

Gender and Sports: Representation of Women Athletes in Mizo Dailies

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Gender has always played a key role in defining the ways in which athletes are portrayed in the media. This paper tackled how the patriarchal set-up of the Mizo culture and society resulted in the limited opportunity for Mizo women to participate in sports. It gives an in-sight on the status of women in Mizo traditional society, also how changes brought along by the Christian missionaries have led to the wider participation of women in society and in sports. This study explores the level of representation of women athletes in Mizo daily newspapers. It highlighted the differences in the representation of men and women athletes in Mizo dailies, and also studies the space given to women athletes in news coverage. and the types of sports covered by Mizos dailies. Content analysis is employed for the evaluation of data. Using purposive sampling method, three Mizo daily newspapers i.e., Vanglaini, The Zozam Times, and The Aizawl Post are selected as sample dailies. The sample dailies are selected based on their circulation figures. The data revealed that women athletes does not get the level of representation compared to male athletes, also the types of sports played by women paved a way for coverage in the Mizo dailies. The reason for the lack of coverage of women's sports news is deliberated in this paper. This paper will fill the vast research gap that existed in women's participation in sports in Northeast India.

Keywords: Media and Gender, Women Athletes, Women Representation, Mizo Dailies, Mizo

Introduction

Women have played a back-up role in society for generations. With the advancement in technology over the last three decades, the growth of media has immensely accelerated, and it has become a powerful tool for influencing individuals, and hence, society as a whole. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP,

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2020) report, “Gender disparities are a persistent form of inequality in every country.” Women have long faced discrimination in the field of education, health, and the opportunity to achieve economic freedom. In fact, the current trend suggests that it would require 275 more years to close the gap formed by gender disparity in the field of economics. Gender equality has been a hot topic of debate as more and more women fight for equal rights and fair representation in contemporary society. It has an association with the pertinacious biased social norms that set forth the social roles and power structure between men and women in the society (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020).

Gender prejudices in sports have long prevailed, as women were barred from competing in the ancient Olympics. As a result, in the 1900 Olympics, women’s participation was limited to two events, i.e., tennis and golf; they were also barred from competing in track and field events of the oldest Olympics (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2021). Women were predominantly seen as a weaker gender, which resulted to their limited chance of participation which in turn has immensely affected their rights of representation.

Mizoram, situated in the Northeast of India has a population of 1,091,014 as per Census Report 2011. The word ‘Mizo’, used to describe the people living in Mizoram is a generic term used to put different tribes and sub-tribes under one group (Joshi, 2005). According to McCall (2003) it was clear that the Mizo society is a male-dominated society. He wrote, ‘without any ambiguity Lusei has been, and still is, a country for men before it is one for women and children.’ McCall’s writing supplemented the derogatory sayings which have prevailed over centuries; ‘Hmeichhia leh Pal Chhia (old fences) chu an thlak theih’ could be translated as ‘women and old fences are replaceable’. The Mizo society is patriarchal in nature and its functioning. In a traditional Mizo family, women have limited freedom as individual rights are suppressed and the Mizo customary laws largely favour men. A Mizo woman has no right to inheritance and a father’s properties are solely divided among the male children (Dena, 2010).

Gender played a defining role in the early Mizo society when assigning roles between men and women. The gender of an individual is also a key factor in maintaining an individual’s status in the society; evidently men have a higher social status compared to women (Rokhum, 2013). Mizoram, earlier called Lushai Hills was annexed by the British late in the nineteenth century, and in 1894 the Christian missionaries set foot as well (Ralte, 2013). With the introduction of Christianity accompanied by western education and values, women’s status in the Mizo society has undergone a positive change (Dena, 2010). The women’s literacy rate in Mizoram which stood at a meagre 0.14 per cent in 1901 rose to 86.72 per cent in 2011 according to census report (Ralte, 2013).

Ralte (2013) also argued that the rise of women in Mizoram was often challenged by the male set of hegemonic norms followed religiously by the society. The slow growth of women’s education was largely due to prevalent social practises and norms set by the patriarchal notion of gender.

It was only after the British occupation in the late nineteenth century was written

accounts of the history of the Mizo people documented. These documents mostly dealt with the regulations and traditions that colonial administrators and Christian missionaries implemented. The preservation of the Mizo's oral tradition had also been undertaken by colonial authorities. The history of games and sports was rarely mentioned in these documents. Even though alternative sources were recovered as a result of the growing interest in social history, the study of games and sports has only been mentioned in passing in contemporary works on the history of Mizoram (Muansangkimi, 2015; Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021; Thadou, 2022; Thirumal et al., 2019).

