

**CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOOD HABITS AND
CULINARY PRACTICES IN MIZO SOCIETY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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PHILOSOPHY**

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**CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOOD HABITS AND
CULINARY PRACTICES IN MIZO SOCIETY**

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Submitted

**In partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Sociology of Mizoram University, Aizawl**

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Certificate

This is to certify that **Saidingpuui Sailo**, a bonafide research scholar having enrolment No: MZU/Ph. D/1768 of 26.08.2021 attached to the Department of Sociology has completed his work for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Sociology under my supervision and guidance on a research topic entitled '**Cultural Identity In Food Habits And Culinary Practices in Mizo Society**,' for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, Mizoram University, Aizawl. The work embodies a record of original investigation and no part of it has been submitted for any other degree in other universities.

On evaluation of all the formalities, I am pleased to forward the thesis for evaluation and further necessary action.

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DECLARATION
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER, 2025

I **SAIDINGPUII SAILO**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology**.

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Dated: 10th December, 2025

Place: Aizawl

(SAIDINGPUH SAILO)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Food is not only just a means of survival but also the first item under four basic needs of human beings such as food, water, clothing and shelter. In fact, the role and function of food entails more than survival. Similarly, “Next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one which much of social life is entwined” (Mintz, Bois, 2002, p. 102). Food not only has its biological component; it also constitutes social component. Food is closely interwoven with culture. According to Barthes (2008), food is considered to be multifaceted involving different features of shaping the identities and cultures of human beings which shapes society. Visser (1999) addressed the occurrence of change in diet which is resulted by change in culture and vice versa. Therefore, change in culture simply results in change in diet as well.

Freeman (2006) has defined culture by stating it as a complex set of values acquired by man as a member of society that helps in the identification of specific groups of people at a given point of time (Sibal, 2018). In modern society, culture enables us to distinguish one people from another based on their values, symbols, interpretations and perspectives. Exploring culture through the lens of food can provide meanings to one’s livelihood. In a like manner, “food is recognized as a lens through which we can view, explore, analyze and interpret society in the present as well as in the past” (Katz et al., 2003).

Culture is dynamic in nature as it encounters new things, people and situations which further re-create the existing culture. Food and its categories along with the meanings attached is considered as part of culture (Douglas, 1996; Poulain, 2008). Food can thus be considered culture while it is being produced as well as when it is being prepared and consumed. Therefore, food is very much part of the culture which has its own structure experiencing change over a certain period of time.

As defined by Long et al. (2017) “Food culture refers to the practices, attitudes, and beliefs as well as the networks and institutions surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food. It encompasses the concept of foodways, cuisine, and food system and includes the fundamental understandings a group has

about a food, historical and current conditions shaping the group's relationship to food, and the ways in which the group uses food to express identity, community, values, status, power, artistry and creativity. It also includes a groups' definitions of what items can be food, what is tasty, healthy and socially appropriate for specific subgroups or individuals and when, how, why, and with whom those items can or should be consumed."

Cuisines around the world differ from country to country and thus food choice and food preference also vary from culture to culture. Various countries have their own special cuisines that have evolved over time. The ingredients used, the styles of cooking and the methods of cooking vary from country to country. Each belonging to particular ethnicity and race is inclined to their own specific food. Differences in the styles of cookery is visibly shown among the various forms of culture.

Among the Americans today, increased consumption of processed foods is commonly seen. American food has changed in such a manner that Americans lacked the knowledge of food preparation. They do not know how to cook food and therefore consuming large portion of processed foods (Jones, 2007; Tan, 2012). The cuisine of the West has been expanded by welcoming the influences of European cuisines especially that of Italy and Spain and thereby food item such as pasta has been accepted as one of the main components of Western food. The fast-changing world enabled the western cuisine to have a marked impact on other food cultures around the world (Unilever food solutions, 2012). Symbolically, the western food is always linked with bread and the Eastern food is linked with rice. In Western Europe, food habits had been altered and the occurrence of significant changes is visibly seen such as the decline in consumption of vegetables, increase in the consumption of meat and dairy products, processed foods and the commencement of consuming tea, coffee and chocolate which are now considered as part of western cuisines (Mintz, 2000).

The culinary traditions of Asia can be considered as one which is dynamic and varied. The popular Asian food such as Chinese food, Korean food, Thai food, Indian food, Vietnamese food and Japanese food are found to spread across the globe. According to Ishige (2008), the three main dietary cultures of Asia are: Persian-Arabian, Indian and Chinese. The common dish among Persian-Arabian includes naan, rice dish known as pilau, kebab, meat-mutton and consumption of pork is forbidden as they are living in Islamic region. The Indian diet is directly linked with the daily use of curry

in meals. Cows are used for milk and not for meat and clarified butter, popularly known as ghee is used for cooking. Among Indians, in addition to rice, chapati is regarded as a staple part of diet. If we look at the Chinese diet culture, pork is regularly used and milk is not used of their domesticated animals. ‘Jiang’ which is the fermented soy bean is prepared in the form of paste or liquid-ready-made seasoning and is widely used among Chinese. The usage of chopsticks and small individual bowls served as a characteristic of Chinese cultural sphere (Ishige, 2008). We have seen different styles of eating food in Asia. The people of India, Middle East and Southeast Asia eat with hands but the regions which are strongly influenced by Chinese namely Vietnam, Japan, Tibet and Korea used chopsticks for eating food (Ibid).

