

## **Symbolic Annihilation in Mizoram Media: An Exploration of Women's Representation**

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Mizoram, located in Northeast India, has a high proportion of scheduled tribes (94.5%) and operates within a patriarchal societal structure. Despite a sex ratio of 976 females per thousand males in 2011 census, women face significant under-representation in media and public spheres. This study examines how media in Mizoram portrays women using case study methodology and content analysis. The findings reveal a pattern of limited visibility for women in critical areas such as politics and education. Women are predominantly featured in entertainment and beauty contexts, with print media, magazines, and billboards often reinforcing domestic stereotypes. Social media also reflects these biases, with women frequently subjected to derogatory comments. Utilizing UNESCO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM) and Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) criteria, the study identifies a substantial imbalance in gender representation. The results highlight the need for media reforms to challenge patriarchal norms and improve the portrayal and visibility of women in Mizoram.

**Keywords:** Gender structures, Women representation, Northeast India, Mizoram, Indigenous communities, Gender and media

### **Introduction**

In the fifth iteration of the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) in India, there was a notable occurrence where, for the first time, the number of women surpassed that of men. This occurrence indicates significant shifts within the society of the country. The government-conducted survey took place between 2019 and 2021 and revealed that the ratio of women to men in India is now 1,020 women for every 1,000 men (Ellis-Peterson, 2021). However, despite this demographic shift, women's social status in India has not yet achieved parity with that of men. The Women's Reservation

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Bill, which was initially introduced in the Indian parliament twenty-six years ago, still remains unimplemented. When looking at the proportion of elected women representatives in the national parliament, India's ranking is at 148th out of 193 countries (Anuja, 2021).

Simone de Beauvoir's assertions in "The Second Sex" (1949) highlight the vulnerable position of women in a society where they are raised amidst "a multitude of irreconcilable myths" about their gender (Kirkpatrick, 2019). These myths are significantly influenced by mass media, which plays a crucial role in creating, disseminating, and perpetuating societal beliefs. The mass media continues to blend and reinforce past myths with new ones, resulting in hybrid narratives that uphold the ideals of a dominant culture (McLuhan, 1959). The mass media contributes to the propagation and sustenance of myths that support patriarchal culture, influencing perceptions of women within society.

On a global scale, women are notably underrepresented in the media compared to men. Within the realms of television, radio, and print news, women's presence only constitutes a mere quarter (Rattan et al., 2019). According to the findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project's 2020 report, achieving gender equality in media might necessitate an additional 67 years. India's performance in terms of gender equality in news media has been variable, with significant progress observed in 2010 and 2015, followed by a sudden decline in 2020. In the Asian context, India ranked exceptionally low, securing the second-to-last position out of 16 countries in 2020. The methodology employed in this report involved the examination of 20 newspapers, 13 TV channels, 5 radio channels, and 7 news websites and Twitter pages belonging to 8 distinct news media entities. It is noteworthy that the sample was somewhat limited in geographic diversity, with only one newspaper hailing from Manipur and two Assamese TV channels representing Northeast India. Notably, no representation was observed from Mizoram. This glaring absence underscores the need to investigate and comprehend the extent of gender equality within Mizoram's media landscape.

Unlike other parts of India, Mizoram is a casteless indigenous ethnic society (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021). According to the 2011 census data, out of the total population of 10,91,014, the female population in Mizoram is recorded at 5,38,675. This translates to a sex ratio of 975 females for every 1000 males. Impressively, Mizoram boasts a sex ratio of 976 females per 1000 males, surpassing the national average of 940. This figure indicates that Mizoram might have the most favorable sex ratio in the entire country. Moreover, the state boasts a female literacy rate of 89.27 percent.

Mizoram is predominantly inhabited by scheduled tribes, and as a result, the media landscape is primarily controlled by individuals belonging to scheduled tribes. Within this context, Mizo men assume the roles of editors and proprietors of media establishments within Mizoram. This situation implies that Mizo women continue to represent a minority presence within media organizations (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021). Within the Mizoram Journalists Association, the only journalist association in the state, a mere 6 women out of a total of 144 members hold the status of accredited journalists. While women are involved as news anchors, radio jockeys, and news readers in both television and radio domains, the number of female journalists

remains quite limited. In the context of Mizo society, both women and minority groups face marginalization (Ratnamala et al., 2021). This highlights the necessity for an examination of how women's representation unfolds within the media landscape.

