

## Print Media Representation of Conflict between Mizo and Bru with Special Reference to 16th Lok Sabha Election

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### Abstract

*The purpose of the study is to examine the media representation of conflict between Mizo and Bru tribes in Mizoram dailies. The sixteenth Lok Sabha election was postponed in Mizoram due to Mizoram-based civil society's 72-hour state bandh in protest against the EC's move to make Bru refugees vote in Tripura (The Times of India, 2014). The organizations demanded the Commission to allow the refugees to cast their vote in Mizoram, but their demand was turned down. The Bru voters exercised their franchise through postal ballot from April 1 to April 3. For years, Bru families have taken shelter in Tripura after they were displaced to Tripura from Mizoram following ethnic violence with the Mizo community. Apart from revising the poll date, the EC added that provisions will be made in subsequent Lok Sabha and Mizoram assembly elections to allow the displaced Reang voters to vote in their home state. It also utilizes relevant theoretical perspectives including Van Dijk's new(s) racism, minorities' representation in mainstream media, media and conflict theories, besides, Gramsci's hegemony. Content analysis is the primary research method used for this study. To evaluate the media representation, the Aizawl editions of the dailies were selected. One month samples from April 2014 of Vanglaini, Newslink, The Mizoram Post and Zozam times were chosen for the content analysis. These are the leading dailies of Mizoram. All the articles, editorials, photographs, letters to the editor regarding the conflict between Mizo and Bru are the units of analysis. The variables of the study are the sources in the article, the news language, the frequency of news occurrence and the themes.*

**Key words:** Mizos, Brus, Dailies, Content analysis, Media representation, Ethnic violence

### Introduction

Mizoram is a hilly North East Indian state dotted with different ethnic groups.

Perched on the southernmost tip of the north eastern region, Mizoram occupies an area of great strategic importance. It is bound by Bangladesh on the west and

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Myanmar on the east and south sharing a total of 722 km international boundary with two countries. It also shares borders with three states – Assam, Tripura and Manipur. The inhabitants of Mizoram are Mizos to outsiders; the word Mizo does not denote one single tribe. It is a generic term given to a conglomeration of tribes, e.g. the Lushai, Pawis (Pai), Lakher, Paite, Ralte, Hmars and Chakmas (Nag,2002).

The Brus are also known as Reangs who reside in the western part of Mamit district of Mizoram. The Reangs are the second largest Scheduled Tribe of the state of Tripura. They belong to the Mongoloid race and their dialect has been classified to the Austro-Asiatic group of Tibeto Burman family. Their dialect is known as *Polong-O*. It is also known as *Riang*. The Reangs have a large presence in the tribal belts of Tripura, as well as Mizoram. The displacement of Reangs (also known as Brus) in Mizoram relates to the demand by the Bru National Union for an autonomous district for Reangs in Mizoram. The estimates of Reangs displaced from Mizoram and living in the refugee camps of Tripura vary between 35000 to 41000.

Mizo politicians and organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) vehemently opposed the demand and see the Reangs not as indigenous to Mizoram, as the bulk of them are recent migrants. They see the demand for a Bru homeland as a scheme to split up Mizoram. But from the Reang activist view point, the demand

for a Reang homeland is justified (Baruah, 2003).

The sixteenth Lok Sabha election was postponed in Mizoram due to Mizoram-based civil society bodies' 72-hour state bandh in protest against the Election Commission's move to make Bru refugees to vote in Tripura (Halliday, 2014). The organizations demanded that the commission allow the refugees to cast their vote in Mizoram, but their demand was turned down. The Bru voters exercised their franchise through postal ballot from April 1 to April 3. For years, Bru families have taken shelter in Tripura after they fled Mizoram following ethnic violence with Mizos. Apart from revising the poll date, the Election Commission added that provisions will be made in subsequent Lok Sabha and Mizoram assembly elections to allow the displaced Bru voters to vote in their home state. The present study attempts to study how media represented the whole episode of conflict between Mizo and Bru with special reference to sixteenth Lok Sabha election held in April 2014.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study utilizes relevant theoretical perspectives including Appadurai's thoughts and Gramsci's hegemony. But to the researcher's knowledge there are very few comprehensive explanations of the coverage of the conflict between Mizo and Bru in Mizo dailies.

Ethnicity occupies an important position in the history, politics and governance of northeast India. Sanjib Baruah in his article “Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, Homelands, and the Crisis of Displacement in Northeast India” analyzed that demarcation of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups, protective discrimination regime and separate statehood and autonomous district council has shaped the political imagination of tribal as well as non-tribal activists of the region. The ethnic conflicts between citizens and denizens lead to internal displacement of denizens within Northeast India.