Regardless of the nature of society or the degree of civilization, sports and recreational activities have been a component of all societies since the dawn of time. Even so, the body of historical texts that is currently available hardly ever contains historical research on games and sports. Academics did not view sports as a significant and legitimate field of study. Despite people's interest in sports, academics were sceptical of them and thought they were questionable for a number of reasons. The topic is initially dismissed as being unimportant and frivolous, nothing more than a pastime that is unworthy of serious consideration. It was also deemed challenging to comprehend its "researchability" because it permeates every aspect of daily life. Finally, it's the academic perspective, where many think of athletics as an opiate that distracts from more serious issues (Vidacs, 2006). Vidacs (2006) also acknowledged the rise in research done by scholars since the mid-1990s' and argued how sports is an important fabric in society and cultures across the world. By examining what individuals did for entertainment, what appealed to them, and how they interacted, sports historians have thus made a major contribution to the study of identities and knowledge of everyday life of historical communities (Johnes, M. 2008).

Though there has been an uptrend in the amount of research done globally, the same cannot be said of in the context of Mizoram. The Mizos late entry into the field of literature also significantly hampers the possibility of studying the deeper context in how sports were practised and utilised before the intervention of the Christian missionaries and the extent in which women were allowed to participate in these activities.

Women and sports in pre-colonial Mizoram

The traditional Mizo society was nomadic in nature where a place for settlement was scoured on a frequent basis (Sangkima, 2004; Vanlaldika, 2014). Like most tribal societies, the traditional Mizo society, can be described as segmentary, where different clans have separate villages which was ruled by a Chief (Thadou, 2022; Thirumal et al., 2019). The Mizos would often engage in inter-tribe wars, owing to different clans having separate Chiefs, fights for superiority and better lands were the part and parcel of the Mizos before the they were annexed by the Britishers.

The Mizos scarcely engaged in physical activities for their own purpose during the traditional era; instead, they were associated with ritual, combat, amusement, or other external features. There were not many sports comparable to what exists today; however, there were times when one needed to demonstrate their strength and might in the pre-colonial Mizo society. Sports were more or less intertwined with economy

and warfare. Hence, the games and sports practised were mainly focused on how that event could display an individual strength and courage (Dena, 2010; Sangkima, 2004; Thadou 2022).

As a result, there weren't many games that were accessible to both sexes. It may be argued that activities like games and sports were largely engaged in by men (Thadou, 2022).

In pre-colonial Mizoram, family and zawlbuk served as a significant social institution. In particular, the family was structured in a way that taught the children cultural practises and traditions which were accepted by the society. It played an integral part in shaping the social life and also the role to be played by an individual in the society. Being a patriarchal society ruled by, and for men, both social institutions function under the strict purview of men (McCall, 2003).

One of the pioneering researches done on the social history of games and sports in Mizoram, Thadou (2022) noted that the both boys and girls participated in sports and recreational activities when they were children. But this pattern changed drastically when the children become older and enters adolescence. This is when the social institutions have a deep influence in how a Mizo woman must act, and the roles she will have to play in the society. While young boys provide services and act as a tool for the efficient functioning of the zawlbuk by gathering firewood and water- young Mizo girls in the traditional society were expected to help their mothers with domestic chores instantaneously once they reach adolescence; it is the set-standard opinion that young girls are not to wander as boys of their age (Lalrinchhani, 2004; Sangkima, 2004). Apart from this, women in early Mizo society were required to acquire certain traits like weaving and cooking from an early age. Young girls were provided 'Themlem' (a tool used for weaving) and owning one is the non-written requirement of a woman (Dokhuma, 1992). Mizo women in the pre-colonial period were confined to household chores and lack the time and freedom to pursue their choice on interest.

Zawlbuk played a vital role in the life of young Mizo men before it was abolished in the 1930s. It was an establishment where young Mizo men learnt the mores and customs of the society, 'learned useful art and handicrafts, sports, singing, and dancing.' They were groomed and disciplined by val upa (village elders), who were not nominated by the village chief but were acknowledged (Thlanga, 2013). It was a place where young men would compete in traditional Mizo sport like 'In chai' (wrestling) and 'In lungden' (shot put); zawlbuk would also often decide the most valiant among the young men in the village through a set of competitions formulated by the val upa. Though zawlbuk served as an institution for young men to learn the traits of life, women were not allowed to even approach zawlbuk, let alone enter the building (Thlanga, 2013). Laitanga (1984) clearly chronicled the lack of respite and opportunities for women in the early traditional Mizo society. "Inberh buan hi mipa infiamna a niin hmeichhia chuan a tih pawh an ti chin eih ngai lova, an tih ve chi pawh a ni lo reng a ni," can be translated as, "Inberh buan (a type of wrestling) is a sport for the men alone, and women do not participate in it, evidently it is not an activity for a girl to try her hands on." It consists of six chapters that trace the roots of Mizo traditional sports and discuss their significance and functioning in Mizo society. There are 56 sports and leisure activities practised by the Mizos and out of these, 48

