Journal of South Asian Exchanges
A Multidisciplinary Journal of South Asian Research
ISSN: 3048-8877 | Peer Reviewed | Indexed
Pine Press

JSAE: 2.2, 2025 | https://saexchanges.com/v2n205 | https://doi.org/10.21659/jsae/v2n2/v2n205

Research article

Films from the 'Highlanders': Tracing Issues and Prospects of the Mizo Film Industry

David Lalhmachhuana[1], Sayan Dey, PhD[2], Nicky Lalrinsanga Lotlai[3], Joel Laltlanchhuaha[4]

[1]Research Scholar, [2]Assistant Professor, [3]Research Scholar, [4]Research Scholar
Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram.

Abstract
The Mizo film industry has a unique place at the periphery of Indian regional cinemas. In contrast to Assam or Manipur, where film industries began in the early and mid-twentieth century, Mizoram's production history only began in 1983 with the film *Phuba*. The late entry into film, together with Mizoram's remote geographic location, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure, has contributed to the slow and irregular development of a film culture. This paper examines the socio-cultural grounding of the practice and the contemporary challenges and opportunities of the Mizo film industry. Additionally, it emphasizes emergent possibilities such as grassroots creativity, digital technologies, community production, and increasing demand for narratives that resonate locally. By locating the Mizo film industry in the broader discourses of regional cinema, cultural identity, and globalization, this paper maintains that while structural barriers remain in hindering the film industry, there is considerable potential for it to be a cultural medium and catalyst for socio-economic development. This study adds to our understanding of how a small, resource-trapped film industry positions itself within the greater Indian and global film culture.

Keywords: Mizo Films, Highlanders, Regional Films, Film Studies, Mizoram

1. Introduction

Contact: David Lalhmachhuana, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, Email: davidchhunthang7@gmail.com
Article History: Received: 19 August 2025. Accepted: 07 October 2025. Published: 14 October 2025

Citation: Lalhmachhuana, David., Dey, Sayan., Lalrinsanga, Lotlai., & Laltlanchhuaha, Joel. (2025). Films from the 'Highlanders': Tracing Issues and Prospects of the Mizo Film Industry. *Journal of South Asian Exchanges* 2(2) <https://saexchanges.com/v2n2/v2n205.pdf>

Cinema has been widely considered as one of India's most important cultural industries. Since the advent of the twentieth century, Indian cinema has emerged as the world's largest film-producing industry, with both Bollywood and regional cinemas contributing to its cultural significance and global stature. According to researchers, the Indian film industry plays an important role not only in artistic practice but also in economic life, providing millions of jobs in production, distribution, exhibition, and related industries such as music, retail, tourism, and digital media. (Kumar, 2014; Prabakaran & Sudharsan, 2024).

Bollywood remains the most prominent part of Indian cinema globally, while film and cultural industries in regional contexts such as Tamil (Kollywood), Telugu (Tollywood), Kannada (Sandalwood), Malayalam, and Bengali exist in their own right and contribute to the betterment of the broader film ecology of the nation. Each of these industries contributes different stories, genres, and cultural forms, and together they make for a very lively film ecology, which generates both economic and employment activity, as well as recreation and entertainment. Consequently, Indian cinema has experienced a growing record of vibrant, artistic experimentation, with new challenges emerging. There are issues and opportunities posed by complications such as piracy, regulatory issues, and disruptive global streaming platforms. (Deb, 2023) In particular, digital media offer alternatives to historical revenue models reliant on box office receipts, urging the need for adaptation to these new frameworks. While Bollywood has always been at the forefront of academic and media attention, recent research indicates that regional cinema is gaining recognition both domestically and globally. Industries catering to regional audiences in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and West Bengal are sizeable, and also have audiences abroad (Barman, 2024). In contrast, the smaller regional cinema industries located in the Northeast remain sidelined within both public and academic discourse. The Hindi film industry's dominance restricted regional theatres to a limited geographical audience (Chandrasekaran, 2022). However, scholars suggest that the growing prominence of satellite television, OTT platforms, and strategically marketing films within India and across the world has enabled Malayalam, Marathi, and Assamese films to access audiences well beyond the borders of the publics encased within the language (Deb, 2023). Scholars such as Pegu (2015) have already observed several constraints that impinge upon the regional film industry in Northeast India, such as infrastructural inadequacies, linguistic diversity, limited access to capital and equipment, and a near-complete lack of pro-film industry government policy. Such issues, he says, primarily account for the sporadic and fractured nature of cinema production in the region, problems that are especially relevant to the under-researched Mizo film industry.