India’s North Eastern Region (NER) comprises of eight states-Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and constitutes 8% of the country’s geographical area. The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Agritech portal has mentioned that the consumption of food pattern in Northeast India is largely seasonal and the people eat food thrice a day and meals include rice, vegetable and meat with local spices (TNAU Agritech portal, 2015).

In the context of Mizoram, our interpretation of the term food and its categories is unique from other culture. Specifically, the Mizos in Mizoram decipher the term food to chaw which directly attribute to rice (*buh*). Studies conducted by Bawitlung (2022) showed that for hundreds of years, the staple food of the Mizos is rice and thus people of Mizoram attached the meaning of food to rice.

The traditional culture of the Mizos remained intact till the coming of Christianity, modernity and several other aspects of change. The contemporary Mizo food could serve as an instrumental lens to understand the Mizo culture by looking at the changes seen in food habits, culinary practices involved, consumption pattern, table manner, ways of cooking, cuisine, amount of food eaten and left uneaten, vision of food and position of food among the Mizos. Moreover, the role of food in society and how it affects social prestige, health consciousness and all other food related issues shall be dealt through this proposed study.

1.2 Culture and identity

Culture and identity have a significant but often unnoticed influence. Identity refers to the feeling of being a part of a specific group or country, whereas culture

encompasses common values, beliefs, traditions, and practices. Culture and identity shape people's views, values, customs, and behaviors (Kamak, 2024). The Latin term for culture has a definite origin. The term culture originates from the verb *colo* (infinitive *colere*), which signifies "to tend," "to cultivate," or "to till" (Minkov, 2013). According to the dictionary, culture refers to the habits and civilization of a specific time or people, as well as intellectual and artistic expression. Throughout history, philosophers and thinkers have defined and studied the concept of culture in their own ways. Prof. Edward Burnett Tylor, an anthropologist, defined culture as a set of knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and habits acquired by individuals in society (Ratnapalan, 2008). William A. Haviland (1990), a modern anthropologist defined culture as a system of laws or standards that guide behaviour within a society's acceptable range. Sociologists, philosophers, cultural historians, anthropologists and others have all proposed various definitions of culture. They all aim to capture the various facets of culture and how it affects our life.

Culture is not genetically passed, but rather learnt through socialization. Not everything that is learnt is culture, but all culture is learned. Diverse societies and communities hold distinct sets of values. These disparities can occasionally lead to conflict. Culture also refers to the lifestyles of individuals or groups in society. It includes how they dress, their marital practices, language and family life, their working habits, religious rites, and leisure interests (Giddens, 2005). The concept of culture is universal. According to Sutherland (1961), the culture is examined through its customs, beliefs, language, and other shared ways of thinking, feeling, and doing. Culture is characterized by its variability and adaptability to change. Culture is subjective, but human heredity is generally constant. Culture is also transmitted through customs, beliefs, norms, sanctions, values, laws, and institutions. Culture is therefore social, symbolic, and ever-changing. Culture is not just characterized by its language, customs, beliefs but also by norms, sanctions, values, and laws. Every culture has a fundamental structure, including cultural features, complexes, and areas. Culture is dynamic and prone to shifting. Cultural changes occur as a result of innovation, diffusion, acculturation, and accumulation when cultures interact.

Anthropologists typically divide culture into two categories: material culture and non-material culture. Material culture refers to the physical objects, artifacts, and spaces that people create and use to define their culture. These items are tangible and

observable, embodying the values, beliefs, norms, and technologies of a society. Non-material culture refers to the intangible aspects of a society's culture, including values, norms, language, beliefs, and symbolic meanings. It represents the unseen spiritual and intellectual substance of a society's culture (Anthrologic, 2023). Specific cuisines associated with cultures, like Italian pasta or Indian curry, are part of material culture. The intended meaning of identity does not have a single answer (Coulmas, 2019). The term identity is always in question due to its complexity of its nature and nuances. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we suppose. Instead of thinking identity as an unaccomplished fact, it should rather be viewed as a process of production, which is always in process and never complete (Hall, 2015). The concept of "identity" as we understand it now mostly originates from the 1950s work done by the psychologist Erik Erikson. Erik Erikson's work from the 1950s, largely responsible for the complex of meanings that define "identity" in its modern, historically new form. The term in question had been widely accepted in both everyday speech and several social scientific fields by the 1970s, when it was first employed in this meaning. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, historians, anthropologists, and most humanities scholars began to rely more and more on "identity" as they examined the cultural politics of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and other social categories. This trend was influenced by postmodernism and discussions surrounding multiculturalism. Identity is better understood as "identification," which is a never-ending, continuous process.

