

A REFLECTION ON THE EMERGENCE OF PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN MIZORAM

by

Dr. C. Lalmuansangkimi

Assistant Professor

IIMC, Aizawl Centre

clalmuansangkimi@gmail.com

Abstract

The print media in Mizoram has situated itself to remain one of the major mass media. One area of concern though is an increasing coverage of entertainment oriented stories and contents. One local Journalist quoted, “entertainment stories involving celebrities and socialites need to occupy huge pie of newspaper space, otherwise, how will we lure the young readers and sell our papers?” Such is the circumstance whirling many weekly magazines a touch of sensationalism is required so as to entice readers to which a large extent of their survival also depended. Also, typically, majority of personnel engaged in the Media industry are not trained professionals but learned on the job. On a positive note, the growth of Mass communication and Journalism in the country (India) as a whole has given rise to the growth in the number of trained professionals possessing enthusiasms and skills. Professional approach to the field is on the rise. There has now been a steady growth in the number of journalists having good experiences and competency. The print media has also opened up job opportunities for many young educated Mizos, which, to a great extent, would help solve the employment problem facing the State. It would, as well, make constructive contribution to the on-going progress and development of print journalism in Mizoram.

Keywords: Print Media, Local channel, Dialect, Mizo, Dubbing

INTRODUCTION

The Media industry in Mizoram, both print and Electronic Media is unsurprisingly dynamic and vibrant given the entrepreneurship attitude of the people coupled with demands of Media products and on-going Governments efforts to promote the industry. Even though, Electronic Media has a rather late entry into Mizoram compared to Print Media, it has progress along with the growth and development (particularly of Television and Radio). In short, it has not lagged behind in progress. In the Media scene of Mizoram, one noteworthy fact, however, is the almost non-existence of Cinema theatre/Hall.

Remarkably, during the late 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, cinema as an entertainment medium

gained popularity among the people of Mizoram. Audiences crowded to cinema halls as tickets were affordable to the common man, which was as low as one rupee. In fact, ranges of higher admission ticket prices were also made available for the financially able audiences demanding comforts. Sadly, the arrival of Small screen and in particular, VCR and Cable Television overshadowed the big screen and today, it has almost wiped it off from the Media scene of Mizoram altogether. The main reason for this desertion of the big screen is that people prefer to entertain themselves at home rather than going out to entertain themselves with the same kind of products, which are readily available at home.

Another desolating facet of the Media Industry in Mizoram is that only small fraction of locally produced movies/films are certified by Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). At the same time, locally produced movies (Mizo films as they are called) are being marketed and disseminated for public consumption mainly through the Cable system. It must be kept in mind that Mizo films are very popular among audiences in Mizoram.

A positive trend in the recent mediascape of Mizoram is the progress in new communication media such as Internet/Online Journalism/Convergence Media, Citizen Journalism and the general improvement in the awareness on the importance and “power” of Media among the masses. The availability of video transferring system in the internet has made it possible for the Newsrooms at the hub (Aizawl) to cover events taking place in other places of the state. Moreover, reporting and Journalism as a whole has taken a more vigilant as well as a rather aggressive tone as a trend brought in by the emergence of Online Journalism and its converging media, for instances, social networking sites, Blogs, Online public forum and so on. In the sameway, public participation has also been tremendously enhanced with the availability of online public forum and other interactive communication media. The emergence of Print and Electronic Media are both a stepping-stone in the history of Mizoram.

HISTORY OF PRINT MEDIA

The emergence of Print Media in Mizoram is traced back to the late 1890's. The Christian Missionaries from Britain pioneered and nurtured education among the Mizo tribe of Mizoram.

The consciousness on communication through print media such books, journal and newspapers begun with the publication of Christian literatures like tracts, Bibles and so on in the late 1890's and beginning of the 1900's. To a great extent, Journalism may be regarded as one of the many legacies brought about by Christianity in Mizoram. In the early days, printing machine was not available in the area, so most of the literatures were printed outside the region and the local publications were mostly of handwritten or done with typewriter.