Appadurai proposes five factors that contribute to the global exchange of ideas and information in his 1990 essay ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’. He labels these five dimensions as “-scapes,” which are fluid and constantly shifting, just as cultures are. Within each of these –scapes, however, exist multiple realities, as an idea or image that changes its context depending on the spectator. With the meaning of ideas changing depending on the person ingesting them, one must then grapple with the existence of an “imagined world,” in which our reality is no more real than somebody else’s. The five scapes are ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, mediascapes and ideoscapes.

Ethnoscape refers to the migration of people across cultures and borders, presenting the world and its many communities as fluid and mobile instead

of static. He defined this as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world, and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.”

The other two –scapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes, deal with the national and international creation and dissemination of information and images. Mediascapes can be understood as the many media outlets (television, radio, newspaper, etc) that shape the “imagined world” we inhabit, where narratives and images are often the only way one forms an opinion about a place or culture. This study will deal with how the media is imagining the ethnic issue of Mizoram i.e the ethnoscape and the mediascape.

Gramsci used the term hegemony to denote the predominance of one social class over others (e.g. bourgeois hegemony). This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as ‘common sense’ and ‘natural’. Hegemony is the power of a dominant group accepted as both natural and legitimate by those who are dominated. This study will also look whether the media supports the dominant views of one social class over the other.

## **Review of Literature**

As per Harold Mendelsohn, the society cannot exist without communication and communication cannot exist outside a social system (Saeed, 2013). The society cannot exist without media and media cannot exist outside a social system. The media just reflects the social system where it exists.

The studies pertaining to “media and minorities” occupy a significant position in academic research all over the world. According to Oxford dictionary, the word minority means ‘the smaller number or part’ and ‘a relatively small group of people differing from the majority in race, religion etc’.

The portrayal of minorities in the mainstream media plays a significant role in any society. The media provides an important source of information through which citizens gain knowledge about their nation, and our attitudes and beliefs are shaped by what the media discerns as public knowledge. According to Van Dijk, media discourse is the main source of people’s knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, both of other elites and of ordinary citizens. Further he focused more specifically on the role of media and in particular the news which play a role in the reproduction of racial and ethnic equality in the multicultural societies of Western Europe and North America.

Media representation of minorities is always a matter of concern. The minorities are mostly portrayed negatively by the mainstream media. Van Dijk

speaks about new racism in the form of news in which racism is not shown directly but indirectly by showing the minorities as problem people and different from majority. He argues that there is subtle racism in the news media. In Europe, the immigrants are seen as a problem for the majority. ‘The immigration of the Tamil refugees to the Netherlands is represented as a threat to the nation and the social status quo by the Dutch dailies’ (Van Dijk, 1988). The immigration of Tamil refugees is described as invasion.

The Tamils are represented as terrorists who are themselves to blame for the situation in Sri Lanka, as kids of rich parents, as people who illegally enter the country, or as refugees who merely come here to live out of our pockets. In fact, they are portrayed as economic refugees instead of political refugees. He recommends the critical discourse analysis methodology to study the representation of minorities and the news racism in media (Van Dijk, 1988).

Gill Palmer investigated the representation of the Albanian immigrants in the Italian press using social semiotics method. The study posited that the Albanian immigrants are seen as a threat to the status quo of Italian society and to its symbolic geography and identity. They are represented as politically and culturally primitive people. The study combined a critical discourse analysis approach with semiotic analysis of visuals

to explain how language and visuals interact to create meaning and thus, to represent. The Albanian minorities are excluded and other European countries are included in the news representation (Palmer, 2002).

Ilse Devroe's study on media and multiculturalism in Flanders found that the immigrant ethnic minorities are often associated with problems and conflicts and newspaper articles show general bias concerning immigrants. However, findings of both everyday and crisis reporting show that immigrants who are allowed to speak directly are still rare. Even in relation to crime and justice, the topic immigrants are mostly connected to, they almost never get the chance to speak directly. The findings of the study on crisis reporting confirm this trend. Whenever immigrants are allowed to speak, it is mostly on topics such as 'human interest' and 'entertainment, art and culture'. By focussing on one side of the story, several articles stimulate a feeling of insecurity 'caused' by immigrants. (Devroe, 2002)

Gabriela Jacomella's media and migrations: Press narrative and country politics in three European countries is a study on Italian media and the portrayal of fear. It concluded that every newspaper seems to fall prey, at various degrees, to the temptation of inflating news and portraying the sensationalistic, simplified version of the story. The readers are therefore presented with a coverage that kicks off with strong negative messages, and an identification of the "migrant

issue" with disturbing concepts such as emergency, segregation, and cultural differences. A second relevant finding is the almost overwhelming absence of migrants' voices from the media coverage. The stereotype involves the (il)legal status of migrants, which is sometimes taken for granted, as if it were a feature of their very existence (Jacomella, 2010).