The idea of an "identity crisis," as proposed by psychotherapist Erik Erikson, has played a major role in shaping our current understanding of "identity," as demonstrated by Gleason (1983). According to Gleason (1983) and Brubaker and Cooper (1999), the idea of "identity" has lost any significance due to the widespread and disorderly proliferation of "identity talk" in both academic and popular discourse. Gleason highlights that the term "identity" has come to mean so many things. "Identity" is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of plausible explanations, most of which rely on normative references. These explanations need be thoroughly examined in order to arrive at a meaningful conclusion. According to Hall (1992), identity is something that is produced throughout time rather than something that is inherent or present in consciousness at the time of an individual's birth. Bauman (2004) supports this by saying that it is something that should be

invented rather than found. According to this viewpoint, one's identity expresses their positioning rather than their inner nature (Hall, 1992).

Identity and culture are never entirely apart. According to Bhugra (2005), cultural identity encompasses religion, rites of passage, language, food patterns, and leisure activities. Beliefs concerning food and food preparation, including taboos based on religious principles and the symbolism of food can have an impact on cultural identity (Bhugra, 2005). Cultural identity is not a static concept that exists regardless of history and culture. It is not a transcendent and universal soul that exists within us and has not been fundamentally changed by history. It is a product of its history, and histories have tangible, symbolic consequences. The past is still speaking to us. Yet, since our ties to it is always already "after the break," much like a child's relationship to their mother, it no longer refers to us as a straightforward, factual "past." It is always created from memory.

"Cultural identity" can be conceptualized in at least two ways. By the first position, 'cultural identity' relates to a single, shared culture that exists within the many different, more constructed or superficial 'selves' that individuals who share a history and cultural assets have in common. This is equivalent to a collective 'one real self'. According to this definition, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history, our cultural identities reflect the shared cultural codes and common historical experiences that give us, as "one people," constant unchanging frames of reference and meaning. An alternative perspective on cultural identity that is connected but distinct. This second viewpoint acknowledges that in addition to the numerous points of similarity, there are also crucial points of profound and notable distinctions that together make up "what we really are" or more precisely, "what we have become" since history has intervened. In this second sense, cultural identity is not just about "being," but also about "becoming." It has equal historical and contemporary significance. It is not something that exists already, existing outside of space, time, history, and culture (Adler, 2002).

Historical backgrounds are the source of cultural identities. However, they are always changing, just like anything that is historically significant. History, culture and power play a constant role in shaping individuals, rather than being stuck in a certain past. Identity is a term that we give to the various ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.

Cultural identity is fundamentally shaped by food. Food proscriptions, or foods prohibited in certain cultures, like horsemeat in the US, and food prescriptions, or particular foods deemed essential to preserving cultural identity, like short-grain rice for the Japanese, are practiced. Cultures also use food to commemorate and signify special occasions through feast foods. Our identities are shaped by the food we consume as a society (Hasty et. al, 2022).

The approaches of Hall (1992), Bauman (2004) and Mathews (2000) examined identity as culturally constructed through a system of references and shared interpretations that bring together individuals who have the same identity. The type of identity that is created collectively is known as cultural identity. The human being looks for the location and time when he will feel completely and really “at home” in the ongoing process of creating his cultural identity (Bauman 2004; Mathews 2000). The concept of “feeling at home” is not location-specific, rather, cultural identity is rooted on a sense of community and belonging. (Bauman 2004; Appadurai 1996).

Cultural identity now includes an outside layer that is selected by the individual and is no longer just based on nationality or place of birth. Nowadays, culture is an issue of personal preference. Food habits can also help people connect with their cultural or ethnic group. Food is frequently utilized as a means of maintaining cultural identity. Individuals with diverse cultural origins consume distinct types of food. Families’ dietary preferences and dislikes are influenced by the places they call home and the ancestors they descended from. Patterns of food choices within a cultural or regional group are a result of these food preferences (Sibal, 2018).

The term ethnic comes from the Latin and Greek words *ethnicus* and *ethnikas*, which both imply “nation.” *Ethos* means “custom, disposition, or trait” in Greek. *Ethnikas* and *ethos*, considered combined, can refer to a group of people (country) who live together and share common customs. The second component of the construct, identity, has Latin roots and is derived from the word *identitas*; the word is derived from *idem*, which means “same.” Thus, the term refers to the concepts of sameness, likeness and oneness (Trimble, 2000). David Riessman coined the term ethnicity in 1953. Spoonley suggests ethnicity “to acknowledge the positive feelings of belonging to a cultural group” (Spoonley, 1988). Food has been utilized to maintain ethnic identity (Ternikar, 2014). Food is one of the ways in which various national and ethnic identities are created and practiced. Food choices represent more than just our likes; they also

represent our social identities, class, national or ethnic affiliation, and the manner in which we choose to show ourselves to the outside world (Gvion, 2012). In intercultural contacts, ethnic food can act as a social transformational agent. It is imperative that we examine how different cultural settings impact our perceptions of food and how it is associated with feelings, memories, value and significance. We may therefore attempt to comprehend both our own and other people's experiences of taste and smell, even if this is very context-dependent. Ethnic food has the capacity to transform intercultural relations (Karaosmanoğlu, 2020).