are solely for boys and men. While the other eight activities are for girls and women, it still is a limited option compared to men. Girls used to play games like Kalchhet kal and kawikah ralsai. Kalchhet kal is a relay race using bamboo, in which the foot is normally kept at a distance of two feet from the ground. If a player falls during the race, she may rise up on the bamboo and continue the race. Kawikah ralsai is a game of creeper bean seeds where the beans are set at a 5/6 metre distance. Each girl on each squad has three chances to shoot the beans (Fanai, 2019). A Mizo woman is always hardworking, has a lot of work to accomplish, and has far too little time for any useful leisure activities (Joshi, 2005). Joshi's assessment clearly highlights the lack of opportunities for Mizo women in the field of sports in the early Mizo society.

Women and sports in Post-colonial Mizoram

Colonial rulers introduced the game of football, cricket and hockey in school curriculum throughout British India in 1880s. Football and cricket were considered to be an elite European sports while vernacular games like wrestling was deemed a sport to be played by the lower class (Majumdar, 2002).

Though the introduction of reading and writing played a decisive role in imparting the British cultural practises and beliefs, games and sports were also heavily used as a tool to inculcate the Mizos to the western culture and religious practises (Stoddart, 1988). In the context of post-colonial Mizoram, the advent of western education, the World Wars, the influence of colonial administration, and most crucially the arrival of the missionaries all had a significant impact on the socio-cultural life of the Mizos. The missionaries and the colonial government served as the forerunners in the adoption of new sports and games (Thadou, 2022).

Sports was also used a tool to avoid conflict and make peace with the Chiefs in the early years of the British rule in the then Lushai Hills. Among the limited literature on sports in Mizoram, Royte (2008) recounts that the first sports competition to be held in Mizoram which was after the arrival of the colonial administrators in 1892 at Lunglei. Sixteen Mizo Chiefs accompanied by villagers competed in four different sports items which were all practised and performed by the Mizos- Inchai (a form of wrestling), Inzuansiak (High and Long Jump), Lungden (shot put), and Feikhawh (Javelin Throw). He also mentioned how the Mizos started forming sports associations, organise and participate in tournaments.

The influences of the British colonial administrators have been debated from different angles; the attitudes adopted by the Mizos towards the participation of women in sports after the colonial rule is immensely positive. Games and sports were introduced as a part of the co-curricular activities in the schools opened and run by the Christian missionaries. As a result, women were allowed to participate in these activities even after they enter into adolescence. Hockey, a game introduced by them was largely popular apart from the traditional games still played and practised. Apart from hockey, badminton, volleyball, and football can be seen as the legacy left behind the colonisers as they remain hugely popular in Mizoram (Thadou, 2022). In addition to women participating in sports, the attitude in which it was played also took a drastic turn. Played for merry making and physical exercise among the Mizos, it is now seen as a form of competition rather than entertainment.

At present, the most popular game in Mizoram is football. The game appeals to people of all genders and has left a lasting impression on the Mizos' social life. Despite all the progress and triumph, it is still widely regarded as a man's sport (Lalduhawmi & Ralte, 2018). Women who play football are derisively commented upon. Though this sentiment has abated in recent times, women footballers in the state do not have the same platform to express their talents.

The Mizoram Football Association, the apex body in football in Mizoram started Mizoram Premier League, a men's football league in 2012 and is still continuously run till today (Bawitlung, 2022). Even after ten years there is still no women's league, it may be argued that women's league was played but it lasted for a single season in 2019. Other sports association soon followed suit as Mizoram Basketball Association launched Mizoram Super League in 2014, and after nearly a decade, women in Mizoram still does not have a league to call their own (Kazi, 2018). When it comes to volleyball, the Mizoram Volleyball Association initiated a men's league in 2016, a year later they started women's league, the first sports league for women in Mizoram (Shan, 2018). The absence of opportunity in sports for Mizo women has highlighted the chances and level of freedom given to women in contemporary Mizo society.