### **Women in the Mizo Society**

Mizo women take part in historical writings but are usually portrayed as passive characters. For decades, Mizo history has shown the dominance of patriarchal attitudes, which has encouraged the privilege of the male population (Hmingthanzuali & Chhange, 2020). The Mizo society operates within a framework of patriarchy, delineating clear roles for both men and women. Men hold significant sway within both the familial and societal realms. In instances where men exert authority over domestic and communal spheres, women assume subordinate positions, primarily serving and being associated with the male members of their families.

Historically, the Mizos did not inherently discriminate between genders at birth. Both male and female children were initially introduced to similar rituals. However, a shift in roles began to manifest as male children departed for the Zawlbuk, a traditional bachelor's quarters among the Mizo people. Conversely, female children remained indoors, receiving training in domestic tasks and were entrusted with the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings (Aleaz, 2005). Despite evolving career and professional dynamics for men and women over time, the tradition of assigning women the primary role in household management remains entrenched. This practice has seemingly reinforced the idea that childcare predominantly falls under the purview of women, potentially even more rigidly than in traditional times. Consequently, local hegemonic masculinity in Mizo society is unquestionably characterized by its supreme authority within the family, dominance in the public sphere, non-involvement in routine domestic duties and childcare, as well as economic affluence, among other factors. (Burgher & Flood, 2019).

Gender parity is nearly achieved in Mizoram (Kalita, 2015). Mizo women predominantly occupy workplaces ranging from governmental institutions to local markets. Within government offices, women make up 54% of the workforce, while in commercial establishments like restaurants, shops, and vegetable markets, they account for 71% of workers. Moreover, women form 62% of the workforce in stone quarries (Saha, 2017).

Despite women being employed on a large scale in offices and commercial establishments as well as in the service and labour sector, the dominance of the "Nexus of Patriarchy" has displaced women and minority groups from positions of influence and control. The presence of women in the workforce does not indicate their presence in a leadership position. In the Mizo society, the marginalization of women and minorities serves as an indication of gender inequality and human rights violations. (Chakraborty, 2008). Evidence of misogyny is observable in Mizo society, as exemplified by the symbolic burning of an effigy portraying a Mizo Member of Parliament (who was dressed in a woman's puan) during a protest opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (Mihai, 2020).

Examining politics through a gender lens also accentuates the gender inequality present within the state. Mizoram's electoral rolls have consistently displayed a higher

number of women compared to men (IANS, 2018). However, throughout the history of Mizoram's assembly elections, which commenced in 1972, a mere four women have been chosen for the Mizoram Legislative Assembly, and as of 2023, none have secured positions as Members of Parliament. Various factors have contributed to the discouragement of women's involvement in politics, including the notion that political engagement might divert women from their domestic roles and the perception that female participation in politics contradicts Christian principles (Vanlalthanpuii, 2019).

Mizoram is a Christian-dominated society, and even in the church community, Mizo women are a minority. The religion has become an important identity marker for the Mizos and Christianity has also played a role in incorporation and exclusion. In the 1930s, church elders expressed their discontent with one particular missionary, Edith Chapman. The local elders were not pleased that a woman, even if she was a 'white woman missionary,' had been appointed the Inspector of Schools (in the absence of a male missionary), a role in which she could exert power over them (Pachauau, 2019).

Since the embracement of Christianity in Mizoram, local women have been exempted from leadership roles and decision-making because of indigenous patriarchy. Despite their contributions, women are still forbidden from being ordained as Pastors or Elders, and the church's definition of women's gendered roles restricts it from acknowledging women as equals within the church (Vanlalthanpuii, 2019). The Baptist Church of Mizoram, the second largest church in Mizoram, ensures that a Pastor's wife accompanies him to his "workplace" permanently, i.e. pastors' wives are not permitted to work and a strict penalty is imposed for non-compliance (Pachauau, 2015).