1.3 Identity and Sociological Context

Culture and society are so interrelated that influence flows both the ways. It becomes clear by studying the literature of eminent sociologists that Cooley (1962), Mead (1934) have the most in-depth allusions to the issue of identity. Nevertheless, the lens through which they viewed identity was more socio-psychological than political sociological.

It is widely used to analyze current identity issues. In their discussion of "identity," Mead and Cooley emphasized the need of socialization and meaningful connections in helping people establish an "individual self" in group settings. Mead and Cooley stressed the importance of the "other" in forming a person's self-identity as the main point of contention in their discussion. Afterwards, sociologists emphasized the significance of validation in the process of forming personal or societal identities. To merely state one's identity was considered inadequate; it required acceptance (or rejection) from people one interacted with (Jenkins, 1996).

In his ground-breaking study on ethnicity, Barth contended that approval from important persons was necessary for an identity to be deemed established, merely expressing the uniqueness of one's identity was insufficient. At the intersections of internal and exterior boundaries, identities were thus found and negotiated (Ibid).

In modern sociological research, the idea of "identity" has become increasingly important from an academic standpoint. Identity-related topics have been prevalent in the area since the 1950s and 1960s, when Erikson (1968) popularized the idea of an "identity crisis" and Goffman (2009) investigated stigma as a "spoiled identity." According to Erikson, "there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity in the social jungle of human existence", identity is crucial.

Originally based in psychology and psychoanalysis, the necessity to take into account both individual and collective forms of identity became increasingly apparent in the 1980s and 1990s (Bendle, 2002). Bendle identifies two causes for this change. First of all, in the age of advanced modernity, there is a belief that identity is both important and difficult. Second, even while sociology recognizes its significance, its theoretical explanations of identity are erratic, undeveloped, and unfit to support the analytical burden attached to them. Consequently, a major contradiction emerges between a theoretical understanding of “identity” as something manufactured, fluid, complex, ephemeral, and fractured, and the realization of identity as fundamentally significant for personal well-being. Accordingly, the modern identity crisis presents as a crisis of theory as well as society (Ibid). The emergence of modernism and the current identity issue are linked, according to Bendle and argues that modern secularization placed more emphasis on achieving self-realization in this life than it did on hoping for benefits in the next. In addition, new identities that might be sought within the boundaries of the earthly sphere emerged as a result of the dissolution of hierarchies, the development of individualism, social mobility, and the possibility of significant social change. There was also an increased degree of flexibility in defining oneself. Identity had previously been established by strict and dependable social processes and institutions. But as these institutions crumbled, the basis for establishing identity became mutable and non-absolute.

There is no denying that the conversation about identity is a creation of the modern era. According to academics, the emphasis on identity which is based on a variety of organizing principles including gender, sexual orientation, language, race, religion, or caste appears as a reaction against the sense of anonymity that permeates the impersonal modern world. It is considered a way to create a feeling of community, warmth, and belonging.

Societies are undergoing significant structural changes as a result of modernization’s transformative consequences. This leads to the fracturing of the cultural landscape of caste, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and even nationality, which historically offered social individuals a safe haven. These shifts in society also have a significant impact on individual identities, which destroys our cohesive sense of self. The breakdown of a solid “sense of self” causes people to become alienated from their

social and cultural environments and also leads to an identity crisis on a personal level (Hall, 1996).

Mercer (1990) contends that an idea of identity is only problematic when it is experiencing a crisis. According to Mercer, a crisis occurs when something previously thought to be fixed, coherent, and stable is disrupted, causing ambiguity and doubt.

The writings of Anthony Giddens (1991) and Manuel Castells (1996) are crucial for comprehending identity formation and its function in contemporary society. Giddens' theory of individuation, reflexive modernization, and the rise of post-traditional societies within an international system all revolve around identity. Giddens argues that people are forced to make lifestyle decisions amid a variety of options as customs wane and daily life is reconstructed via the interaction of the local and the global. A key component of the development of one's self-identity is this reflective approach to life planning (Ibid). It is supported by an ongoing or retrospective "narrative of the self," that works as a lens for reflexive understanding of self-identity (Ibid). According to Giddens, self-identification refers to a person's reflective awareness of themselves in relation to their biography. Giddens views trust as essential to his idea of self-identity because it provides "ontological security" against the potentially chaotic world that exists outside of daily norms. Trust cultivates trust in oneself, another people's dependability, and the social milieu in which one lives. Giddens believes that an emotive-cognitive orientation toward other people, the object world, and one's own self-identity develops on a foundation of trust (Ibid). Childhood is the most critical time for developing a secure self-identity since it is at this time that children are emotionally vaccinated against existential fears related to potential threats and hazards. In a world that is always changing and unexpected, a secure self-identity serves as the foundation for continued relationships.