The patriarchal notion that sports are only for men has played a factor in the slow growth of women's football in the state. Mizoram has the highest women to men ratio among all Indian states and union territories at 70.9 per cent when it comes to women participating in the work force (Gupta, 2022). Despite the freedom of a women's choice in choosing a career and how they choose to dress, Mizo women still does not get the much-needed support to choose sport as a career.

Women and Sports in Media

Women who are half of the world's population and also happen to be the consumers of media are often overlooked by the people working in media. The sport serves as a microcosm of society, reflecting contradictory and paradoxical signs and signals about women's responsibilities that are passed down through other societal organisations (Christopherson et al., 2002). The sports culture is a significant socialisation institution and its behaviours, beliefs, and messages have an impact on other aspects of their lives. It is proposed that the media's handling and portrayal of athletic habits "normalises" what viewers perceive to be acceptable aspects of societal identity (Gagnon, 1996).

In what was one the first research in examining the ways and levels in which women athletes are portrayed in the media, Lever and Wheeler (1984) extensively studied the sports pages of the Chicago Tribune that was published during a 75 years span of 1900 to 1975. The findings show that coverage of women sports news constituted a modest 1.2 per cent and increased to 4.0 per cent from 1925 to 1950, but this growth stunted and rose by a mere 0.1 per cent by the year 1975. It acts as a reference tool in how society has developed towards gender equality in sports participation and representation.

The 2012 Olympic Games was the first time ever that women participated in every sport, every country that participated had women athletes for the first time in

the history of the Olympics (Donnelly, 2013). The total number of women athlete participants also rose to 5457 in the 2020 Olympic Games held in Tokyo, the highest number ever recorded, which accounts to 48.7 per cent from 5059 women athletes in the 2016 Rio Olympics which reached 45 per cent. Though the number of women athletes' participation has healthily increased over the years, men athletes have always outnumbered them in every Olympics held. Even as women athletes rise in numbers, the Tokyo Olympics was the only event where women exclusive and mixed events combined has outnumber men only events (IOC, 2021). Historically, the lower chances of participation available for women in turn have an effect on their chances of representation in the media.

Mannion (2016), in her study named, "Play Like a Girl: An Analysis of Media Representation of Female Athletes," examined three popular American sports websites to find out the representation of women athletes and perception of people who are engaged in women sports and also from individuals who necessarily do not follow women's sports. An analysis done on the ESPN's website contained 43 sports news and stories, out of these items there was only one news in regards to women's sports news and that equates to 2 per cent approximately. Bleacher Report does not have a single women's sports news on their website. Apart from creating content, the website also has tabs that allow users to choose their favourite sport team. Though the list ranges from the wide variety of sports teams, there were no women sports team provided as an option. Fox Sports also had no content on women's sports. Though a mention of Danica Patrick was found, it was outside the confines of the sports that she participated. Patrick competed in NASCAR racing but the news item about her was her attending a music festival.

A study by Frisby (2017) titled "Sacrificing Dignity for Publicity: Content Analysis of Women and Men Athletes on "Sports Illustrated and "ESPN the Magazine" found that out of the '245 cover pages' covered women athletes amount to a mere 10 per cent of all the publications. This study also reported that aside from a few appearances on the covers of sports magazines, women athletes were shown in sexually objectifying stances, with sensuous eye contact. On the other hand, men athletes and their poses are still depicted in ways that encourage hegemonic masculinity notions.

The Covid-19 pandemic offered a peculiar opportunity to examine how and what sports material was made during a period when men's and women's sports were perhaps at their most equal (Symons et al., 2022). They studied the coverage of women's sports news produced in Australia in a study titled, 'The (un)level playing field: sport media during COVID-19' by selecting 21 media outlets with the most traffic, as well as conventional print media. The data reveals that coverage of women's sports news in Australia decreased to some degree during the onset of the Covid-19 issue and that low levels of coverage were maintained throughout. This suggests that in the absence of live sport, media organisations return to conventional ritualised, routinized procedures to generate sports media material, and women are excluded from sports tales regardless of whether a play is taking place.

In the last few years, there was a rise in women's sports events attendance leading to Covid-19, the 2019 Women's Football World Cup played in France saw record

turnout, accompanied by the 86,000 record-breaking attendances at the 2022 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup final played at Melbourne Cricket Ground. As Covid-19 halted sporting events around the world affecting the livelihood of many athletes, Bowes et al. (2021) carried out a study documenting the perception of 'elite sportswomen' on women's sports before and after Covid-19 and came to the conclusion that majority of the sportswomen believed that women's sport was on the rise, but many contrasted this with inequity in media attention and funding compared to men's sport.