Mizoram stands as a hub of civic organizations, with civil societies or NGOs constituting the primary framework within the state. Upon scrutinizing the coverage of local media on civil organizations, it was observed that while Mizoram's civil bodies received significant attention in newspapers, the civil entity MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuikhawm Pawl), designed to empower women in the state, did not receive the warranted significance (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2020).

Studies have been conducted to explore the roles of Mizo women within politics, the church, and society. Existing literature substantiates the prevalent marginalization of women across these domains, spanning from domestic life to religious practices and societal structures. Women are systematically excluded from assuming positions of authority within family, community, politics, and religion. The influence of patriarchy extends across both private and public aspects of women's lives. Nevertheless, there exists a necessity for a comprehensive investigation into how women are portrayed in media within the technological age and the resultant implications for the identity of women in Mizoram.

### **Representation of Women in Media**

The Media does not exist in isolation. It serves as a mirror, reflecting the socio-political, economic conditions of the society. When a society is patriarchal, the media is also patriarchal because it mirrors the social structure. Studies on how women are portrayed in the media have been the focus of much feminist media scholarship over the past years. Gaye Tuchman et al. (1978)'s foundational collection of empirical and

theoretical articles in *Hearth and Home* was one of the first to problematize women's media representations.

Gaye Tuchman studied gender representation in media from the lens of 'Symbolic Annihilation' in 1978. She mentioned that television and other media texts, such as women's magazines, do not depict women accurately. She pointed out that "from children's shows to commercials to prime-time adventures and situation comedies, television proclaims that women don't count for much" (Tuchman, 2000).

Women have often been omitted, trivialized and condemned by the mass media. George Gerbner describes this omission as symbolic annihilation writing, "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence, absence means symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner, 1972). A study of online news coverage pertaining to women in positions of governmental leadership unveiled the enduring presence of gender-specific narratives, which at times take surprising forms. Women were the subjects of a lesser number of original news stories when compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the reporting on women frequently incorporated both traditional feminine and masculine gender signifiers, alongside an increased focus on their sartorial choices. (Thomas et al, 2020).

According to the findings on the prevalent themes in the coverage of women in business, the print media portrays women in business poorly and regularly uses negative motifs to depict women in business. According to the survey, most of the negative themes used to characterize women in business are stereotyped positions, such as victims of misfortune or criminal activity. There are significant discrepancies in print media coverage between men and women, with men receiving more coverage. The negative themes, combined with gender differences in coverage, impact the growth of women-owned enterprises, as well as the corporate, private, and public image of women in business (Kiruku, 2021).

A study on Indonesian newspapers coverage of violence against women and girls found that the regardless of gender, sensitive values remains the same. Even though the general proportion was low, there were still certain trouble spots such as insensitive news stories in newspapers, with prejudiced language and exaggerated features. More than half of the samples failed to emphasize the social foundations of gender violence and to remind the society of its responsibilities, as well as to provide survivors and witnesses with contact information (Yusuf, 2023). A study done on English newspapers on the linguistic representation of Pakistani women in crime reporting found that women are more commonly found in crime stories than the stories of other themes. In crime stories, women were blamed for the crime using passive voice for reporting (Yasmin, 2021).

In spite of gains in women's rights and several developments in gender equality, a study on Nepalese newspapers implies that newspapers in the Nepali society keep reinforcing gender inequality by including very few women as news sources. Even when women are represented, they are frequently portrayed in gender roles in the newspapers. It is also mainly concentrated on an exclusive image of the upper caste metropolitan Nepali women (Koirala, 2022). When it came to India and Pakistan, researchers' analyzed the editorials of one newspaper each from the two countries and concluded that both newspapers provided substantial coverage of various women's

issues. However, they found that portrayal of women's concerns were framed negatively rather than in a positive or neutral manner. (Malik and Nawaz, 2021).

Indian's mainstream media content represents a masculine view of the world, and it primarily serves the interests of the upper-class, upper-caste, urban men, ultimately neglecting many newsworthy matters concerning women (Joseph, 2004). Research has shown that the Indian news media accepts the Indian rape culture, as it is a reflection of Indian patriarchy. It reinforces sexist, hegemonic, dogmatic, and prejudiced power structures in this process, which feeds into outdated beliefs about an "ideal rape victim." (Fadnis, 2023). Women's problems are not written on the first page of a newspaper unless it be a 'gruesome murder or a case of advertisements where their bodies are shown off to advertise beauty products or weight-loss medications which sets a sense of negative body-image to its readers' (Verma, 2006).