The first Mizo dialect Journal "*MizoChanchinLaishuih*" edited by Captain J. Shakespeare IA, the then Assistant Political Officer/ Superintendent of the Lusai Hills came out in the month of August, 1898. By then, the pioneer Christian Missionaries had exposed a few native people to a literature and it was felt that there was a need to hone their intellects through constructive writings. The first journal was, thus, published. It was a hand written cyclostyled Newsletter. However, this publication was soon deserted. In a while, the then superintendent of the Lushai Hills, Captain J. Shakespeare, published a monthly journal "*MizolehvaiChanchinLekhabu*" again. The first publication came out in the month of November 1902. It was printed at Dina Nath Press, Syhlet. "*MizolehvaiChanchinLekhabu*" is the first consistently publicized monthly Journal in the Mizo dialect and the Editor of the Journal between 1911 to 1936, Mr. Makthanga was the first Mizo Editor. The 14 pages "*MizolehvaiChanchinLekhabu*" Journal included contributions of the first generations of literate Mizos. The contents of the Journal mainly comprised of Human-interest stories and Government activities. Its contribution to the people particularly among the intellectual circle was immense. Then the "*KristianTlangau*", a monthly mouthpiece of the Presbyterian Mission was published from Aizawl in 1911. The magazine is still in publication as of today. It is, in fact, the biggest monthly magazine in the state of Mizoram in terms of number of copies circulated at present. Also, in 1911, the first printing press known as "*Loch Printingpress*" in the region was launched. The name of this Printing press was later changed to "*Synod Press*".

Apart from government published journals, the Christian community / churches published a few more community oriented magazines. Among such papers was a monthly magazine named "*Tlawmngaihna*" (1934), a publication of Baptist Mission of Lunglei. The slant of this magazine was community services emphasizing on upholding positive Mizo traditions and culture such as "*Tlawngaihna*" (literally meaning altruism) and other constructive qualities

mainly through human interest stories. Another monthly KohhranBeng from the Baptist Church of Serkawn came out in 1947. This again is the mouthpiece of the church and is still in publication as of today. After these significant surfacing, many journals and magazines were published. They, indeed, contributed a great deal towards the development and promotion of education, political awareness and other positive traits among the Mizo readers.

The Journal that took up the development and preservation of Mizo literature as its main object was the monthly mouthpiece of the Lushai Students' Association (LSA), which came out in September 1938. The first few issues were circulated after an interval of three months. The first Editor was Mr. L. H. Liana. Unfortunately, the publication of this Journal ceased in 1980. The name of LSA was later changed to *MizoZirlai Pawl'* (MZP). The contents of this magazine included currents affairs, articles with patriotic tone, essays and other writings of purely literary nature. Mizoram witnessed a steady growth in the number of Newspapers and Magazine/Journals throughout the 20th Century. However, it must be noted that a local dialect daily newspaper and weekly magazine made a rather late entry.

The main reason for this may be lack of reliable and efficient printing press and shortage of funding and work force. September 1939 saw the publication of the first Mizo dialect weekly magazine "*TunHaptaChanchin*" (This week news) edited by Mr. Liankhuma. That same year (1939), the first daily newspaper "*Ni tin Chanchinbu*" (Daily Newspaper) was published by A.G. Mc Call ICS, the then Superintendent of Lusai Hills (1931-1943). Having realized the effectiveness of print media for creating and mobilizing public opinion, a local political party "*Mizo Union Pawl*" began the circulation of "*MizoChanchinbu*" (Mizo Newspaper/Journal) in September, 1946 co-edited by Mr.Thanhaira, Mr.Thangbuaia and Mr. Lalthlamuana. "*MizoChanchinbu*" is the first political journal in Mizo dialect. Then on 6th December, 1947 a rival local political party "*ZalenPawl*" began the publication of "*ZoramThupuan*" co-edited by Mr. Lalmawia, Mr. Thangruma, Mr. Lalrinliana and Mr. Rokunga. Theyear 1948 also saw the circulation of another Political party's appendage newspaper "*MizoArsi*" edited by Mr. H. K Bawichhuaka.

Newspapers and magazines are all community-based mouthpieces and do have a targeted readers

who read/speak Mizo dialect. Mizo newspapers / journals in good numbers started to appear in the State from the early 1990's onwards. The circulation of the paper and its survival depends to a large extent on its readership. One reason for the short life of some publications could have been that the pioneers took up Journalism on part time basis rather than as a full time profession. Under this circumstance, many newspapers were not able to withstand the test of time, financial shortage and "lack of professionalism". However, the factor, which contributes to the rise and growth of journalism among the people of Mizoram, was positive. Publications were mainly started with the aim of imparting information, education and entertainment among the people. Good number of personnel entered the field of Journalism with the aspiration of addressing social, economic, cultural and political issues that necessitated the bringing out of such publications. Another significant factor that contributed to the growth of journalism in Mizoram is the ever-increasing consciousness to protect and preserve their identity and also to perform the function of "watchdog" of Democracy. In fact, a new trend of journalism took shape with political parties taking keen interest in media. This trend is prevailing as of now.