The 2015 February, March, April, and May publications of the Times of India and The Hindu was studied by Banerjee and Kakade (2016) in their paper, "Coverage of Women's Sports in Two English Dailies of Karnataka: A Comparative Study," The findings highlighted the lack of space for women athletes in India, during the sampling period the number of sports items printed by The Hindu and The Times of India was 555 and 423 respectively. Out of all the sports news printed, women sports could only constitute 24 items (10.09 %) in The Hindu, whereas it was even lower in The Times of India as it was only 56 (5.67%), she also mentioned the lack of pictorial representation of women athletes in the news items.

In India, Cricket is a religion and cricketers are worshipped as gods (Mishra, 2013); Murali & Bagchi, 2020). Though Cricket is hugely followed by Indians, majority of the broadcasting slots and money generated are given to men. Women cricketers in India only earn one tenth of the money compared to their male counterparts (Murali & Bagchi, 2020). Murali and Bagchi (2020) did a research on the "Study on the Broadcast of Women's Sports in India" and analyse if there was an increase or decrease in the coverage of women's sports. The findings showed that 89 per cent of the respondents think that women's sports and athletes in India do not have enough coverage. When women athletes are presented in the media, the focus was more on their private lives and importance was not given to their achievement in the field of sports (Kian & Clavio, 2011). The findings also co-relate to the results in the studies done by Alur (2019), Chattopadhyay (2017), and Shakti (2005).

But contrary to these results, Chakrobarty and Sil (2016) studied the coverage of Indian athletes and compare the representation of men and women athletes in 10 leading English and Bengali newspaper in Kolkata, the findings showed that women athletes are represented at a higher rate in comparison to men. They further argued the findings as India's two medals in the Rio Olympics was won by women and that it was the first time India participated in Gymnastic event, the athlete being a woman also gives an opportunity in the absence of men athletes. The result in this study was supported by the study of "Comparative study of print media coverage of Indian athletes in London Olympics" by Paul and Roy (2015).

A study done by Lotlai (2022) titled, 'Coverage of Sports in Mizoram' shed light on the poor coverage received by women in comparison to men. Among the three dailies selected for this study, Aizawl Post has the highest percentage of women's sports news with a meagre 5.8 per cent, followed by Vanglaini's 5.5 per cent, and this slumped down further to 2.3 per cent in regards to The Zozam Times.

In India and Mizoram as well, the indigenous traditional social order persists and it governs contemporary media. Furthermore, the ethnocentric form of news in the

public sphere is evident in Mizoram media owing to the media's all-pervasive dominance through its cultural bias. Indigenous tradition is the framing factor that also primarily affects the news values (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021). Mizoram is entirely populated by scheduled tribes and the media is run only by them. Mizo men retain an incredible level of influence in news selection and reporting. Mizo men are the proprietors and the decision makers in the Mizoram media houses. Mizo women continue to be a minority in the Mizoram media (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021).

Media being a profit driven business needs to cater to the needs and wants of its consumers who are for the most part men. Having said that, some experts argue that the way men's sports are presented in the media really serves to increase interest and enthusiasm while simultaneously censoring women's sports (Cooky et al., 2013).

The available literature throws light on the under representation and stereotyping of women in sports coverage. But no research has been done on the representation of women athletes in Mizoram newspapers. This paper will attempt to fill the huge research gap as there has been little to no research carried out on the representation of women in Mizo dailies.

This paper will attempt to highlight the wide gap that exists between men and women athletes, in a historically patriarchal Mizo society, when it comes to representation in sports media. It will portray the types of women sports that are produced, and the reason behind why those sports are being targeted. The study is useful because it will reveal the challenges and problems of how women sports are portrayed in Mizo dailies and in turn the public's eyes.

Theoretical Framework

To emphasise the elimination of a certain sect via popular communication, symbolic annihilation is deployed. Gerbner and Gross (1976) coined the term "symbolic annihilation" to refer to the absence or underrepresentation of a group of individuals in the media, for instance, on the basis of sex, race, or sexual orientation, which furthers social inequality. According to Tuchman (1978), symbolic annihilation of women has three impacts, including trivialization, omission, and condemnation, which in turn has an impact on women's possibilities to fully participate in society.