The book on *Media and Migration: Constructions of mobility and difference* edited by Russell King and Nancy Wood has documented how the media influence, shape or determine the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of British and European citizenry with respect to contemporary migration processes. This book highlights the relationship between media and migration primarily in terms of the media's representation of the figure of the migrant and of immigration issues, or of the language and rhetoric through which these are articulated and understood.

For Giovanna Campani (Chapter 3), the interests of media and political power in Italy are so inextricably intertwined that the type of coverage immigration received by the media will necessarily be dictated by the prevailing political agenda. Indeed, while one can find major politico-economic interests behind most national media ventures, Campani maintains that Italy constitutes a special, 'abnormal' case where 'all the information is ideologically controlled through implicit choices and depends on economic and political paymasters'. Precisely for this reason, the

media treats migration only in its most superficial and negative manifestations without considering how these are structurally related to the Italian system more generally. Thus the media is so fond of emphasizing the links between migration and criminality (Campani, 2001).

An article titled “Media and Stereotypes on Ethnicity: A Study of Framing Chakma Migration in Tripura” has attempted to analyze the media coverage on migration of Chakma refugees from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh to Tripura with reference to two leading newspapers of Tripura. The study concludes that the media coverage of Tripura Times and Dainik Sambad on Chakma migration from Bangladesh largely resulted in forming ethnic stereotypes that hold high potential in determining the public-Chakma refugee relationship. The study also suggests that absolute dependence of the newspaper on state sponsored advertisements may have resulted in its dependence and reliance on the state for information and advocacy over the Chakma migration from Bangladesh as suggested by the government and its affiliates (Deb & Charvak, 2016).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the extent of the coverage of the conflict during sixteenth Lok

Sabha election in the sample newspapers.

2. To locate the various types of the news being covered on the conflict.
3. To trace the various themes of news on the conflict during sixteenth Lok Sabha election which was reported.
4. To examine the kind of placement accorded to the news pertaining to the conflict, and
5. To investigate the vocabulary and lexical choice used in the text.

### **Methodology**

The method of content analysis is employed for the present study. The print medium was chosen for the study. According to Wimmer & Dominick (2003), most content analysis in mass media involves multistage sampling. This process consists of three stages: sampling of content sources, selection of dates and selection of content. According to Mass Media in India 2009, the principal dailies of Mizoram are *Vanglaini*, *Aizawl Post*, *Zozam Times*, *Mizo Aw*, *Tawrh Bawm*, *Highlander*, *Newslink*, *Dingdi*, *Hnehtu*, *Mizo Arsi*, *Romei* and *Mizoram Post*. It was compiled and edited by Research, Reference and Training Division, National Documentation Centre on Mass Communication and published by Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Both the English and Mizo dailies published from Aizawl were chosen for the study. They were chosen based on their circulation figures. The English dailies namely *The Mizoram Post* and *Newslink* were chosen for the study based on circulation. According to Registrar of Newspaper in India, there are 188 publications including daily newspapers, magazines and periodicals published from Mizoram. Among them only *The Mizoram Post* and *Newslink* are English dailies published from Aizawl.

*The Mizoram Post* is printed in Silchar and it is published from Dawrpui, Aizawl. The registration number of *Newslink* is 69023/98 and it is also sold for Rs.3. The *Vanglaini* and the *Zozam Times* were the two Mizo dailies from Aizawl selected as samples for the study.

Issues of one month sample dailies from April, 1 to April, 30, 2014 were selected for the study. All the articles, editorials, photographs, letters to the editor regarding the conflict between Mizo and Bru were the units of analysis. The variables of the study were the sources in the article, the news language, the placement, the size of the news item, the frequency of news occurrence and the themes. The coding schedule was prepared and finalised after review of literature.

Data collection for the content analysis was achieved by coding each item within a sample newspaper directly into a Microsoft excel sheet across each of the categories of the content analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data collected from the newspapers employing content analysis. Frequency distributions and percentage distributions, was used.