Expert systems made up of trained experts are called upon by contemporary society when self-identity is in crisis as a result of disease, deviance, anxiety, or alienation. Due to the loss of civil society's and individuals' ability to handle crises of this nature, traditional civilizations must sequester their experience inside these expert systems. As such, the development and preservation of identity become more difficult and fall under the purview of impersonal, external expert systems, while society is dehumanized and deskilled in vital domains of interpersonal life.

In M. Castells' (1996) view of the information age, identity is a fundamental subject. He emphasizes how the competing trends of globalization and identity impact our environment and our lives. Castells explains the rise of the network society which is marked by changes in capitalism, a reduction in statism, and technical improvements. Features of this network society include individualization of labor, flexible and unstable work, network-based organizational structures, and a virtual culture founded on intricate media networks. Along with the emergence of new global governing elites, it also involves changes to the physical underpinnings of life, space, and time (Ibid). Castells argues, however, that the growing expansion of collective identity manifestations is strongly opposing this significant transition. These group identities might be gendered, religious, national, ethnic, territorial, or sociobiological, among other identities. They are varied, shaped by the characteristics and historical context of every culture. Whether progressive or reactionary, these identities use media and telecommunications networks as instruments more and more. Castells highlights that these identities fight against cosmopolitanism and globalization, supporting cultural uniqueness and individual autonomy over one's life and surroundings (Ibid). According to Castells, identities are created through the process of individuation and provide significance for the people who possess them. Cultural characteristics are the foundation of an individual's identity and are given priority over other sources of meaning, nevertheless, dominant social roles and institutions only evolve into an integral part of an individual's identity when they are internalized and given personal significance. Thus, identity is a dynamic process of formation, and Castells defines "meaning" as a social actor's symbolic identification of the motivation behind their behaviour (Ibid).

Power dynamics, however, have an impact on the particular shape that an identity takes. According to Castells, there are three primary categories of identity such as (1) project identity, which entails creating new identities that suggest a change to the larger social structure (2) resistance identity, which opposes the struggles that marginalized groups face within those systems and (3) legitimizing identity, which supports systems of domination. These three identity types give rise to three corresponding modes of collectivity, subjects who aim to transcend markets and communities, constituting a collective social actor through which people find holistic meaning in their experiences and civil society, which is made up of the market and its

legitimizing institutions; and communities, which are formed through collective resistance to marginalization brought about by market processes (Ibid).

Three distinct identities are presented by Hall (1996) in addition to Castells' analysis namely the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the postmodern subject. These conceptualizations are extremely important for comprehending how identities are formed and expressed. The concept of the human being as a fully realized, cohesive being equipped with agency, consciousness, and reason served as the foundation for the Enlightenment movement. This subject's centre was an inner core that surfaced at birth and was mostly constant throughout their life. This individualistic approach of the issue revolved on the idea of identity (Ibid). But as Hall points out, these identities that were fixed in the past are now described as "shifting." Once perceived as having a single, cohesive identity, the subject is now fractured, consisting of several, occasionally conflicting, or unresolved identities. At the same time, institutional and structural changes are dismantling the identities that comprise the social landscapes. People's ability to project themselves into cultural identities through the identification process has grown increasingly difficult, erratic, and open-ended. This leads to the emergence of the postmodern subject, which is distinguished by the lack of a stable, fundamental, or enduring identity. Identity becomes a dynamic concept that is constantly created and altered in response to how people are portrayed or treated in cultural systems. Identity is defined historically rather than biologically.

Identity is a symbol for something we do not completely comprehend yet. In deftly stating, Hall's own method of defamiliarizing identity is to have us reconsider "identity" and instead concentrate on "identification" which encompasses both the process of people being discursively forced into specific positions and the process of getting them to either accept or reject those positions.

1.4 Food as a marker of cultural identity

Understanding how culinary traditions create identity is particularly interesting. Food plays a significant role in shaping national identities and defining ethnic communities. Food crosses cultural boundaries more frequently and easily than any other tradition. Food can occasionally be associated with specific culinary customs, like using chopsticks, or it might blend with already-existing culinary traditions to create new syncretic cuisines, like Tex-Mex, which originated from a fusion of Mexican and US

Southwest culinary traditions. Foods are shared within and between societies, evolving to fit new environments and conditions, much like culture itself. Food is incredibly flexible, but it is also closely associated with people's cultural identities, or how they identify and set themselves apart from other social groupings. The word "cuisine" refers to particular cultural practices related to food preparation, cooking, and consumption as part of these cultural identities. The components of cuisine most closely associated with identity tend to change more slowly across all settings, even if urban regions tend to shift and adapt cuisine more frequently than rural places. Food can be deeply symbolic and is essential in all cultures. Every culture assigns meaning to food and the feelings people have for the things they eat, regardless of whether some foods are allowed or forbidden (Hasty et. al., 2022).