The mainstream media all promote the same message about women to all social strata, similar to the mediaeval church that aired one message to all social classes: They declare their symbolic complete annihilation and denigration. The beginning of women's news demonstrates how long newspapers have typically segregated between women's and men's interests, as well as how issues affecting women have turned into trivial and frivolous content not worthy of news- the ideology is held till today. Unlike the general news, sports, and financial pages, parts seen to be of interest to males, which are regularly updated, the budget for women's pages rarely does (Tuchman, 1978).

Symbolic annihilation is usually used to describe women and members of racial and sexual minorities, symbolic annihilation highlights how negative media representation may lead to social marginalisation and how symbolic exclusion in the

media can eliminate people and groups from the public consciousness (Coleman & Yochim, 2008).

It is possible to trace the evolution of sport to the process of the awakening of women’s consciousness in a field that, since its origin, has been dominated by men with undisputed hegemony and has helped to create and maintain a patriarchal society dominated by men. The struggle for women’s power in sports has primarily been underestimated or ignored by the media, which has served to further the absolute male hegemony in sports (Zhou et al., 2023).

Research methodology

This paper throws light on the amount of coverage that women athletes get in the Mizo society; it also compares the representation given to men and women athletes. The research is based on a quantitative content analysis method. Using the purposive sampling technique method, three Mizo daily newspapers i.e., Vanglaini, Zozam Times, and The Aizawl Post are selected as sample dailies based on their figures of circulation. All the sports news, the quantum of women’s and men’s news; the number of news stories supported by photographs, women’s and men’s news with and without photographs, the geographical coverage of sports news and the types of sports covered by the selected dailies were the units of analysis. The sampling period for the study was between January-June, 2022. All the dailies in Mizoram do not publish a copy on Sunday as it is being observed as a holy day for the Lord in the Christian dominated Mizo Society. The sampling period is selected purposively because of the numerous sporting events happening during that time, including Australian open tennis, AFC women Asian cup, and women’s hockey Asia cup.

Data analysis

Table 1:

Total number of sports news stories

During the sampling period, all three newspapers were selected from January 4 and to June 30, 2022. Vanglaini, with three allotted sports pages published the greatest number of sports news with 2298 items, followed by The Zozam Times and The Aizawl Post with two allotted pages with 1632 and 1294 news items each.

Newspaper	Total no of sports news stories
Aizawl Post	1294
Vanglaini	2298
Zozam Times	1632

Table 2: Difference between men and women sports news stories

Among the three newspapers selected, The Aizawl Post has the highest per cent of women’s sports news published which stands at 10.70 per cent while men’s sports

news accumulates for 89.30 per cent. Vanglaini's sports news coverage of men stands at 89.56 per cent; on the other hand, women sports news coverage was 10.44 per cent only. Women sports news was published at a pitiful 4.78 per cent of the time in The Zozam Times, compared to 95.22 per cent of men's sports news.

Newspaper	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Aizawl Post	1156	89.30%	138	10.70%
Vanglaini	2058	89.56%	240	10.44%
Zozam Times	1554	95.22%	78.00	4.78%

Table 3: Sports news with/without pictures

The Aizawl Post and Vanglaini published more than 70 per cent of all sports news with photographs while The Zozam Times publications stood at 43.38 per cent. The Zozam Times published 56.62 per cent of the sports news without photographs. The Aizawl Post news items without images stood at 26.98 per cent, Vanglaini sports news without photographs equates to 11.23 per cent.

Newspaper	With photographs	Percentages	Without photographs	Percentage
Aizawl Post	945	73.02%	349	26.98%
Vanglaini	2040	88.77%	258	11.23%
Zozam Times	708	43.38%	924	56.62%

Table 4: Men and women's sports news- with and without pics

News with pics occupies more space, requires additional colour which expand expenses, therefore news with perceived higher value is published with photographs. Out of the 944.87 news with photographs published by The Aizawl Post, women's sports news adds up to a mere 14.64 per cent, which is the highest among the three select dailies. Vanglaini's pictorial news is 90 per cent men's sports news, in comparison, women's sports news is only 10.00 per cent. The Zozam Times does not perform any better, 88.98 per cent of the news with photographs are men's while women's constitutes only 11.01 per cent.

Newspaper	Men	Per cent	Women	Percentage
Aizawl Post	807	85.35%	138	14.64%
Vanglaini	1836	90.00%	204	10.00%
Zozam Times	630	88.98%	78	11.01%

Table 5: Geographical coverage of sports news

For this study, region is defined as the geographical area of Mizoram, national as within India and international as events that are organized outside India. The sports pages of the select newspapers are filled mostly with international sports events coverage. 91.62 per cent of sports news published by The Aizawl Post is international, followed closely by The Zozam Times with 86.02 per cent, and Vanglaini with 83.28 per cent.