Empowerment is a targeted advertisement strategy in female-targeted magazines and rarely for the general or male audience. Advertisements showing empowerment ads typically featured slim body types with fair skin tones in women's magazines, while a more ordinary body type was featured in advertisements in men's magazines (Tsai et al., 2021). Advertisements in India portray women in three types: the first type shows women as a sexual object, the second type shows women as nurturing housewives, while the third type shows women as empowered, young and attractive. Women are not shown as equal partners but are often confined to homemaking and domestic chores (Nagi, 2014).

A discourse analysis on the representation of women in current Indian television advertising found that women are frequently associated with conventional gender roles, sexually stereotyped as sexual incentives for the consumer. The study deconstructs the brand's rhetoric by propagating a prejudice of 'women's beauty' as only one type of beauty, i.e. fair skin and scant clothes—which becomes necessary to achieve everything in life (Nath & Saha, 2021).

The content analysis of representation of women in Mizo magazines revealed that women were treated as commodities and the coverage is mostly focused on health, beauty, romance and celebrities (Ratnamala et al, 2019). The available literature reveals that women are negatively portrayed by the media and not shown as equals to men. The media around the world tends to reinforce gender inequality in their news coverage. The advertisements tend to sexualise and stereotype women. The media reinforces sexist, hegemonic, dogmatic, and prejudiced power structures of the society. But rarely any study on how Mizo women are represented in the media.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In 2012, UNESCO released Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM) to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the media. Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media are divided into two categories: Category A: gender equality in media organisations and Category B: gender portrayal in media content. This study employs the category B: Gender portrayal in media content i.e B1: Gender portrayal in news & current affairs B2: Gender portrayal in advertising (Lourenco, 2016).

Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) argues that democracy is often built on three key tenets, freedom, equality, and control. These principles are not just norms

but also functionally and structurally connected to each other. The democratic media functions are freedom, equality and control. Freedom as a principle in civil society has often been defined in terms of communication rights to hold opinions and to receive and convey information. Control, as a paradigm of communication and power, implies that the media must serve as a watchdog for the people, keeping public officials liable. Equality requires that no preferential treatment be given to those in positions of power, and that opposing or differing viewpoints, perspectives, or assertions be given equal access to the media. Equality requires the lack of prejudice or bias in the quantity and type of access provided to channels on equal terms for all alternative voices to a possible greater extent. According to McQuail, if we have the right to communicate, everyone should have the equal opportunity to hear and be heard (Núñez-Mussa et al., 2022). The present study analyses the coverage of women in the Mizo media in terms of UNESCO GSIM and equality of MDM.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized the case study method as its primary research approach. This technique was employed to comprehensively explore the research problem. Case study research is particularly effective at enhancing the understanding of complex subjects or phenomena and can build upon existing knowledge derived from prior research. It places a strong emphasis on conducting in-depth contextual analyses of a limited number of events or situations and their interconnectedness.

According to Robert K. Yin, the case study research method is an empirical investigation that examines contemporary events within their real-world context. This method operates in situations where the boundaries between the event and its context are blurred, and it relies on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1984). To select the four case studies, the study followed the criteria set by UNESCO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media, specifically focusing on gender portrayal in news, current affairs, and advertising. For data collection in these case studies, the research team employed content analysis. This content analysis method was applied to investigate how women are depicted and represented in various forms of media, including newspapers, magazines, billboards, and social media platforms.

To study the portrayal of women in print media, the decision was made to examine the content of both Mizo and English newspapers during the years 2019 and 2020. Following the methodology described by Wimmer & Dominick (2003), which commonly involves a multistage sampling process, this study employed three key stages: the selection of content sources, the choice of dates, and the selection of specific content for analysis. In the initial stage, two newspapers, namely *Newslink* and *Vanglaini*, were chosen as representative dailies for this study based on their circulation in Mizoram. It is important to note that Mizo newspapers are not published on Sundays for religious reasons. As a result, two constructed composite weeks from each of the years 2019 and 2020 were selected for examination. These composite weeks were created by selecting one day from each month, following a pattern where, for instance, Mondays in January, Tuesdays in February, Wednesdays in March, Thursdays in April, and so forth, were included. The unit of analysis encompassed any content related to women. This included all articles, editorials, photographs, and

letters to the editor that pertained to topics related to women.