Food and culture have been linked throughout history, powerfully impacting cultures and civilizations. Our cultural identity, customs, and values are closely linked to the production, processing, and consumption of food. Food has an important part in the lives of humans (*Homo sapiens*), going beyond its primary function of nutrition. It serves as a profound expression of cultural identity, offering a wide range of meanings. The various flavours, ingredients, and cooking procedures associated with a specific cuisine integrally reflect a community's traditions, historical context, and core values. Every culinary heritage weaves together an array of flavours, fostering a sense of connection to one's ancestor origins and cultural past. Examples of this include the vibrant and diverse tastes found in Mexican gastronomy, the delicate fusion of flavours found in Japanese delicacies and the fragrant spices that originate from India.

Cuisine is an important component of culture since it reflects a region's location, climate, history, and beliefs. It provides a window into a community's spirit, showing its rituals, social structure, and cultural identity. Common cooking methods are frequently inherited from previous generations, preserving traditional tastes and techniques that provide a glimpse into the past. Cultural identity consists of a vast range of factors, including beliefs, customs, language, arts, and, definitely, food. Food is fundamental to cultural identity, and it is by the preparation, sharing, and consumption of meals that cultural customs are passed down from one generation to the next, preserving the essence of a community's history.

Food serves as a powerful nostalgia power, bringing back memories of festivities, get-togethers with relatives, and early life events. Our childhood food habits shape who we are and help us maintain a connection to our roots. Food provides a feeling of familiarity and connection that underpins our cultural identity, whether it is the flavor of a cherished grandmother's recipe or the aroma that permeates the air during celebratory moments.

Food connects the past and present by acting as a bridge across generations. Traditional recipes include stories and wisdom passed down through generations, preserving the values and experiences of those who came before us. By conserving and passing on these culinary traditions, we not only honor our cultural past, but also ensure that future generations can connect with their roots and comprehend the importance of their cultural identity.

Food is a strong marker of cultural identity. It acts as a tangible symbol of our heritage by reflecting the history, morals, and customs of a society. Food helps us develop our place in the world and connects us to our ancestors, from the rituals of cooking to the communal experience of a meal. In addition to improving our knowledge of various societies, embracing and appreciating the many culinary traditions around us also helps to strengthen our sense of community and compassion for humanity as a whole. Food serves as a medium for celebration, empathy, and understanding in addition to providing sustenance. Thus, let us cherish the flavours, welcome the tales, and pay attention to the history that food brings to our tables.

Understanding a culture through food is an interesting process. By asking questions about how something is created, what ingredients are used, and why it is termed a specific way, one can get insights beyond culinary knowledge. Food reflects a culture's way of life, according to these answers. In brief, food serves a symbolic role in communication as a means of meaning creation, management, and sharing with others. It is possible to learn about culture, customs, habits, and rituals through food and how other people view it (Sibal, 2018).

1.5 Food studies

Sociology of food allows us to explore the relationship between food and social identity. Food serves as a symbol of social class and caste. Our cuisine reflects our identities. In food studies, culture has grown to be of particular importance. A group of people's habits reflect certain features of their culture. Writings from the

sociological and anthropological fields often discuss food in terms of social structure and culture.

The term “food studies” relates to a comprehensive field of study that examines how important the alimentary system is to human relationships, labor, communication, ritual, and culture. Thus, “the study of the relationships between food and the human experience” could be the definition of food studies (Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Different viewpoints and locations throughout the food chain might be used to examine the relationships. The symbolic importance of cooking and eating, the most basic acts that contribute to the construction of meaning and identity is the focus of the social science and humanities departments. Another relevant topic to examine is the specifics of how food has been studied and analyzed by the fields of sociology and anthropology.

Cultural studies suggest that everyday actions are directly related to power, making understanding them crucial for politics. Food studies within cultural studies explore issues of subjectivity, meaning-making, power, identity and consumption. Food studies can be divided into three broad categories such as symbolic repertoires for social identity, cultural performance site, and signifiers of race, class, gender, and sexuality in popular culture (Ceisel, 2018).

A deeper comprehension of our location in the complex settings we inhabit is made possible by the interaction of eating behaviors with identity and subject forms. Food, being a handcrafted product is also a component of material culture. Food reflects our mental and physical states through its components, behaviors, and shapes. It is involved in the processes of culture’s perpetuation and preservation and frequently acts as its focal point.

Food plays a significant role in shaping cultural identity, continuity, and social control. In their monumental work, Inglis & Gimlin (2010) emphasize the importance of food in all societal processes, including class structures, gender relations, community, cultural nationalism, globalization, religion, and everyday life. The foods people choose, prepare, and share have a profound impact on both communities and individuals.

Food, according to Mannur (2010) is a vital “vector of critical analysis in negotiating the gendered, racialized, and classed bases of collective and individual identity.” Social interaction and psychological expression are greatly influenced by food and

eating habits (Conner & Armitage, 2002). Food studies is an emerging, interdisciplinary, and fundamentally politicized discipline of study, practice, and art that investigates the relationship between food and all elements of the human experience, including culture and biology, individuals and society, global networks, and local contexts. Food studies is a field that connects researchers and communities to explore resources, assets, issues, and solutions (Contois, 2017).