Newspaper	Regional	Percentage	National	Percentage	Int’nal	Percentage
Aizawl Post	334	25.78%	256	19.75%	705	54.47%
Vanglaini	633	27.58%	516	22.45%	1150	50.03%
Zozam Times	311	19.08%	422	25.88%	898	55.04%

Table 6: Types of sports covered

Sports items that are covered at least five times are counted while sports that do not meet these criteria are clubbed under miscellaneous for the integrity of the data. Football has the bulk of coverage in all newspapers; this clearly shows that football has a deep-rooted connection with the Mizos. While football accounts for 70.23 per cent of all sports news coverage in The Aizawl Post and Vanglaini, The Zozam Times football news coverage is 56.62 per cent. Though all the newspapers have strongly covered football, women’s football news is covered only four times by Vanglaini and once by The Aizawl Post, and The Zozam Times football news has not included even a single news story of women’s football.

Newspaper	Types of Sports						
	FB	Ten	BB	Bad	Com	Mis	
Aizawl Post	910	247	35	30	30	42	
Percentage	70.23	19.07	2.79	2.33	2.33	3.26	
Vanglaini	<u>FB</u> 1614	<u>Ten</u> 294	<u>BB</u> 132	<u>Cri</u> 96	<u>Bad</u> 66	<u>Hoc</u> 54	<u>Mis</u> 42
Per cent	70.23	12.79	5.74	4.18	2.87	2.35	1.83
Zozam Times	FB	BB	Ten	Cri	Com	Mis	
	920	368	131	101	89	23	
Percentage	56.62	22.79	8.09	6.25	5.51	1.47	

FB-Football, Ten- Tennis, BB-Basketball, Bad-Badminton, Cri-Cricket, Com-Combat, Hoc-Hockey, Mis-Miscellaneous

Conclusion

The content analysis done on Mizo dailies has shown that women athletes are immensely under-represented and men athletes have a lion’s share of the news

coverage. The data revealed that the representation that athletes get based on gender is unabashedly biased. While men athletes get more than 88 per cent of all news produced in the selected dailies, women athletes do not even make up for more than 11 per cent of the published news items in the selected Mizo dailies.

Not only was there little coverage of women athletes, but the news and photographs produced were limited to non-contact sports. Out of the 138 women sports news stories published by *The Aizawl Post*, 116 of them were related to tennis, followed by 21 news items about Badminton, and one was football news. *Vanglaini* printed 240 women sports news out of which 176 were tennis, 32 were badminton, 11 were hockey, 17 were cricket news, and four football news items. This pattern is followed by *The Zozam Times* as out of the 78 women sports news published, 69 were tennis and nine were cricket news stories.

The selected dailies heavily depend on international sports events for content creation as the majority of the news produced by them are international sports events and do not necessarily focus on the national or regional sports coverage. All three newspapers have more than 80 per cent of their news constituting international sports coverage, while events that are organised within Mizoram (regional) and India (national) get less than 20 per cent when combined. As the pandemic put a halt on sports events in India, minuscule representation of regional and national sports events can be attributed to this. With lockdown being slowly withdrawn by the union and the state governments, the representation of regional and national sports stories might increase if the study was done at a different point of time. Another reason that can be attributed is the fact that there is not much women participation in sports in patriarchal society set-up of the Mizos. An ideal Mizo woman is one who is confined to the domestic sphere and upholds traditional family values. To actively play sports, one has to break the domestic chains and spend more time and energy in public spaces which do not necessarily have social acceptance in Mizoram.

Football occupies the sports pages of the selected Mizo dailies as football news constitutes 70 per cent respectively in *The Aizawl Post* and *Vanglaini*, though *The Zozam Times* has the lowest number of football news, 56 per cent of all the sports news produced by them still attributes to football news. It is imperative to mention that out of the total 3444 football news produced by the selected newspaper, women football news was produced only five times. *The Aizawl Post* ran a column on January 21, 2022 about a women footballer refugee named Nadia Nadim, who escaped the Taliban regime in Afghanistan after her father was killed when she was just 11 years of age. Nadim now lives in Denmark and has also finished her medicinal studies and is a qualified doctor. *Vanglaini* published only four women football news items, on January 28, 2022; it describes the three Mizo women footballers, namely 'Grace Lalrampari, Elizabeth Vanlalmawii, and Ngopowdi,' who were among the team that won the Tamil Nadu Women's League. It briefly highlighted the personal achievements of the footballers which, in comparison with the representation that the men Mizo footballers usually receive from the Mizo dailies are unmerited.