From a broader perspective, the Mizo film industry may be relatively young, but it holds great cultural value. It started in the Mizo society in the early 1980s, when enthusiasts started low-budget film production in small, amateur crews due to the accessibility of VHS technology (Lalrinawma & Vanamamalai, 2019). Such early attempts, although unrefined in a market-focused sense, showed the local film industry was a tangible possibility in the state of Mizoram. Since then, Mizo films have grown to represent the social and cultural values of the community, while continuing to explore recurring themes associated with Christianity, family, folklore, social issues, and moral challenges (Lalhmachhuana et al., 2025).

Compared to Manipuri and Assamese cinema, which have attracted greater academic and critical attention, particularly for their engagement with politics, conflict, and cultural identity, Mizo cinema has remained largely overlooked. Scholars have examined Manipuri films as intersections of aesthetics and politics (Bhattacharjee, 2016) and as narratives of women's resistance (Devi, 2021). Assamese cinema has likewise been studied for its ecological imaginaries and cultural politics (Dowerah, 2019; Medhi, 2017). By contrast, Mizo films have received only sporadic coverage in cultural essays and scattered studies, with little systematic

attention to industrial aspects such as production patterns, financing, distribution, or audience reception.

In this context, the current research aims to explore the issues, potential, and future of Mizo films. The objectives of this research are to examine the current state of Mizo film making, to identify the issues and factors contributing to its slow development, and to investigate the opportunities and possibilities of a road map for Mizo films. Therefore, the research is guided by: What is the present state of film production, distribution, and reception in Mizoram? What structural, financial, and institutional challenges have hindered the development of the Mizo film industry? And how do filmmakers, audiences, and stakeholders envision the future of Mizo cinema? By addressing these questions, the study contributes both an empirical account of the Mizo film industry and a broader understanding of cinema's role as an economic enterprise and a cultural institution.

2. Review of Literature

The Mizo film industry is a very recent and still-emerging regional cinema. Scholarly accounts emphasize that Mizoram lagged decades behind other Northeast states in filmmaking. Lalrinawma and Vanamamalai (2019) observe that *"Mizoram is lacking very far behind in cinema when compared with even other Northeastern States of India"*. Indeed, Mizoram's first feature film *Phuba* ("Revenge"), was only made in 1983, whereas Assam produced its first film *Joymoti,* in 1935, and Manipur began filmmaking in the 1940s (Baruah, 2020). From *Phuba* onwards, Mizo directors produced only a handful of feature films over the next decades. In practice, early Mizo movies were shot on shoestring budgets. (Baruah, 2020) Oral histories and interviews have been the main source for early Mizo film history. The Mizoram Film Forum, established in 2003, was an early institutional effort to encourage local talent; however, the output remains limited (Lalrinawma and Vanamamalai, 2019). In sum, the industry's historical development has been minimal, and only a few films (often adaptations of local history or folklore) have appeared, highlighting how nascent Mizo cinema still is. (Agarwala, 2018; Baruah, 2020)

2.1 Production and Distribution Challenges

Scholars and journalists identify multiple structural obstacles facing Mizo filmmakers. Infrastructure is severely limited: Mizoram has no commercial movie theatres, no system of professional distributors, and filmmakers must manage all roles themselves. As Agarwala (2018) reports, a *"hit"* Mizo film is measured by shows run, but unlike elsewhere, there is no hall or distributor. The filmmaker becomes a one-man army (director, producer, distributor, even actor). In practice, most features are screened in local community halls under the YMA (Young Mizo Association) network, with announcements (tlangau) and door-to-door ticket sales. This unconventional exhibition limits audience reach and box-office returns.

Other production constraints include a shortage of equipment and trained personnel. Veteran filmmakers note that in the 1990s, *"it was hard to find not just actors, but equipment too"* (Agarwala, 2018). Even in the 2010s, directors like Zuala Chhangte had to hire cameras and sound gear from Mumbai or Guwahati (Agarwala, 2018). There is no formal film school or industry cluster in Mizoram: as one filmmaker laments, *"We don't have trained filmmakers in Mizoram"* (Baruah, 2020, p.9). Acting is not seen as a viable career; most cast and crew work on films only part-time (Agarwala, 2018). These human-resource shortages raise production costs and limit quality.

Financially, filmmaking has rarely been profitable in Mizoram. Local producers report that even their most successful dramas lost money; for example, Khawnglung Run "lost around three lakhs". (Agarwala, 2018) State support has been minimal; a budget of only ₹20 lakh per year

was earmarked for film development in Mizoram, which industry leaders say *"has not been able to truly take off"* (ibid). In short, Mizo filmmakers operate under extreme budget constraints, with very small returns on investment. (ibid) These challenges combine to stunt growth without purpose-built studios, schools, or market linkages. Mizo cinema remains largely a hobbyist or community-driven venture, not a sustainable industry.