Scholars have utilized food as a sign of change over lengthy periods to generalize socio-economic behaviour, however some researches are archaic or time-specific. The importance of food in the study of social history has been demonstrated by Burnett (1979), in particular, who points out that food plays a significant influence in the fluctuating cost of living. By recognizing the many phases in the development of the mass market, Glennie (1998) feels that it is easier to examine how consumption is evolving. This has to take into consideration tangible aspects like wealth and production technology, but supply-side elements like the opening of new retail stores and studies of consumer behaviour are also essential.

Mennell, Murcott, and van Otterloo (1992) identify 'developmentalist' food literature. Here, the focus is on explaining how historically, in specific economic and power-related situations, food consumption patterns have differed across social and geographic boundaries. Food avoidances and preferences can be attributed to historical events that have influenced modern diets, rather than being irrational. Warde (1997) criticizes Mennell's important book (1985), viewing it as a continuation of Norbert Elias' work on the civilization process. Historians have examined how specific commodities have evolved over time. Salaman's (1949) potato research and Mintz (2000) sugar study are well known (McNeill, 1999).

Throughout the 20th century, various sociologists and anthropologists, including functionalists and structuralists developed an interest in food. During the early stages of the functionalist movement, there were empiricists who explained eating habits by comparing them to the ritualized and customary behaviors that support the survival of a stable society (Lupton, 1996). They suggested that what may seem to outsiders to be unusual culinary practices may actually serve a purpose that helps to bind society together. They found specific values and norms in eating patterns that are symbolic of larger structures in society as a whole (Goody, 1982).

Functionalism stresses food's physical properties and highlights its utility. This technique has been criticized for analyzing patterns and processes inside a static framework, leaving little possibility for explanation or even understanding of the significance of origins, change, and conflict. The assertion that we may infer a social system's functional requirements from its institutional structures and practices without getting into a circular argument has also been criticized (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). A significant portion of the initial functionalist study on food was conducted by social anthropologists, with the most notable being authors like Audrey Richards (1939) and Margaret Mead (1934).

While structuralism focuses on how "taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled," it also looks for deeper and more comprehensive explanations for eating behaviors (Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo, 1992). Social context is given more weight than flavour, texture, nutritional value, and other biological attributes. One strategy used by academics is to employ Saussure's language analysis to comprehend culinary culture. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) analysed the universality of opposing meanings of food, including raw, cooked, and rotten (known as the 'culinary triangle'). He believed that some attitudes toward food are 'hard wired' into the human mind, resulting in universal thought and action structures.

One of the most fascinating and perceptive structuralists was Roland Barthes (1915–1980). He used his semiotic eye to interpret popular food preferences and food in media, such as advertisements. He regarded food as a sign system (Barthes, 2008). Diet has rules of association for how certain dishes and menus should be put together, rules of exclusion for denoting opposites (such as savoury/sweet), and rituals of use, just like any language. Once more, Saussure's language structuralism had an influence, but Barthes' theory has more immediate relevance for readers in the west since, in contrast to Lévi-Strauss, he addresses ideas like capitalism and imperialism. Barthes made significant contributions by identifying and interpreting 'mythologies' based on everyday life in France. He examined soap powder, the Eiffel Tower, the world of wrestling, and many other topics. The main focus was on food and drink, including discussions on ornamental cooking, steak and chips, and margarine. According to Barthes (2008), wine is considered the national drink of his country, symbolizing the same things that the Dutch and British would associate with milk and tea respectively. Food was important to Barthes in many facets of life that affected the

body and the psyche, all of which could be studied using a single, integrated approach called psychosociology (Ibid).

Mary Douglas (1972) analyzes the “grammar” of meals, much like Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, breaking them down into their essential parts like coded texts. However, she likes a “thick description” based on participant observation. Because she incorporates aspects of both methodologies, she has been referred to as a structural-functionalist. Her interpretation of the meal is based on its structure as a social event.

Regarding food studies, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has emerged as one of the most influential theorists. Similar to numerous other authors, he acknowledged the necessity of shifting from depending entirely on the production-focused explanations of society that had long dominated materialism to a framework that may take into account factors related to consumption and lifestyle. Class, according to Bourdieu is still significant. He views consumption patterns and taste as ways to reproduce social class divisions as well as ways for people to show their class identity. Food habits, according to Miller (1995) symbolize the naturalization of ideology.

Bourdieu’s background is a combination of cultural studies and structural Marxism. Some academics would rather advance the cause and give the latter priority over the former. They act in this way because they think that people in many societies are becoming more and more free to choose how they consume, free from the constraints imposed by class norms or the production and marketing decisions of food companies. According to this theory, consumption is becoming less structured and more casual and individualized (Baumann, 1988; Warde, 1994).