In order to analyse how women are depicted in magazine advertisements within the print media, the research focused on Diktawn's monthly magazine, which was selected due to its widespread circulation. To conduct the analysis, six issues from the year 2019 were chosen using a systematic sampling approach. Specifically, every alternate monthly issue was included as a sample for examination. In this analysis, the research honed in on a specific aspect of the magazine content. Specifically, only the middle page or poster page within each selected issue was singled out for detailed analysis.

For a case study of portrayal of women in hoardings, hoardings displayed on the streets of Aizawl city, by government, non-government or the commercial advertisements, were selected using a systematic sampling by choosing the alternate displays between February and March 2019.

For the purpose of examining how women are depicted in social media, the initial stage of the study involved the deliberate selection of Facebook as a representative sample platform, considering its widespread usage in Aizawl. Within Facebook, the 'Zosap Photographers' Society' was chosen as the focal group due to it having the highest number of members. The content for analysis consisted of all the memes that were posted during the months of February and March in the year 2019, which were selected as the sample period.

## **Findings**

### *Coverage of Women in Mizo Newspapers*

Table 1 illustrates that in 2019, Newslink featured a total of 2.5% reports on issues and stories related to women, while Vanlalnini had 3.58%. In 2020, Newslink increased its coverage to 4.33%, while Vanlalnini's coverage remained at 2.5%.

Table 2 reveals that Vanlalnini predominantly published articles concerning women in the third page, designated as the Youth Section, whereas Newslink predominantly featured such articles on the fourth page, known as the sports and entertainment section.

Table 3 presents categories such as Entertainment, Sports, Politics, Women's Issues, NGO-related news, and Crime or Rape-related stories. Concerning news related to women's issues, the Entertainment category received the highest coverage, focusing on topics like celebrities' personal lives, relationships, and careers.

### *Representation of Women in the Mizo Magazine 'Diktawn'*

Table 4 demonstrates that 75% of the posters featured women, while men were represented in only 25% of the center spreads within the magazine. Table 5 highlights that among the 12 posters extracted from the six chosen issues of Diktawn monthly magazine, a substantial majority of 10 posters featured women, with just 2 posters showcasing men. The women featured on these posters primarily included professional models, singers, actresses, and pageant winners. Notably, their attire and poses often emphasized their physical attributes. On the other hand, the posters featuring men depicted footballers engaged in various action shots of them playing the sport.



*Women in hoardings*

Figure 1 presents a billboard advertisement from a roof manufacturing company, accompanied by the slogan ‘stunning at the Top!’. The image features a woman wearing a vibrant red hat, adorned with a striking makeup. The company’s intention and the significance of their slogan become evident as they use the woman with the red hat as a symbolic representation of their product, implying that their steel roof is exceptionally stunning. The choice of a bright red hat for the woman mirrors the color of their product, which serves to convey a sense of vitality and strength. Furthermore, the use of the color red is deliberate, as it is known for its ability to capture attention effectively. This aligns perfectly with the tagline, creating a compelling visual synergy between the image and the accompanying message.

Figure 2 showcases an advertisement created by PRAN, a company promoting a variety of toast flavors. The advertisement features a married woman dressed in a saree, carrying a tray with tea and toast. She is depicted slightly bending down, suggesting a subservient posture in relation to those she is serving. The choice to include a woman in the advertisement aligns with traditional gender roles, where women are often associated with domestic responsibilities. Notably, the woman in the advertisement is identified as a Hindu non-Mizo woman.

Figure 3 is an advertisement promoting a wardrobe, and it features Miss Mizoram 2018 endorsing the product. In the image, she strikes a pose to support the product’s promotion. It’s important to note that in Mizo society, women are traditionally responsible for handling the washing and laundry of clothes for their families.