Till the late 1990's, all the Daily newspapers followed a Newsletter size format. It must be noted that a standardized daily newspaper layout and format is a recent trend in Mizoram. At present, "*Vanglaini*" which began publication in 1978 is the biggest daily newspaper in terms of number of copies circulated. "*Lelte*" (edited by Mr. C.Dinthanga), an entertainment oriented Magazine is the biggest circulated weekly magazine. Respectively, a human-interest literature oriented Magazine "*Lengzem*" (edited by Mr. Vanneihluanga) is the biggest circulated Monthly magazine. The presence and well-organized functioning of Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA) may be attributed with the booming of Print Journalism in Mizoram. As of today, more than 200 full time journalists are covering events and incidences taking place in Mizoram and outside. There are about 100 Mizo dialect daily newspaper published within the state. "*Newslink*", "*Mizorampost*" and "*Highlander*" are three prominent English dailies published in the state. Apart from Daily Newspapers, a good number of Weekly and Monthly magazines are being published and circulated in Mizoram.

Besides Mizo dialect Newspapers and Journals, a sub-tribe "*Hmar*", "*Lai*", "*Mara*" and others has their own dialect Newspapers and periodicals either as an organ of Churches or non-governmental organizations /society/community. Moreover, many government departments and State wide

organisation also published Journals targeted at their own community or the general mass as a whole such as “*Hriselna*” (an organ of Directorate of Health Services), “*ThulehHla*” (a mouthpiece of the Mizo Academy of Letters), “*Meichher*” (a publication of Mizo Adult Education Wing) and so on.

The print media in Mizoram as a whole has a positive trend and growth. One area of concern, however, may be the high level of entertainment oriented stories and contents. One local Journalist quoted, “it is crucial that Hollywood and international celebrities stories must be extensively covered, otherwise, how will we lure the young readers and sell our papers?” Such is the case for many weekly magazines; they require sensationalized stories so as to entice readers to which a large extent of their survival also depended. At the same time, it must be noted that majority of personnel engaged in the Media industry are not trained professionals. In short, they learned on the job. On a positive note, the growth of Mass communication and Journalism in the country as a whole has given rise to the growth in the number of trained professionals possessing enthusiasms and skills. There are a more and more professional approaches to the field. There has now been now a steady growth in the number of Journalists having good experiences and competency. In addition, the print media has open up a job opportunity for many young educated Mizos, which, to a great extent, would help solve the employment problem facing the State. This would, no doubt, make constructive contribution to the on-going progress and development of Print Journalism in Mizoram.

History of Electronic Media with special reference to Cable Television

The emergence of Electronic Media could be traced back to the launching of All India Radio (AIR) as an auxiliary station in May 1966. Then, in 1975, Regional News Unit for AIR Aizawl was inaugurated. And on January 1977 the duration of the News Broadcast was extended from 5 to 10 minutes. From the very start, Radio has always played a momentum role as sources of Information, Education and entertainment among the people. Radio sets are available at an affordable price even for lower income group who could not afford a Television set. This could be the primary reason for its popularity among the people and in particular, rural areas. Prior to the coming of Television (specifically Cable Television), majority of people depended on Radio for information. News Broadcast in the local dialect is highly appreciated among Mizo dialect

speaking people. With the launched of FM Transmission (FM Zoawi Station) from AIR Aizawl in 2008, Radio has regained a good number of listeners tuning to Radio as a form of entertainment not only among rural people but also urban listeners.

In Mizoram, Television has come to the forefront as a Mass Medium only in the past 20 years and more so during mid 1990's. On the emergence of Television, there were two ignition points: the first was the relay of the Asian Games 1982 by Doordarshan from its first VLP Transmitter installed at Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl, the Capital of Mizoram. This telecast of Asian Games was witnessed and viewed by very few people as only small number of households owned a television set at that time.

