, these encounters nurture what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls "cosmopolitan concern" an ethics of care that transcends one's immediate cultural group.

The chapter concludes by arguing that transnational television in Mizoram is not experienced as a one-way imposition of foreign values but as a complex, multi-directional process of meaning-making. Mizo audiences decode media content through a hybrid matrix of Christian ethics, traditional norms, and global aspirations. The emerging cosmopolitanism is thus partial, contested, and situated, it reflects neither a wholesale Westernisation nor a rigid cultural insularity, but a flexible engagement with the world that is both critical and hopeful.

Ultimately, this chapter affirms the interpretive agency of viewers and their capacity to reframe global content in ways that resonate with local experience. In Mizoram, as elsewhere, television serves as both a mirror and a map, a surface of reflection and a guide for navigating an increasingly interconnected moral and cultural landscape.

Chapter VI:

Conclusion

This concluding chapter synthesises the multi-layered findings of the thesis, bringing together the historical, theoretical, and empirical analyses to assess the cumulative impact of transnational television on Mizo culture, gender dynamics, media institutions, and audience reception. It reflects on the central argument that while transnational television introduces new imaginaries and cultural forms, its effects are always mediated by the existing socio-religious, historical, and institutional structures that shape Mizo identity. Employing Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and drawing from concepts of deterritorialisation, hybridisation, glocalisation, and cosmopolitanism, the chapter articulates the resilience, complexity, and adaptability of Mizo society in the face of accelerating global media flows.

The first key insight revisits the foundational cultural shifts brought about by Christianity and colonial education, which not only dismantled pre-colonial institutions like the Zawlbuk and rituals such as Thangchhuah, but also reframed indigenous values such as Tlawmngaihna within a Christian moral framework. These early interventions laid the groundwork for a society that was already predisposed to negotiating external influences- cautiously, selectively, and reflexively. Transnational television thus entered not a cultural vacuum but a media ecology marked by historical realignments and moral gatekeeping.

The second insight concerns the role of dubbing studios as powerful cultural intermediaries. Far from being neutral translators, these studios operate as agents of soft censorship and religious preservation. Through linguistic manipulation, content editing, and strategic scheduling, they recode global media to fit Mizo-Christian worldviews, effectively re-encoding the encoded. Their practices demonstrate how media localisation in Mizoram is not a passive reception of foreign narratives, but an active moral and cultural filtration that aligns with local expectations. These studios also operate within a pragmatic ethics of piracy, sourcing content informally yet justifying their actions through the lens of cultural access and audience service. In

doing so, they negotiate legality, economics, and ethics in ways that underscore the peripheral position of Mizoram in global media circuits.

The third insight centres on audience reception and the emergence of cosmopolitan imaginaries. Mizo viewers are not homogeneous; their interpretations vary by age, gender, education, and religiosity. Younger audiences exhibit a dual orientation, embracing global aesthetics and emotional narratives while reaffirming cultural and spiritual rootedness. Female viewers, in particular, use transnational media to reimagine gender roles and emotional agency, although these aspirations remain constrained by enduring patriarchal norms and ecclesial power structures. Religious filtering continues to shape even private media consumption, reaffirming the deep moral imprint of the Church in everyday life. Yet viewers also articulate ethical growth, enhanced empathy, and aspirational identification with global narratives, signals of an emergent, localised cosmopolitanism.

A fourth key contribution of the thesis lies in its theoretical synthesis. By situating Mizo media experiences within broader frameworks of cultural hybridity, deterritorialisation, and localisation, the study contributes to the literature on peripheral media reception in postcolonial contexts. It confirms that media globalisation is not a uniform process but one that is deeply entangled with local histories, ideologies, and institutions. In Mizoram, global flows are neither resisted nor embraced wholesale; they are negotiated through cultural logics, institutional mediation, and audience reflexivity.

The conclusion also revisits the research questions. The first- on the impact of transnational television on cultural values and gender roles is answered through evidence of both transformation and persistence. While certain communal practices have adapted or faded, core ethical values such as *Tlawmngaihna* endure in hybrid forms. Gender norms are increasingly questioned, yet institutional reform remains slow. The second question- on how Mizo audiences perceive and respond to transnational television finds that viewers are active negotiators who selectively internalise, resist, or reinterpret global narratives based on generational, moral, and emotional parameters. The third question- on the role of dubbing studios reveals that

they are crucial mediators who recode global messages through moral, linguistic, and ideological filters.

In conclusion, the thesis paints a picture of Mizoram as a culturally alert, morally conscious, and selectively cosmopolitan society. The local and global are not in binary opposition but are enmeshed in a dynamic interplay that reshapes identity without erasing its roots. The Mizo experience of transnational television is emblematic of postcolonial negotiations with modernity- cautious but creative, adaptive yet anchored. Rather than heralding the decline of culture, the advent of global media in Mizoram has occasioned a new phase of cultural authorship, where tradition persists not in opposition to change but through its careful and critical incorporation.