### Categories of the Study

Five content categories were developed drawn from previous studies such as the sources in the article, the lexical choice, the frequency of news occurrence and the themes.

### Operational Definitions

- “News” is the timely report of events, facts, and opinions that interest a significant number of people. Here “News” also means a direct, matter-of-fact rendering of events related to the conflict.
- Frequency of news - within the sampling period, the appearance of the news story.
- Lexical choice - Use of a word with positive or negative connotations.
- Themes – News and photographs on Bru participation in polling, news and photographs on bandh called for by the NGOs, Bru repatriation, Bru politics and Lok Sabha polls.
- Sources – Views of official sources, views of politicians and views of victims.
- Space – The news stories with 4 columns, three columns, two columns and one column.
- Placement - Front Page, other pages.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the News Occurrence**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	Total No of news Frequency N=30	Percentage Distribution
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	11	36.66
2	<i>Newslink</i>	19	63
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	17	56.66
4	<i>The Zozam Times</i>	15	50

As show in Table 1, there was more coverage in terms of frequency of news occurrence in the newspapers. The *Newslink* published more frequently on this issue. Both the Mizo dailies *Vanglaini* and *The Zozam Times* gave fair coverage of this issue in terms of frequency.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Placement**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	Placement in Front Page	Placement in other pages	Percentage Distribution of Front Page placement
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	9	2	81
2	<i>Newslink</i>	19	0	100
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	9	8	53
4	<i>The Zozam Times</i>	9	6	60

Table 2 shows that *Newslink* published all the articles on this issue in the front pages. *Newslink* is a four page daily and the front page is devoted for the state i.e. Mizoram news. Hence all the 19 news items on the issue was published in the front page. *The Mizoram Post* also published them mostly on the front page.

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of the Size of the Stories**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	5 column stories	4 column stories	3 column stories	2 column stories	1 column stories
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	0	2	5	0	4
2	<i>Newslink</i>	0	8	9	0	2
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	3	7	4	2	1
4	<i>The Zozam Times</i>	4	3	4	3	1

All the sample dailies gave importance to this issue in terms of space. *Vanglaini* and *The Zozam Times* published 5 column stories on this issue. (Table 3)

**Table 4: Frequency of the Themes of the News Items**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	Bru Participation in polls	Bandh	General news on Lok Sabha polls which mentioned about Brus	Brus repatriation and Politics	Negative news
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	4	4	0	2	1
2	<i>Newslink</i>	5	5	2	3	4
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	2	7	4	3	3
4	<i>Zozam Times</i>	3	7	2	4	1

Most of the news on Bru participation in polls and bandh by Mizoram based civil society associations were published in the sampled dailies during the sampling period. News on Brus repatriation and politics were given less importance. All the sampled dailies have also published negative news on Brus (Table 4).

**Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Photographs Published in Select Newspapers**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	Frequency N=30	Percentage distribution
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	5	16.66
2	<i>Newslink</i>	8	26.66
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	5	16.66
4	<i>The Zozam Times</i>	5	16.66

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, very few photographs on the issue were published in all the dailies. Only *Newslink* published eight photographs and other dailies published only five photographs.

**Table 6: Frequency of the Themes of the Photographs Published in Select Newspapers**

Sl. No	Name of the newspaper	Bru participation in polling	Bandh	NGOs	Bureaucrats	Brus
1	<i>The Mizoram Post</i>	1	1	2	1	0
2	<i>Newslink</i>	3	3	0	0	2
3	<i>Vanglaini</i>	1	3	1	0	0
4	<i>The Zozam Times</i>	1	2	0	0	2

### Words used

The terminologies the reporters used in the news reports showed the nature of the report whether it is balanced or biased. The reports from *The Mizoram Post* revealed that they have used various terminologies to refer to Brus. They have used the terms like Bru refugees, displaced Bru, tribal refugees and the Reang Tribals. However, they have predominantly used the term Bru refugees. Only one news item from IANS reporting from Agartala referred to Brus as tribal refugees and the Reang tribals. In one news item regarding the kidnapping incident, they used the word miscreants indirectly to refer the Brus.

In *Newslink*, the terms used are Bru refugees, Bru militants, Bru tribals, Bru community, uprooted Bru, and tribal refugees. It has predominantly used the term Bru refugees. One news story on eviction drive indirectly referred them as illegal.

In the *Zozam Times*, the word Bru was never used to denote them, rather the Mizo terminology of determining the 'other' *Tuikuk* was used throughout the content of the news. In *Vanglaini*, the term Bru raltlan (Bru refugee), Bru were used.