Even for those who could afford a Television set, dull and developmental oriented Doordarshanprogrammings and Bangla channel lasting for few hours a day was the only available options. And when the solitary few soaps like mythological dramas: Ramayan (1987-88) and Mahabharat (1988-89) and Popular Bollywood Film songs Programme – “Chitrahhar” were televised, people viewed them with awe and stayed glued to their sets. Nevertheless, entertainment programmes were few and far between and could not satisfy people's needs. As such, apart from what Government owned broadcaster DD was offering, they were looking for entertainment option. They grasped Videocassette recorders (VCR) as an answer to their prayer. Pioneered by enterprising individuals, exhibiting films on Television screen using Video cassette players in residential homes on payment for admission was quite popular in the 1980's. The fares available were mainly Hindi and English movies and pirated western comedies, music, sports and game shows. During this period, Video Library was a good business. However, such kind of exhibition was technically illegal for some years until the Government of Mizoram enacted “The Mizoram exhibition of Films on Television Screen through Video Cassette Players Act, 1990”. The Act laid down certain rules and guidelines regarding granting of license, seating accommodation, license to exhibit only certified films and so on.

The second spark in television came in 1991 with the entry of satellite TV. It was Skylinks Cable networks (now ceased to exist), which took the initiative of Cable Television service in Mizoram. Skylinks Cable networks claimed it to be the first Cable operator not only in Mizoram but also in the whole of Northeast India. Skylinks Cable Networks was launched on

5th September 1991. They began distributing Satellite TV channels through cables to limited households in the southern part of Aizawl. Even though, some treated Cable Television with skepticism at first, many households began cabled up their TV mainly out of curiosity. To boost the popularity of Cable Television, the first local origination transmissions took place in Mizoram with the launched of LPS Vision Television Production studio in 1992. Then in 1994, Zozam also began producing local origination programmes. In the early years, local news round-ups, music videos and Voxpopuli were the main contents of local origination programmes. Apart from being ready entertainment, these local programmes have been instrumental in giving information in local dialect/language. When LPS started operating as a Local Cable operator, the first Local Cable channel devoted to local content came on the scene. It must be noted that the sole Cable Operator Skylinks relied on outside production houses for their local contents till 2002. By then several Cable Operators distributing satellite Television channels came up in different part of the state. These Cable Operators in different Districts and villages subscribe local programmes originated by the three Head-ends Cable Operators in Aizawl. These Local programmes are sent to them in the form of Compact Disc (CD).

Nowadays, Cable operators in Mizoram have three or more local dialect oriented Mizo channels to their credits. However, they could not devote their local channels entirely on local originated programmes. To run a 24 hours channel, the existing channels need about 10 fresh programmes to be on air 12 hours a day and they could not afford to produce such number of programmes due to financial as well as technical and personnel constrains. So, locally originated programmes such as News Bulletins, Documentary Films, Popular songs, Interviews, Talk shows and so on are telecasted at Prime time for about 5 to 6 hours i.e. between 5 to 10 pm. The same programme is played back the next morning.

Since the Local channels are run 24 hours a day, the Cable operators have to rely on English, Hindi and Mizo Films to fill up the slot. These days, the cheap dubbed foreign programmes such as Korean Serials and English Movies are very popular. Dubbing comes handy because Cable Operators are unable to produce an adequate amount of good programmes to fill up the Local Channels round the clock. Besides they are much in demand by the audiences and as such they are able to fetch more sponsorships and advertisements, which is the main source of revenue for

the Cable TV managements.

In Mizoram, LPS Vision Cable Networks pioneered the “Video on demand” channel with its “Music demand” channel launched in 2005. Viewers could choose a song of their choice with clicks on the telephone buttons. This is made possible with an amalgamation of Telecommunication, Cable system and Computer technology. Cable Networks in the states followed suit and now have 3 or more extra local channels in its favour.

Since around 2005, the programme qualities of the Local Cable Channels have improved immensely mainly as a result of better equipments. The Cable Networks have gone more or less digital. The Cable operators which started off with about 5 channels of Star TV could now offer 50 to 60 (approx.) Cable/Satellite channels to their viewers, they have much more to offer their viewers in terms of Local programme genres as well. This has, however, created more concern over what effects Cable television could have on its viewers.

The popularity of Local channels has not diminished the value of satellite channels among viewers. The major Satellite TV networks accessible for viewers include Star, Sun, Zee and Doordarshan. Each Network has a number of channels in its package.