Figure 4 represents a Public Service Announcement (PSA) created by the Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation Department (UD&PA) as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission chapter. The PSA is accompanied by a message emphasizing the importance of maintaining clean toilets for the nation’s development, a crucial aspect in the context of a developing country like India. However, the image in the PSA does not appear to have a clear connection to the message being conveyed. The girl featured in the photograph is not associated with the Swachh Bharat Mission as its ambassador. This mismatch between the image and the message can be seen as reinforcing gender stereotypes related to domestic roles for women.

### **Representation of women in memes shared in a social media group**

The Facebook Group known as ‘Zosap Photographers’ Society’ has been observed posting a multitude of offensive and crude pictures of women. This group seems to serve as a platform for derogatory humor and the exploitation of women.

Table 6 presents data indicating that between February and March of 2019, there were a total of 458 posts made within this group. Among these posts, 279 featured women, accounting for 60.9 percent of the total. The remaining 179 posts primarily consisted of memes related to the United Pentecostal Church (UPC), with 67 posts in this category, followed by jokes about Lunglei District, humorously referred to as ‘02’ due to its district number, making up 57 percent of the remaining posts. The remaining 55 percent comprised various other jokes and memes related to daily life.

Among the content posted in this group, some memes were particularly insensitive. For instance, one meme ridiculed a bald woman with a caption questioning if having

a bald head is evil. This meme was satirical, and a personal photo was used without the individual's consent. Another meme featured a picture of a provocative model with a caption suggesting that every man would desire to be intimate with her.

It's worth noting that despite the group description stating it is intended for individuals above 18 years of age, there doesn't appear to be a robust age restriction in place. Additionally, some of the posts within the group included content that objectified and made derogatory comments about women, such as referring to them as "gluttons with sexy photos" or asking for mentions of women who have transitioned from being tomboys to ladies.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals a notable lack of women's representation in the print media within Mizoram. Although there are occasional reports and articles featuring women, these tend to be relegated to the entertainment section, primarily focusing on international celebrity relationships or local celebrities' song releases and beauty pageant-related stories. Regrettably, the professional accomplishments and expertise of women in areas such as politics, bureaucracy, education, and sports are often overlooked and marginalized. This situation has the potential to influence younger generations, as they primarily engage with media through print and social media platforms. It may inadvertently shape their perspectives in a manner that regards women primarily for their entertainment value, neglecting their significant contributions in various fields. Furthermore, the researchers observed a glaring absence of female columnists in the two prominent English and Mizo newspapers in Mizoram. An editor from Vanglaini, a local Mizo daily, recalled a single female columnist in 2014, specifically during a phase when the paper featured a fashion column.

Additionally, the study unveiled a lack of substantial coverage of women's issues within editorials and op-ed pages. Among the news reports scrutinized, only one editorial discussed topics related to women, specifically focusing on the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), a women's umbrella NGO. The study also sheds light on how magazines tend to depict Mizo women as objects of sexual desire. Within the examined magazine, a significant majority, constituting 75%, of the models were women, whereas men represented only 25%. The male models were typically showcased as athletes engaged in various sports activities in the posters. In stark contrast, the female models were often portrayed in a provocative manner, wearing sheer clothing to captivate the readers' attention and potentially boost sales.

These female models were drawn from a wide spectrum of professions, including models, singers, and actresses, thereby establishing a high standard of beauty. According to this standard, only fair-skinned and slender women are considered desirable. The researchers' work shows how women are misrepresented and stereotyped by the hoardings put up on the streets. In Figure 1, we can find that the woman in the hoarding has no relation to the product being advertised, which is a roof company. The woman is shown in the picture just to capture the attraction of passersby and to be used as an object of gratification by the viewers. The same can be seen in figures 2, 3 and 4 where the product or the service in question has no relation or necessity of a woman posing in the hoarding. There are no women-centric products

as such where it would be necessary to have a female model. The hoardings also point toward the domesticized role of a woman to take care of the household and serve the family. The Mizo society is patriarchal, where every decision is made by the male head of the family. Thus, the stigmatization of a woman's role as a homemaker, who is supposed to take care of her husband, children and household chores is reflected in these hoardings.