2.2 Cultural and Audience Factors

Several social and cultural factors further shape the Mizo film context. Mizoram's strong Christian and communal culture affects entertainment patterns: evening hours (6–9 pm) are largely reserved for church and community events, and afternoons are school/work times, so movie-going is uncommon (Agarwala, 2018). Television and dubbed content dominate local screens. By the 2000s, widespread cable TV provided dozens of Mizo-language channels, but local film output was too scant to fill them (Agarwala, 2018). Channels like LPS-TV and Zonet now broadcast many foreign shows dubbed in Mizo (Korean dramas, Bollywood films, etc.), which survey respondents say are extremely popular (Agarwala, 2018) with foreign films and Korean dramas dubbed into Mizo gaining widespread popularity (Laldinfeli et al., 2022). In other words, *the audience exists*, but for television entertainment rather than local cinema. Conversely, there is clearly local interest in Mizo stories and stars. Film festivals (e.g. the Mizoram International Short Film Festival) attract submissions of Mizo shorts, and events like *Mizo Idol* enjoy big followings (Agarwala, 2018). Traditional institutions like the YMA actively promote screenings, and community events such as Chapchar Kut now include film showcases. Moreover, a new generation of viewers appreciates culturally rooted narratives: filmmakers note that audiences *"love Mizo"* content and even popular Indian films are re-voiced in Mizo dialect (Agarwala, 2018). In practice, however, these opportunities are limited by lack of supply: as one cable executive said, *"Mizo films are popular, yes, but there is simply not enough content to air"* (Agarwala, 2018). Thus, while the cultural appetite for local cinema exists, the small scale of production leaves much unmet demand.

2.3 Institutional Support and Prospects

In recent years, governmental and institutional efforts have sought to overcome some constraints. The Mizoram Film Forum (a government-backed body since 2003) now assists productions and plans infrastructure: it has acquired land to build a film city and a theatre (Agarwala, 2018). The Mizoram Film Forum (MFF) has promoted screenings and talent development since 2003. Ailawng Film City, launched by the Public Relations Department and the MFF, provides a dedicated site for film and documentary production, signalling infrastructural investment (Fanai, 2022). A short-lived mini-theatre was opened, and the state provides modest funding for equipment and training. Notably, in 2015, the Children's Film Society of India funded Mizo filmmaker Zuala Chhangte's *Kima's Lode – Beyond the Class*, which became the first Mizo film to win a National Award (Agarwala, 2018). Such high-profile recognition demonstrates that Mizo cinema can achieve wider visibility. Existing studies document multiple structural obstacles. Lalmuanpuii (2017) traces the decline of Aizawl's cinema halls and points to the absence of professional distributors, forcing filmmakers to rely on improvised networks like the Young Mizo Association for screenings. Lalrinawma and Vanamamalai (2019) note that most productions are self-financed on minimal budgets, with equipment often hired from outside Mizoram.

Prospects for growth also hinge on new media. Although local distributors are absent, web streaming or social media outlets could reach younger viewers (a gap not yet exploited). Moreover, increasing digitization of video production (even on smartphones) lowers entry barriers. Festivals (national and international) have begun showcasing Mizo films, creating

networks for talent. If state funding were expanded or co-productions arranged (as in other Northeast states), the industry might scale up. At present, the Mizo film industry remains tiny, but the foundations of support for cultural organizations, government interest, and budding filmmakers suggest potential for future development.

2.4 Comparative North-East Context

By contrast with Mizoram, scholars notes that Assam and Manipur have well-developed film industries. As Baruah (2020) emphasizes, *"Assam and Manipur are the only two states in the Northeast that have consistently made films on their local issues"*. (Baruah, 2020, p.3) Assam's first film, *Joymoti* (1935), launched a continuum of notable directors like Biju Phukan, Jahnu Barua) (Baruah, 2020). Manipur's cinema emerged in the late 1940s and 1970s with *Mainu Pemcha* (1948) and *Matamgi Manipur* (1972). (Baruah, 2020) Both states now produce dozens of films yearly, with festivals and a significant audience. In comparison, Mizoram's single-screen hometown screenings and DIY production style are unusual. Comparative scholarship underlines the uneven development of film industries across Northeast India. Assamese cinema, with over nine decades of history, has been the most widely documented. Deori and Bora (2020) show how Assamese cinema evolved from Jyoti Prasad Agarwala's Joymoti (1935) into a diverse industry that explores themes of ethnicity, ecology, and gender. Dutta (2022) adds that directors like Bhabendra Nath Saikia advanced feminist representation, embedding Assamese films in broader national discourses on art cinema. Manipuri cinema, though younger, has also been widely studied. Aribam Syam Sharma's films have received critical acclaim for their realist style and their nuanced treatment of women's agency and social change. (ShodhKosh, 2021) Manipuri documentaries, including Fried Fish, Chicken Soup, and a Premiere Show, have drawn attention for exploring conflict, displacement, and community identity in times of insurgency. (ShodhKosh, 2021) These examples underscore how Manipuri filmmakers have turned local struggles into powerful cinematic narratives, gaining recognition nationally and internationally.