Programming in Local Channels

Apart from Satellite Television channels, Cable Operators in Mizoram provided their viewers with daily news programmes, dubbed programmes, popular Hindi, English and regional films as well as Interviews, Live shows, reality shows based competitions and music videos which feature local artistes and musicians. Many of the programmes are inspired by both Hindi and Foreign satellite programmes. In terms of programme genres, Reality show/Live show, Local News bulletin and Dubbed serials and Movies (Korean serials, English and Bollywood movies) dominated the Local channels these days.

Local channels also air people's opinions (communicated through SMS or email or in writing) on current social issues and programming on the local channels as part of their regular feature. The opinion send in by viewers are telecasted without much editing. Apart from being a popular programme, they are useful for the Channels' management to generate feedbacks from the

viewers. In fact, none of the channels have undertaken any systematic audience research. So, feedback is usually received through informal means. One Producer admits that their programmes receive mixed responses but people by and large feel positively towards Mizo channels.

An interesting phenomenon in Aizawl and Mizoram as a whole is the dubbing of popular Hindi serials, like 'KasautiZindagi Ki', into Mizo. This dubbed serial was immensely popular among Mizo viewers during 2006-2007. One observer remarked that “Kurtas” and “Kolhapurichappals” were very much in trend among the youth especially among women during the heyday of KasautiZindagi Ki' serial. However, the Hindi serial was viewed by many people as a treat to indigenous culture and tradition and could lead to cultural degradation. A number of criticism were raised on local newspapers and on people's opinion programmes. Even some NGOs raised their concern about the matter as well. Under pressure and criticism, the Local Channels in consultation with each other made an agreement to stop airing the serial towards the end of 2007.

As the Director of Zonet put it, “The basic Mizo fabric is still there.” It is also felt that organizations like the Church, NGOs and the media maintain the status quo – “if a newspaper or a local TV channel is too westernized or too modernized...if it goes against the Mizo mind, then there is no chance for survival as of now” (Hasan 2008: 59).

Dubbed Hindi serials may have been discarded from the local Channels' time; Korean serials dubbed in Mizo are invading viewers home nowadays. These serials are extremely popular among the youth and in particular among female. An Editor at LPS Vision Comments, in Mizoram, there seems to be more tolerance and acceptance towards South-east Asian culture than “mainland” Indian Culture. The reason may be our Mongoloid root /connections, or perhaps the Mizos find it easier to identify themselves with their culture and lifestyle since we have similar physical structure.”

Recently, popular Bollywood feature films like “Bhagban”, “Kalhona ho”, “Rishte”, “Dhoom2” and dubbed in Mizo are beginning to dominate the Local Movie channels. Most of these dubbed programmes are produced by outside Production Houses. Since such programmes are much in demand by audiences, the Local channels bought these programmes from Production Houses on

reasonable price. Though the Local channels have improved both technically and in programme wise, it must be noted that serious and informative TV genres like Documentary films do not occupy sufficient space in the Local Channels.

On the other hand, Music videos have always been dominant entertainment programme. There are different channels devoted to different kinds of music videos from heavy metal to gospel and love songs. As such Music Video making is a booming business in Mizoram. Video producers charge between Rs. 6000 to Rs.10000 for shooting and editing a music video.

Mizoram being a pre-dominantly Christian society/state, Christian based programmes are regular feature in the Local channels. Among such programmes, “Nun Krista” an exclusive interview based show of LPS Vision, “Krista Rilru” and “Damna Kim” generated high viewership. In all the Cable Networks, Sunday is mostly dedicated to Christian based programmes such as sermon, devotional songs, Christian films dubbed in Mizo and so on. Gospel programmes are vital part of Local Channels’ programming. Besides telecast of such programmes, live coverage of important Church events, Conference, Gospel campaigns etc. are aired regularly.

As mention earlier, the programming that Local cable channels offer ranges from Mizo, English, Hindi films to local events like Festivals, fairs, religious discourses, civic elections, Local news, and favourite local sports. Practically, every cable operators (including “Sub-operators”) has a channel of their own. These channels often screened pirated or illegal versions of English and Hindi movies. However, the questions of piracy and copyrights violation charges have not yet distressed programming in Local channels. The reason may be that as one Local Producer puts it, “compared to other parts of India, Cable Television business and viewers in Mizoram is very small... only a tiny bit, not enough to damage or hurt any business in a real sense.... so authorities are not too concern about it”.