The data confirms that Mizo daily symbolically annihilate female athletes. The Mizo dailies underrepresented and stereotyped women athletes in their news coverage.

Over decades of Mizo history, the marginalisation of women in political and religious space, along with the pervasiveness of established patriarchal views, contributed to the privilege of male perspectives in the Mizo historical record (Hmingthanzuali & Chhangte, 2020). History repeats itself in the contemporary media coverage of women in Mizoram.

The photographs of women athletes utilised for visual appeal in Mizo dailies confirm the stereotypical representation of women athletics. Women athletes are frequently portrayed in the media as women first and athletes second (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations [UNESCO], 2023). The sports where women athletes wear short skirts as a uniform were given importance in comparison to contact sports like boxing and mixed martial arts. These depictions can promote gender prejudice and stereotypes, degrade women athletes' genuine athletic abilities, and give the audience the impression that men athletes are more significant than women athletes. Again, the disparity is huge in pictorial representation as well; all three newspapers produced less than 15 per cent of all women athlete news with photographs. Printing photographs requires more ink, hence more expensive, as a result news stories that were printed with supporting photographs are considered to be more important in this research. Mizo dailies, it can be said, depict women athletes from a masculine viewpoint. They publish photographs of women athletes from non-contact sports like tennis and badminton in order to provide Mizo readers with appealing visuals.

This is because being an athlete contradicts the traditional female gender role. As a result, the media tends to emphasise features of their "femaleness" while targeting men as its audience. The media gives the male conscience what it wants, or rather, what it expects: wonderfully proportioned and conditioned bodies posing in seductive ways (Joshi, 2021).

It is clear that patriarchal Mizo society does not give much importance to women sports news. While young boys find ample sources to identify their sporting idols and get inspired by their sporting achievements, this lack of representation of women athletes leaves little room for young girls to get inspired by outstanding women athletes all over the world. All the sports writers in the three selected dailies are men, Vanglaini has three sports writers while The Aizawl Post and The Zozam Times have two and one respectively. The male hegemony that exists in the newsroom can be a factor for the lack of women representation in the dailies selected.

Among the six sports writers that are present in the dailies, only two hold a degree in Journalism. The lack of training and awareness that permeate among the sports writers can also be an affective factor. Continued work is required to achieve equality in the quantity of coverage between men and women athletes. Personnel in the media must provide equal opportunity to women athletes, and be sensitized on the need for inclusive media coverage of women. However, in order to achieve inclusive media coverage of women, we must also seek to diversify the media workforce. Rather than simply advocating, gender parity in coverage and staff should be adopted and enforced as the standard for all media organisations.

For gender parity in sports coverage, we need gender parity in patronizing sports.

Although football is a religion in Mizoram, men's football receives all the spectator attention and fandom. Seeing boys playing religiously in the public football grounds is a norm in Mizoram. At same time, the seeing women in the grounds are a rarity. KTP sports and organised sports at academic institutions are exceptions. Futsal grounds are the favourite pastime for Mizo men. Although anybody may rent the private futsal ground and play in groups, you will frequently see men playing in teams. Women are preoccupied with unpaid household tasks and child care, while Mizo men enjoy all the pleasure of playing sports. This prominence of men's sports in Mizo society extends to media attention as well. So, no one can criticise the exclusion of women from sports coverage since that is the fact. As per the Pew research centre report on Global Views on Diversity, Gender Equality, Family Life and the Importance of Religion (2019), Indians significantly prefer greater gender equality and less support for greater diversity. In addition, if greater literacy, then people favoured greater diversity in their country. But in the case of Mizoram, a state with one of the highest literacy rates in India is not inclined for greater diversity in their state.

The review of literature confirms that indigenous tradition, specifically Mizo patriarchy dictates the terms and conditions of the society, which extends to Media routines. The findings of the study reiterate that the modern media in Mizoram operates to cater to the interests of the patriarchal Mizo tradition. The media persons who are accountable for a free and fair media unfortunately fall in line with the patriarchy undermining Media ethics. All media personnel are expected, so is their duty, to cover news objectively and impartially, irrespective of gender, ethnicity and religion. So, until and unless we address the systemic problem of patriarchy, real change in media coverage will only be a dream.

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