By contrast, other smaller industries remain emergent but are gaining scholarly attention. Khasi cinema, for instance, has been examined for its focus on folklore and oral traditions, often adapted into low-budget films circulated within Meghalaya. Scholars note that despite limited infrastructure, Khasi films articulate questions of language preservation and cultural continuity (Baruah, 2020). Naga cinema has produced independent films and documentaries that engage with themes of insurgency, ethnic identity, and reconciliation, though the scale remains very small and scholarship is sparse. Similarly, Arunachali cinema has begun to develop in recent decades, with films drawing heavily on tribal folklore and landscapes to project cultural specificity. (Baruah, 2020)

Placed against these trajectories, Mizo cinema remains strikingly underdeveloped. Unlike Assam and Manipur, Mizoram lacks consistent production, institutional support, and scholarly analysis. While Khasi, Naga, and Arunachali cinemas also remain small, they have begun to carve out niches within cultural studies debates. Mizo cinema, by contrast, has received little critical or comparative attention, making it the least represented in academic film discourse from the region.

Lalrinawma and Vanamamalai (2019) explicitly contrast Mizo cinema with its neighbours: they note that Assam and Manipur have earned national and international recognition for their films, whereas Mizoram is lagging very far behind. A key reason is scale and investment: other Northeast states have invested in film institutes and studios, whereas Mizoram has not. In short, the regional perspective highlights how exceptional Mizo cinema's constraints are; it effectively started decades later than Assam or Manipur and has grown much more slowly.

This comparison underscores both the uniqueness of Mizoram's challenges and the untapped possibilities of catching up.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

Scholarly research on the Mizo film industry is very sparse. Beyond a few local journal articles and reports, most accounts come from journalism or oral history. The retrospective study by Lalrinawma and Vanamamalai (2019) is one of the few in-depth analyses. Few peer-reviewed studies on Mizo cinema exist – one recent example is a 2025 article on insurgency themes in Mizo films (Lalhmachhuana et al., 2025), but these are isolated. There is a clear gap in systematic research on *audience reception, economic models, distribution networks*, and comparative studies of Northeast cinemas. In particular, no comprehensive history or market analysis of the Mizo industry has been published in English-language journals. Thus, the literature review reveals that while media sources document many practical issues and prospects (overviews by Agarwala 2018; Baruah 2020), academic coverage is limited. This review identifies the need for more scholarly work on Mizo cinema's evolution, its role in cultural identity, and its place in the broader Indian film ecosystem,; a gap which this study seeks to address.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, since the aim is to capture lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of filmmakers regarding the state of Mizo cinema. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited for examining emergent industries such as Mizo filmmaking, where numerical data alone cannot explain cultural, institutional, and creative dynamics.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews: Rationale

To generate rich, nuanced data, semi-structured interviews were chosen. This method allows researchers to follow a flexible guide of open-ended questions while also probing respondents' unique insights (Ruslin et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews are regarded as especially valuable in film and cultural studies because they enable participants to articulate personal experiences, contextual histories, and subjective evaluations that would remain inaccessible through survey or structured interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). They also provide a balance between comparability across participants and the depth of narrative exploration.

3.3 Participant Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify participants. Eight prominent Mizo filmmakers were selected based on their demonstrated contribution to the regional industry, measured through film production, recognition at state/national levels, or leadership roles in film organisations. This criterion ensured that the perspectives gathered were informed by practical experience and reflective of the challenges and opportunities within the industry. The sample size of eight is consistent with qualitative research norms, where depth of engagement is prioritised over breadth (Guest et al., 2006).

3.4 Data Collection and Procedure

Each interviewee was asked twelve essential questions that aimed to illustrate the main issues related to the Mizo film industry concerning the degree of influence of other local and national regional film industries, the increasing importance of mobile phones and church productions, the structure and logistics of actual filmmaking, and the future of the Mizo film industry in the coming years. All the interviews were conducted in person and with prior informed consent from the participants. Each interview was recorded to ensure accurate transcriptions and transparency in the research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The participants were informed about the aim of the study and were assured of confidentiality. Participants were asked for their consent to record; they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The ethical procedures put in place were made to respectfully regard the cultural sensitivities of the participants and the filmmaker's professionalism.