The real victim of Cable Television industry is, undeniably, Doordarshan. In an attempt to withstand challenges pose by Local Cable channels, Government owned Doordarshan Kendra Aizawl has taken certain initiative measures to reinventitself. Since 2007, they introduced live telecast of Mizo news (a 15 minutes news bulletin at 7:00 pm sharp daily). Recently on 15th August 2008, they’ve also started 5 minutes Headline news at 5: 30 pm for the benefit of

Churchgoers. In terms of coverage, the reach of Doordarshan Kendra Aizawl is very wide. DD Aizawl programmes are available for viewing in the neighbouring states of Manipur and Tripura. Since June 2008, they have also started a 30 minutes current affairs programme. To cater news stories, DD Aizawl presently have 18 correspondents / stringers stationed in different Districts.

On an average, 3 stringers are on rotation at all time. During the two and half hours of programming, apart from news Bulletin, DD Aizawl's contents usually include Documentary film, Live Phone-in show, music videos, Farmers' programme, interview and seldom Reality show based competition in collaboration with big organisations, for instance, Red Ribbon Choir Competition with MSACS.

Local News Service and Contents

Mizo channels are part of the boom in media activity in Mizoram. The director of Zonet remarked, in this connection, "the media awareness among the Mizos is always exceptionally high. We are less than 10 lakh people but we have more than 30 dailies in Aizawl only. And in the entire district quarters and the regional headquarters you will find a number of newspapers...and Mizo churches have their own bulletin regularly. Such is the awareness of the media among the Mizo people that it is particularly impossible to have a channel without the news". These channels claim that they have more credibility than the state owned media and news on the latter has to be corroborated by the former for people to believe it (Hasan, 2008: 52).

Local channels considered themselves as being on the forefront of providing local based news to viewers. Right from the time when Mizo channel was started, News bulletin has always been a significant element of programming. It is evident that news and current affairs programmes are perceived to be most in demand by local channels. One Media person pointed out that investigative news stories carried by the local channels can often compel the state government to address issues of local concern.

Producers stress the importance of public interest in their news stories and try to be as neutral as possible. Officials in the state run media also concede that the investigative reporting by local channels has created greater transparency in Mizo politics. People in these channels, who once worked for the government media, feel that they can now function in a far freer manner.

Commenting on this the director of Zonet said – “while I was in All India Radio...we didn’t dare...to broadcast any news which is against the government policy...Especially before the Mizoram Settlement was signed. There was insurgency in the state...many (sic) news was hidden... people...of course they were aware that many things that AIR broadcast was a lie...of course we have our own guidelines...we have our rule book. We follow that. As long as it is fact, as long as it is important and as long as it is relevant for the public we can carry it” (Hasan, 2008: 56).

Moreover, the implementation of the Right for Information Act has also helped the local media report on governance more efficiently and thus put a check on political corruption. Channels also claim to be free of influence from any “pressure groups” such as the Church or political parties or NGOs which all expect the media to be on their side. Cable television networks in Mizoram are the first among such channels to telecast live coverage of the entire proceedings of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. This is ostensibly done to keep the public informed. One Producer even claimed that their ‘truth telling’ can often upset a lot of people but that it is important for them to remain consistent in order to serve the public. But it is also conceded that the print media is freer and far more critical than the cable television channels though the latter enjoy more popularity (Hasan, 2008: 57).

In terms of News contents, the Local channels have a perception that Doordarshan is unable to compete with them in news presentation. As one Broadcaster pointed out “Doordarshan is a very constrained kind of public broadcaster which has got its own set of rules. Although after it became an autonomous body, it’s got some leverage, still there are so many things that it can’t do which we do. We are able to give in depth news, be more critical of the government...They have to give a lot of emphasis on the national news as well, which we are not bound” (Hasan, 2008: 53). As there is no broadcast code to restrain their production, Local channels, at the same time, are often accused of sensationalizing their news programmes to attract viewers. Doordarshan, having the image of a “serious channel” restrain by certain rules and regulations have lost its audience to the local cable channels.