In the Mizo dailies, most of the news sources were from the civil society leaders and there is only one instance wherein the Mizoram Bru People Displaced Forum (MBPDF) was quoted both in *Vanglaini* and the *Zozam Times* in which the content is based on the voting pattern of the Bru people only.

With regards to the conducting of total bandh, *Vanglaini* quoted fervently from the civil society leaders that the bandh was conducted for the sake of Mizo community and for the betterment of the welfare of the people residing in Mizoram. With regard to the news content and reporting, the word that the papers used to refer to the Brus as denizens residing in Mizoram, instead of citizens.

In the leading Mizo daily *Vanglaini's* headline on April 1, 2014, it was reported that the Brus residing in Tripura refugee camp shall cast their vote on April 3. In this regard, the Joint NGO would not allow the counting of votes polled by the Brus. In the content of the news while the demand of the Joint NGO was given priority and quoted them many a time, the Bru leader was quoted only on the voting pattern of the people. On April 7, *Vanglaini* again reported in its headline that the total bandh organised by the Joint NGO (YMA, MUP, MHIP, MZP and MSU) was to demand the cancellation of votes polled by the Bru in Tripura transit camp. Here the news reported that the bandh is for the preservation of the nation and land. Quoting the NGO Coordination Committee Chairman and Central YMA President Lalbiakzuala, 'it is for the sake of preserving the nation and the land'.

### Sources

The qualitative content analysis revealed that all the reports filed by the select newspapers quoted only the official

sources and local NGO leaders. The news reports disclosed that the reporters depended mostly on the official views. They have not followed the two source rule like British Broadcasting Corporation (Bhaumik, 2008). The reporter should have got the views from the sources from the both sides that are in conflict. They have not taken the views and opinions of the people who were the minorities in the incident. The newspapers published only the statements of the local NGO leaders. In the news content the demand of the Joint NGO was given priority and quoted them frequently. The Bru leader was quoted only once on the voting pattern of the people. Only once was the byte of the Bru i.e one leader from Mizoram Bru People Displaced Forum (MBPDF) taken.

There was not much professionalism in reporting. All the news reports were filed from Aizawl only. Only one news story from Agartala was published that too from a news agency. The reporters did not move outside of Aizawl to report this issue.

### **Findings**

The quantitative data of content analysis revealed that more space and more news reports were filed on this issue. With regards to the news, newspapers echoed the views and opinions of the dominant sources i.e official sources and local NGOs. The news language and the news selection showed that the news reports were not written sensibly. The newspapers have stereotyped the Brus in the negative and as outsiders like other

previous conflicts coverage. With regard to the news content and reporting, the newspaper gave more importance to the civil bodies of Mizoram. They have not followed the two source rule. They have taken only the official views. They have not taken any views from the witness or the victims.

### **Conclusions**

The data reveals that the conflict between Mizo and Bru tribes during the sixteenth Lok Sabha poll received fair coverage in the select newspapers. The select newspapers gave more space to this issue in terms of news coverage. The conflict was given importance in terms of placement also. Locale wise many of the news stories were published on the front pages. It reveals the interest shown by the media on this issue. The findings shows that select newspapers also gave more space to this issue also.

The terms used by the select newspapers are varied and biased. *Zozam Times* used the word 'Tuikuk' to refer to Brus. It was considered very derogatory by the Brus. This is a fine example of language apartheid. Brus' opinions rarely find space. Brus were under represented in the media reports and depicted in a negative tone. This is very similar to the representation of minorities in the mainstream media. They are always portrayed negatively by the media. The Brus are stereotyped as illegal and negative. The local media links criminality with the Bru tribes in the

coverage. The media also depicts Brus as problematic, outsiders and different from the Mizo community. This shows the presence of subtle racism in the media.

The data reveals that the news coverage reflected us vs. them attitude of the media, that supported the views of local NGOs. The findings confirmed that Mizoram civil society dominated the media coverage. The Mizo vernacular media gave more importance to the views of the Mizoram civil society. The media

has published the press releases of the Mizoram civil society without editing. The quotes from the Mizoram civil society dominated the news coverage. The media and the Mizoram civil society are intertwined and the media coverage on Mizo and Bru conflict is regulated and legitimized by the Mizoram civil society. Hence Gramsci's contention is reflected in the media legitimization and hegemony over the Brus through news reports of Mizoram.

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“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by  
the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do.”

~ *Mark Twain*