4. Findings

The finding presented in this paper derives from extensive interviews with 8 Mizo filmmakers. This information contributes to an understanding of the complex realities of filmmaking in Mizoram, an industry that persists in the margins of both Indian national cinema and the broader global film industry. Although the participants' perspectives differ depending on their professional position and personal circumstances, their stories share significant similarities concerning a number of central and intersecting themes that address the structural constraints, creative practices, and cultural hopes in the present and future of Mizo cinema.

The responses shed light on the continuing difficulties of maintaining a filmmaking culture within a context characterized by limited funding, poor institutional support, and minimal distribution infrastructures. At the same time, they underscore the persistence of filmmakers who exist with new technologies, some of which are attached to smartphones and digital platforms, and who persistently make spaces for local stories to resonate. The interviews shed light on external industries (national and international) that have an impact on Mizo film practices, showing how regional filmmakers attempt to negotiate imitation, adaptation, and innovation.

A common theme is the influence of Christianity and the church on the thematic orientations of films. Church-based productions are an important sub-market that fuels creative activity and also represents the moral and cultural values of Mizo society. The findings also suggest there is growing interest in locating Mizo films within wider cultural and economic networks, with participants often reflecting on possibilities for growth, exposure, or recognition beyond the boundaries of Mizoram. These insights combine to allow for a complex understanding of the Mizo film industry: constrained and aspirational, fragile and resilient, and existing within the cultural negotiations of a society that continues to establish its identity through cinema.

4.1 Mizo Films – Popular Genres and Outside Influences

Respondents widely acknowledged that Mizo cinema largely consists of comedies and romances, and audiences naturally prefer these over horror or thriller films. As Filmmaker 3 noted, *"When we try to make horror, the response is cold. People still come for love stories or films with humour — that's what fills the halls."* This finding resonates with broader regional cinema patterns, where melodrama and family-centred narratives often take precedence over experimental genres.

Various narrative themes are present above the more apparent genres, including love as a boundary-crossing trope and migration, the clash of generations, and how Christianity

manifests in ordinary life. The film *Khawnglung Run (2012),* for example, demonstrates the mixing of romance and tragedy, including a historical period backdrop. Interviewees emphasised that audiences are drawn to films that mirror their social realities. As *Filmmaker 6* explained, *"If we tell stories about our families, our churches, or village life, people relate. They are less interested when we imitate Hollywood or Bollywood."*

The influence of other film industries is nevertheless significant. The Mizo movies of the 1990s adopted Bollywood melodrama or the action choreography of Hong Kong martial-arts films. Multiple respondents acknowledged that in the early years, *"Bollywood was our film school"* (*Filmmaker 2*). Nonetheless, Hollywood still inspires visual style and narrative scale, especially in terms of action and editing style. Since the 2000s, Korean dramas (Kdramas) have been noteworthy as influencers of local audience expectations, in relation to romance, aesthetics, and serial storytelling. This aligns with the recorded appeal of Korean media in Mizoram through dubbed cable television (Lalrinawma & Vanamamalai, 2019).

A significant related theme is the function of films produced by the church. Respondents characterized these as a double-edged sword: on the one end, these films act as a training ground for young actors and technical personnel, and as religious outreach. As *Filmmaker 5* explained, *"Many of our actors first acted in church films — it gave them confidence to stand in front of a camera."* Conversely, because these productions depend upon unpaid volunteer labour and are not encumbered by commercial expenses, they inevitably create unfair competition for professional filmmakers. Church films tend to avoid controversial parts but give actors a chance to act without damaging their reputations as long as it is considered gospel work. This aspect of church films is specific to Mizoram and illustrates religious engagement with local film production in a way that differentiates it from most other Northeast cinemas.

The finding demonstrates that Mizo filmmakers are innovative and make experiments across genres, but the strongest genres remain comedy and romance, reinforced by Mizo cultural expectations and the cinematic traditions they draw inspiration from. The dominant presence of foreign industries, including more recently the Korean and Hollywood industries continues to occupy a prominent space in Mizo film, although this is beginning to shift towards a growing focus on stories based within Mizo society.