An extensive analysis of one of Mizoram's most popular Facebook groups reveals a troubling pattern where women are subjected to derogatory and inappropriate comments. Remarkably, it is challenging to find similar comments targeting men in the same manner, as the negative focus primarily centers on women. The study, conducted over a two-month period, reveals that a significant 60.9% of the posts were related to women, and unfortunately, these posts were predominantly unfavorable in nature. The content of these posts either aimed to defame women or engage in mockery based on their physical appearance. This unsettling trend underscores the prevailing mindset within the general public concerning the position of women in Mizo society. Examining the findings through the UNESCO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM), categorized into gender equality within media organizations and gender portrayal in media content, it becomes evident that Mizoram, across diverse platforms such as print media, magazines, hoardings, and social media, exhibits a low score. There is a lack of gender equality in media organizations, and gender portrayal in media content is also unequal and reflects the prejudiced power structures existing within the community.

Regarding the three tenets of democracy outlined by the Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) – freedom, equality, and control – the study reveals a deficiency in two of these principles within the state of Mizoram. The concept of equality, which necessitates impartiality and unbiased access to channels for all alternative voices, is found lacking. The study highlights that women in Mizoram face limitations in voicing concerns related to their rights and struggles, with their contributions often confined to the realm of entertainment rather than addressing substantive issues. This discrepancy raises concerns about the inclusive representation of diverse perspectives and the need for a more equitable platform to address and amplify the voices of women on substantive issues within the democratic framework.

### *Women & Domesticity*

The research findings have demonstrated that print media and billboards tend to depict women primarily engaged in domestic roles, often associated with tasks such as dishwashing, laundry, and kitchen work. Case Study No. 3 provides a clear illustration of how these billboards perpetuate stereotypes and misrepresent women when displayed on the streets. In Case Study No. 1, the available data indicates that women have limited representation in Vanglaini's advertisements, accounting for only 1.20% of the total advertisements. Within this small percentage, women are frequently portrayed in a manner that seems designed to cater to male visual satisfaction. They are often depicted wearing revealing clothing, exposing a significant portion of their skin, or featured solely in advertisements related to household items, kitchen products, or domestic contexts.

### *Women & Beauty*

The study reveals that women are consistently held to stringent beauty standards, with advertisements often depicting them as having fair complexions and slender figures. Notably, the models featured in these advertisements are frequently seen wearing heavy makeup. Furthermore, in both Case Study No. 2 and Case Study No. 4, the women showcased in these ads are typically celebrities or pageant winners. These representations in advertising reinforce elevated beauty ideals while disregarding the promotion of positive body image concepts.

### *Absence of fair and equal representation*

In Mizoram, there is a conspicuous absence of fair and equitable representation of women in the media. Instead, women often find themselves objectified, marginalized, and subjected to stereotypes. This absence of women's representation in the media reflects and reinforces broader societal constructs. This underrepresentation extends to leadership roles across various institutions such as churches, NGOs, and politics. Women are typically relegated to the role of "assisting" male leaders in these organizations. In social gatherings, they are often expected to serve tea while men engage in discussions on significant matters. This prevailing attitude diminishes the perceived value of women as decision-makers. Within the hierarchy of roles in churches or NGOs, women are frequently assigned positions like "Secretary" or "Treasurer," based on the assumption that they are more suited to managing finances or maintaining records of the organization's affairs. Historically, women have often been deemed unworthy of assuming leadership positions, a perception ingrained since earlier generations. Even when Mizo women are employed in government offices and private institutions, they may face societal scrutiny and blame if they prioritize their work over domestic responsibilities at home. These deeply ingrained patriarchal norms are reflected and perpetuated by the media.

### *News placement*

The current study's results reaffirm the lack of democratic representation within the media landscape of Mizoram. It highlights the enduring gender disparity in media coverage, both in terms of placement and subject matter. Notably, women's issues are notably absent from the front pages, effectively stifling discussions on women's concerns in Mizoram. Instead, women's news, particularly related to their physical appearance, predominantly finds space within the entertainment and fashion sections. These findings underscore the media's evident prejudice and bias when it comes to covering news and topics concerning women. A thriving democratic society necessitates a media that operates with freedom, objectivity, and professionalism. Media fairness encompasses two essential elements: objectivity and impartiality. However, an analysis of news coverage in Mizo newspapers highlights a clear bias and partiality when it comes to reporting on women. Magazine center spreads and billboards tend to objectify and demean Mizo women, freely utilizing their bodies for commercial purposes and perpetuating harmful stereotypes about their appearances. Even on social media, often considered a democratic space, toxicity

and misogyny run rampant. Mizo women and their bodies are frequently the target of extensive mockery and serve as the focal point of sexist jokes.