Though it is mandatory for Cable TV to carry at least two Doordarshan channels, the Cable TV channels pose a serious challenge to Doordarshan in the country as a whole in terms of

viewership. However, Officials in Doordarshan Kendra Aizawl are not too antagonistic towards Cable TV channels and felt that they could be allies in propagating news about government policies and programmes. Moreover, private channels are seen as having far more time to dwell on local issues and events and therefore achieve a resonance with people that DDK-Aizawl is denied. One DD Aizawl Stringer comments, “In the Local Cable news, I often see news stories which would not be considered as newsworthy in Doordarshan”. Some Media professionals also felt that local channels give incessant and often irrelevant news to further their own agendas. As such officials argue that these channels need to be regulated.

On a positive note, however, local channels are seen as a platform for promoting local talent and culture and that their involvement in community affairs creates an emotional attachment towards them. Local channels have also been recognized as being instrumental in checking public corruption and practices of social evils. As far as the future is concerned, officials in DDK-Aizawl feel that the channel can still attract talented and trained young media professionals and therefore become more professional.

In terms of News presentation, local channels claimed that their news reporting is “free and fair” and that they are not trying to “project any sort of identity”. Even though, it is not deniable that Mizo channels are also extremely local, Media professionals claimed that Mizoram is abreast with latest developments in communication technology as well as keep the local community aware of worldwide developments. Programme officials interviewed stressed that they did not confine themselves to local issues only.

The director of Zonet put it emphatically – “...in my bulletin, I have three portions. The first one is local. The second one is national and the third one is international. Sometimes national and international news get more time than the local news. My subscribers will be very much aware about the latest news about Osama Bin Laden and the tussle between the UPA and the left on the Indo-US nuclear deal”. The coverage of national and international news by these local channels is, therefore, considered strategic and it is believed that it will encourage “Mizo people to feel part of a larger community...rather than just belonging to Mizoram.” (Hasan, 2008: 55)

Nevertheless, it is the local news stories, which attracted the viewers. Keeping in mind the on-

going competition among Local channels, they are under constant pressure to withstand their rivals as such the newsrooms have to contend with an expanding workload with respect to News coverage, often without expanding resources. In terms of News gathering and Production, one remarkable yet sad facet is the minimal role of news reporter and News Correspondent reporting from location.

In this regard, DD Aizawl fared much better than the Local Cable news. In all the three Local Cable News telecast, news “Package” (Combination of Sound bite and Stand-up) is very rare. News Reader reads (with or without footage / picture) is how the news story are mostly presented. In terms of news stories, the Local channels are greatly depending on Press Releases and the so-called “Write-up”.

In fact, the Cameraperson themselves perform the role of Reporter and prepared the “Write-up” or rely on the press hand-out. The use of so-called feed material is very inclined among Local channels. As a News Editor of LPS Vision pointed out, “For most government news, we are relying on Information and Public Relations office.... they could cover important official events taking place outside the city which are not easy for us to cover due to lack of workforce and other constrains.” Further he remarked that, “.... in the absence of credible information from reliable sources, there is no other choice we often resort to guesswork and on unsubstantiated reports in the Newspapers within the boundary of safe zone.” So as to avoid certain limitations and to manage themselves better in terms of News Production, the Local channels rely on “daybook” / “Engagement- book” stories (that is, stories about pre-scheduled events such as hearings, trials, meetings, exhibitions and press conferences usually kept in a file known as the daybook). Normally they do not have to blindly set out in search of newsworthy events.

As evident from the above account, the last decade and more so the past 5 to 10 years witnessed media boom in Mizoram started off by the introduction of Satellite Television. At the center of this growth and development is Aizawl city where the three head-end Cable Networks are located. An apprehension has always been there with regards to cultural imposition from outside. Furthermore, the nature of consumption of Cable Television channels and the production of Local channels is not unambiguous as it initially appears. Cable Channels are often criticize as being too business oriented and conscious. As a result, there is the added danger of interpreting

and manipulating our culture with slick production values.

On a positive note, Hasan, however remarked, “Although western cultural entertainment is undeniably a source of inspiration for television producers, the “influence” of mainstream Indian culture through Indian television channels has been equally powerful...but neither cultural force has eroded indigenous identity as is evident from producers’ emphasis on indigenous language, symbols and cultural codes in local programmes”(Hasan, 2008:67) This may be true but it is only a one-sided view. The Local channels’ contents and Cable Television programming as a whole is bound to have an influence over audiences at certain level per se, the author (of this paper) has conducted a systematic in-depth study on impact of Cable Television in Mizoram through contents and audience studies as her Doctoral study.

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