4.2 Release and Reception

The access and distribution channels for Mizo films have been affected by nascent digital platforms and limited infrastructure. Screenings of Mizo films have typically happened in community halls, often organised by the Young Mizo Association (YMA). This has remained the case due to piracy and the lack of proper cinema halls. As *Filmmaker 1* explained, *"Community halls are still our theatres. We know the audience will come, and it is safer than releasing only online, where there is a high chance of piracy."* The ticket sales for these screenings are usually split between organisers and filmmakers, reflecting on a community revenue model. (Lalmuanpuii, 2017)

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the growth of local OTT platforms, such as *Bawmrang TV*, *Lersia Play*, *Runmawi* and *Chhimbal*, which provided alternatives to physical screenings. According to *Filmmaker 4*, *"During COVID, OTT became our lifeline. People could still watch new Mizo films, and suddenly we had audiences even outside Mizoram."* Interviewees highlighted that these platforms widened audience reach beyond Aizawl and attracted younger viewers accustomed to streaming content. However, filmmakers also acknowledged their limitations. Compared with global services like Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar, local platforms face challenges of limited content libraries and low subscription uptake. As

(*Filmmaker 7*) noted that *"Many people share accounts or expect free downloads, so income from OTT is still very small."*

Respondents repeatedly identified piracy as a significant barrier that affects both theatrical and digital releases, limiting the revenue channels available to Mizo filmmakers. Respondents acknowledged that films released through OTT platforms are most susceptible to piracy as people use smartphones to record and post them informally on social media. This practice has not only deterred producers from releasing exclusively on digital platforms but has also reinforced the need for producers to continue showing films in local theatrical venues. *(Filmmaker 8)* commented, *"If we only release on digital, within a week, the whole film is on YouTube. At least in the hall, people respect the ticket, and we can recoup our money."* This also points to a central paradox that exists in the industry. Although digital has the possibility of reaching broader audiences and improved visibility than in the traditional cinema space, the nature of digital also opens films to piracy, which diminishes the possible profits and relies upon the relative reliability of returns in a community screening.

Audience data from interviewees suggests that viewership is increasing, particularly among youth. According to Filmmaker 2, *"The audience has grown, especially among young people. They are more willing to watch Mizo films than before."* This change in generations reflects changes in patterns of cultural consumption, where younger viewers are combining global OTT services with newer local platforms. In short, Mizo film release strategies take place in a hybrid space: community screenings are at the centre of distribution methods, but OTT platforms are increasingly important for reach. However, piracy, low subscriber-based revenues, and the level of infrastructure still shape how Mizo films are made and received.

4.3 Filmmakers, Struggles, and the Future of the Industry

Professional Challenges

Mizo filmmakers operate under severe resource constraints. Most productions are self-financed, with minimal external investment. As *Filmmaker 2* stated, *"We depend on our own savings or small contributions from friends and family. Investors don't see film as a business here."* Although the Government of Mizoram provides limited aid through its Visual Art Programme under the Information and Public Relations Department (I&PR) up to ₹10,00,000 for the year 2008-2013, the amount is insufficient to cover even a fraction of production costs. (Lalrinawma & Vanamamalai, 2019) Respondents repeatedly identified piracy as the most damaging factor, reducing revenue and discouraging private investors. *Filmmaker 7* explained, *"Once the film is online, it spreads on Youtube for free. That kills our chance to recover costs."* Equally pressing is the shortage of trained technicians. Directors often multitask as editors, cinematographers, or even actors. *Filmmaker 5* observed, *"In one of my films, I was the cameraman, director, and editor. We simply don't have enough trained people."* The absence of professionalization limits quality and slows down the industry's evolution.

4.4 Mobile Filmmaking

The spread of smartphones has popularised mobile filmmaking in Mizoram. Competitions and YouTube releases have encouraged amateur creativity. Several respondents highlighted the positive role of this trend in cultivating interest in cinema. *Filmmaker 6* explained, *"Mobile films make audiences curious about quality. When they see the difference, they appreciate professional films more."* However, others expressed concern that free access on YouTube fosters a "free-content mentality," normalising piracy and undermining willingness to pay for films.

4.5 Financial Support and Investment

The lack of on-going financial support surfaced as one of the most prominent themes over the course of the interviews, with respondents continually highlighting how the lack of long-term funding stunted the growth and professionalization of the Mizo film industry. Participants were dissatisfied with the almost complete absence of private funding from investors and also highlighted the limited role of the government, often limited to sporadic cultural initiatives rather than systematic support mechanisms. As *(Filmmaker 1*) noted *" If the government wants us to grow, they should treat film like any other industry. Not just a hobby. Right now, it's just tokenistic support. We get a small award here and there; we might get a grant here and there. But there's no structure, no system that helps us plan for a long term. Filmmaking is work. It employs people, it creates income. It promotes culture. But it's only ever treated as a pastime, so we can't get out of survival mode as practice".* This broader reflection encapsulates the frustration of practitioners, who appreciate the cultural industry potential of cinema in both artistic and commercial sense, in a policy environment where cinema is undervalued and unsupported.