### *Women as media persons*

A significant contributing factor to this sexist coverage is the fact that most news and advertisements are primarily created by Mizo men. The underrepresentation of women in the media is further evident in the scarcity of women journalists in the state. Out of 193 members of the Mizoram Journalists Association, only 9 are women. The Mizo society does not actively encourage women to pursue careers in journalism or the media due to the irregular working hours and extensive travel requirements associated with reporting. This minimal presence of women in media workspaces can negatively impact the coverage of news stories related to women's experiences and struggles in society, leading to women being disproportionately featured in entertainment and youth-centric celebrity news.

Efforts are needed to showcase the capabilities of Mizo women beyond their external appearance and domestic roles. In the broader societal context, women are systematically excluded from positions of authority in family, society, politics, and religion, reflecting the pervasive influence of patriarchy. Patriarchy exerts control over women's lives in both private and public spheres, including their autonomy over their bodies. The discrimination and mockery of women exist not solely due to modern media technology but because of the deeply ingrained patriarchy within society.

### *Role of media*

The challenge lies in addressing the larger issue of patriarchy in society, as the media often becomes a tool that reinforces patriarchal norms and silences women's voices. Countering media misogyny requires tackling the root causes entrenched in patriarchal systems. The media can play a pivotal role in advocating for gender equality and dismantling harmful stereotypes present in media representations. Gender equality is primarily a matter of social justice, ensuring that individuals have equitable access to rights, resources, and opportunities. Therefore, women should have equal access, representation, and opportunities within the media. Discrimination against women in both media content and the workforce constitutes a violation of human rights. Media outlets should strive for objectivity and actively promote gender equality in their coverage. Women should be portrayed fairly and justly in media representations to foster gender equity.

Media can serve as a powerful tool to challenge the traditional ideology of patriarchal societies. It has the potential to depict social norms and constructs that are typically considered taboo in a positive light. By illustrating men and women sharing equal responsibilities both in the professional world and at home, media can influence the perspectives of younger generations and promote the concept of a society where gender equality is embraced. These findings emphasise the imperative for concerted efforts in fostering gender-inclusive policies and reshaping media narratives to empower women, ensuring their meaningful participation and representation in shaping the socio-political discourse of Mizoram.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of women-centric stories in select Mizoram newspapers

Newspaper	Total stories in 2019		Total stories in 2020	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Vanglaini	43	3.58%	30	2.5%
Newslink	30	2.5%	52	4.33%

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Placement of news on women-related issues

Placement	Vanglaini 2019	Vanglaini 2020	Newslink 2019	Newslink 2020
Page 1	25%	33%	42%	25%
Page 2	17%	0	25%	50%
Page 3	217%	158%	42%	33%
Page 4	42%	8%	142%	325%
Others	58%	50%	0	0

Table 3: Frequency of Themes of news on women

Themes	Vanglaini 2019	Vanglaini 2020	Newslink 2019	News link 2019
Entertainment	2.17%	1.58%	10.8%	3.17%
Sports	5%	2.5%	3.3%	8%
Politics	3.3%	2.5%	0	1.7%
Women issues/ NGOs	5.8%	2.5%	1.7%	4.2%
Crime/Rape	8%	8%	7.5%	2%
Others	8%	8%	1.7%	8%

Table 4: Posters in percentage

Posters (N=12)	Percentage
Poster with women	75%
Poster without women	25%

Table 5: Profession of celebrities on the posters

Total Posters 12 N	Model	Singer	Actor	Pageant Winners	Others (Men)
75%	8%	17%	8%	50%	17%

Table 6 Percentage of Facebook Memes

Posts	Percentage
Women	60.9%
UPC	14.6%
Lunglei	12.4%
Others	12%

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



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