4.6 Slow Growth and Audience Competition

The growth of Mizo cinema is slowed by structural and cultural competition. Filmmakers cited the dominance of global OTT platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar, which offer vast content libraries. *Filmmaker 8* noted, *"Why would young people pay for a Mizo film when they can watch hundreds of movies on Netflix?"* This tension reflects broader regional struggles, where local cinemas compete with both Bollywood and global media (Baruah, 2020). The scarcity of theatres compounds these issues. Films are still largely screened in community halls, which limit revenue potential and professional visibility (Lalmuanpuii, 2017). Combined with a weak marketing infrastructure, these barriers slow the expansion of the industry despite growing audience interest.

4.7 Future Prospects

Even with adversity, the interviewees showed some cautious optimism. *Filmmaker 4* expressed essential optimism about the future of the industry, stating*, "In ten years time, we will have more professionals, more platforms, and bigger audiences".* This sentiment offers a wider belief among participants that the Mizo film industry is making progress towards greater institutionalisation, technical refinement, and market growth. Others emphasised the possibilities offered by alternative funding models, particularly crowdfunding and co-productions, as alternatives to redress the lack of investment or the perennial shortage of funds. *"In the future, crowd-funded films will come. And we will no longer be stopped by financial issues," (Filmmaker 2).* These statements imply an ongoing recognition of structural issues, but a belief that new models of collaboration and participation may offer chances to sustain their work and to possibly grow their productions over the next decade.

Respondents expressed enthusiasm about the possibility or potential to reach audiences beyond Mizo films and filmmakers. This aspiration includes national film awards recognition, as well as the potential for national and film festival recognition, which can lead to Bollywood collaboration. Nevertheless, most respondents emphasized piracy as the most significant threat to the future sustainability of the Mizo film industry. Participants highlighted that unless the problem is dealt with more robust legality and increased public awareness, filmmakers will not be able to recoup their costs or make enough revenue to support both creative output and the film industry itself. Thus, the ongoing threat of piracy was characterized not merely as an annoyance but as a structural barrier to any real attempts at professionalization and

expansion, which adds to the view that real reform is needed if the industry is going to progress from its current precarious state.

5. Conclusion

The findings from semi-structured interviews draw attention to the unique yet fragile direction of the Mizo film industry. Mizo cinema remains firmly rooted in popular genres such as comedy and romance, while it thematically focuses on social realism, migration, and religion. Although Bollywood, Hollywood, and Korean dramas continue to exert an influence, filmmakers are increasingly affirming the need to tell stories based on Mizo society. Films produced by the church demonstrate the overlap between religion and cultural production, as they both provide a space for the development of talent and create a competitive space with commercial film. Distribution and reception practices indicate a hybrid system centring on community hall screenings, supplemented by new OTT platforms such as *Bawmrang TV*, *Runmawi*, *Lersia Play* and *Chhimbal*. These platforms have increased accessibility and assisted in developing younger audiences, particularly during the pandemic, but piracy and very low subscription rates for these new platforms restrict profitability. The continuing viability of community-based screenings demonstrates the resilience of local networks, but it also highlights the underlying weakness of Mizoram's film infrastructure.

Filmmakers face profound challenges, including insufficient project funding, professional training and support from institutions. Very few filmmakers benefit from financial support as the industry is primarily self-funded and the Government's Visual Art Programme offers only limited to slight assistance. On-going piracy diminishes revenues and discourages potential funders. Yet, the determination of filmmakers is reflected in their readiness to work in multiple jobs, try mobile filmmaking, or use crowdfunding as a future option. There existed a cautiously optimistic attitude among participants that with improved funding opportunities, training opportunities, and audience awareness, Mizo films and eventually Mizo filmmakers would achieve wider recognition and become legitimate players in Northeast Indian cinema. Together, these findings indicate that the Mizo film industry, while hindered by structural limitations, is undergoing a slow change. The combination of local creativity, external influences, and technological adaptation characterises its current state, while the trajectory of the Mizo film industry will depend on addressing piracy, developing significant and sustained finance, and investing in professionalization. The research contributes to an under-researched area of regional cinema in Northeast India, underlining both the difficulties and the untapped opportunities in relation to the films from the "Highlanders".

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The author declares no potential conflicts of interest or disclosures with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding Disclosure: The author has received no funding either for the research work or for the publication of this research article.

References

Agarwala, T. (2018, September 23). Mizoram: How the show goes on. *The Indian Express*.

Barman, V. (2024). Regional cinema: A cultural tapestry. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 12*(7), 859–867.

Baruah, P. (2020). Northeast cinema: Resistance to stereotyping. *E-CineIndia, 9*(4), 32–47. Federation of Film Societies of India.

Bhattacharjee, S. (2016). The aesthetics and politics of Manipuri cinema. *Journal of North East India Studies, 6*(2), 45–62.

Chandrasekaran, A. (2022, January 26). The rise and rise of regional cinema. *The Hindu BusinessLine*. Deb, J. (2023). The proliferation of OTT platforms: Effect on traditional cinema-goers (Kolkata, post-COVID-19). *Global Media Journal (Open Access).* Deori, M., & Bora, A. (2020). Assamese cinema through nine decades. *Global Media Journal, 18*(2), 1–12.

Devi, M. (2021). Women, conflict, and cinema in Manipur: Narratives of resistance. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 22*(9), 120–134.

Dowerah, S. (2019). Cinematic landscapes of Northeast India through an ecocritical lens. *Asian Cinema, 30*(1), 23–39. https://doi.org/10.1386/ac_00004_1

Dutta, M. (2022). Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's contributions to Assamese cinema: A feminist reading. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 10*(8), 120–126.

Fanai, E. D. (2022, March 22). Mizo film community attains boost with the inauguration of Ailawng Film City. *North East Today*.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2954–2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Kumar, S. (2014). Media industries in India: An emerging regional framework. *Media Industries Journal, 1*(2), 1–8.

Laldinfeli, C., Fanai, L., & Khiangte, L. (2022). Korean pop culture and fan-based entrepreneurship in Mizoram. *Shodha Prabha, 47*(1), 9. ISSN: 0974-8946.

Lalhmachhuana, D., Dey, S., Laltlanchhuaha, J., & Lalchhandama, A. (2025). Our side of the story: A qualitative study on the portrayal of insurgency in selected Mizo films. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 13*(5), 199–208.

Lalmuanpuii, J. (2017). The history of the rise and fall of cinema halls in Aizawl. *International Journal of Current Humanities & Social Science Researches, 1*(2), 45–5

Lalrinawma, J., & Vanamamalai, R. (2019). Indigenous Mizo cinema: A retrospective view. *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies, 6*(1), 201–220.

Lalrinawma, J., & Vanamamalai, R. (2019). Indigenous Mizo cinema: A retrospective view. *Contemporary Social Scientist, 11*(1), 33–48. Mizoram University.

Medhi, B. (2017). Assamese cinema and the politics of culture. *Journal of North East India Studies, 7*(1), 25–40.

Pegu, U. K. (2015). Concerns and constraints of film-making in North-East India. *Mass Communicator: International Journal of Communication Studies, 9*(4), 31–36. https://doi.org/10.5958/0973-967X.2015.00021.6

Prabakaran, P., & Sudharsan, R. (2024). The role that movies play in shaping both individual daily routines and societal norms. *Shanlax International Journal of Management, 11*(S1), 34–38. https://doi.org/10.34293/management.v11iS1-Mar.7996

Ruslin, R., Rukmana, R., & Rahmatia, R. (2022). Semi-structured interview as a method in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221082563

Sarkar, S., & Choudhury, A. (2025). Indian cinema and cultural identity: Negotiating tradition, modernity, and global influence. *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies, 10*(1), 157–189.

ShodhKosh. (2021). Beyond domesticity and women's agency in Manipuri cinema: An analysis of female characters in Aribam Syam's films. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 2*(1), 51–62.

David Lalhmachhuana is a Doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Mass Communication at Mizoram University, India. His research focuses on the impact of films on

society, with a particular interest in how Mizo cinema reflects and shapes socio-political identities, represents insurgency, and portrays underrepresented communities.

Sayan Dey is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, India, with a teaching career spanning over a decade. With a PhD in New Media and Hybrid Culture, his research interests include New Media, Cultural Studies and Film Studies. He has published in indexed journals and books apart from presenting his works in international platforms. He has six edited books to his credit apart from authoring one. He is a member of the South Asian Communication Association (SACA).

Nicky Lalrinsanga Lotlai is a research scholar at Mizoram University, India. His research interests include Cultural Studies and focus on how Transnational Television has influenced the Mizo indigenous cultural practices, and how women have gained access, independence, and freedom in a patriarchal Mizo society and culture.

Joel Laltlanchhuaha is a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University. He has a Bachelor's and a Master's Degree in Sociology from the same university. He is currently working on his thesis, "The Role of Digital Media in the Music Industry: An Exploratory Study of the Mizo Youtubesphere" under the supervision of Prof. Irene Lalruatkimi, Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University. His area of interest includes media sociology, effect analysis, media and society, platform studies, affordances study, and others.