Feminism has brought new perspectives to food studies since the 1970s. Feminist writers have analysed how women play a crucial role in family reproduction, particularly through food preparation. In the context of patriarchal norms, they have also discussed the connection between diet and body shape in the formation of female identity. There is a feminism that even views food items as important, claiming that eating meat and killing animals are actions that are influenced by patriarchy (Adams, 1990).

In the 1990s, the cultural turn in social science impacted different parts of food studies. The relationship between food geography and consumption is the main focus of Bell & Valentine’s (1997) book, which effectively illustrates the book’s different themes. Using sites of analysis that begin with the body and progress to the home,

neighbourhood, city, region, country and at the end, the world, they take a scale-focused approach. “We are where we eat” is their subtitle, which is a translation of the German proverb “*Man ist, was man isst*” (you are what you eat) for a particular location. For social scientists interested in food, the cultural change has led to the use of ethnographic data collection approaches.

1. Food culture in context

Food culture refers to the activities, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as the networks and institutions that surround food production, distribution, and consumption (Nagla, 2020). Food must also be regarded as a cultural phenomenon. Understanding that eating habits are a result of social interactions and standards of conduct in the society in which they are practiced is necessary in order to regard eating habits as a subject of culture. The values or beliefs that a community attaches to possible food items determine what families in a cultural group will eat.

This section will further explore food culture through various contextual layers, offering a thorough understanding of how eating practices develop and function within particular socio-cultural settings. The discussion begins with a global overview of food culture, highlighting its cultural perspectives that have shaped one’s understanding of food and society. It then moves to the Indian context, exploring how regional diversity, religion, caste, and globalization influence Indian dietary practices. The subsequent section focuses on the Northeast Indian region, where food reflects both ecological adaptation and ethnic diversity. Finally, the discussion narrows to the Mizo context, situating Mizoram’s food culture within its historical and social frameworks. This layered approach not only situates Mizo food practices within broader comparative frames but also emphasizes the interconnectedness of global and local food traditions.

1.6.1 Global context

The global discussion of food culture in this section is categorised into regional clusters and the intention is not merely geographical convenience but an analytical framework to understand distinctive culinary systems around the world. By grouping food cultures regionally into Western, African/Latin American and Asian, the discussion highlights how shared historical trajectories such as industrialization, colonialism and modernization produce parallel or contrasting attitudes towards food.

Each region is understood not as an isolated case but as part of a larger global network through which food practices, meanings, and exchanges circulate

Table 1.1. Global Cultural Contexts and Regions Examined in the Study

Global Context	Regions/Countries Discussed
1)Western Context	United States, Italy, France, United Kingdom
2)African and Latin American Contexts	South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, Mexico
3)Asian Context	China, Japan, Korea

- 1) The Western Context: Under this Western context, the review will focus on regions such as the United States, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. Each of these regions holds a significant place in global food literature, as they have contributed foundational ideas to the study of cuisine, gastronomy and culinary identity.

United States: Food culture in the United States is shaped by its multicultural composition, geographical vastness, and industrial development, making it less of a unified cuisine and more of a layered mosaic of influences. The country's culinary identity cannot be confined to a single tradition because it has evolved through successive waves of immigration and adaptation, producing overlapping regional, ethnic, and commercial food systems (Gabaccia, 1998; Pillsbury, 1998). Early American foodways emerged from the ecological and spiritual wisdom of Native Americans who cultivated corn, beans, and squash, the "three sisters" as staple crops embodying balance with the land (Wilson & Gillespie, 1999). These indigenous traditions later merged with European influences brought by British, French, German and Dutch settlers, who introduced new grains, animals, and cooking methods (Long, 2015). The fusion of these elements produced enduring dishes such as cornbread, pumpkin pie, turkey, and cranberry sauce which continue to hold symbolic significance, especially during the national ritual of Thanksgiving, where food serves as an emblem of family, gratitude, and national unity (Neustadt, 1992).

Subsequent layers of migration and settlement diversified the American table even further. African American food traditions, rooted in both resilience and creativity contributed deeply to Southern cuisine through dishes such as barbecue, fried chicken, collard greens, gumbo, and cornbread transforming plantation-era hardships into enduring symbols of comfort and identity (Opie, 2008). Mexican and Spanish influences in the Southwest introduced tacos, enchiladas, chili, and tamales, which

have become central to American popular cuisine (Pilcher, 1998). The arrival of Italian, French, and Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expanded the repertoire with pasta, bread, pastries, and stews that evolved into household staples, while later Asian migrations from China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam added another dimension through dishes such as chop suey, sushi, kimchi, and pho, representing hybrid foodways that negotiated cultural belonging in an unfamiliar land (Coe, 2009; Issenberg, 2010). In contemporary times, this complex layering of cuisines has created a food culture that is plural, adaptable, and constantly reinventing itself (Mintz, 2002).

Regional diversity further enriches American food culture. The Northeast is characterized by colonial and maritime food traditions such as clam chowder, baked beans, and lobster rolls, while the South is defined by comfort and hospitality expressed through biscuits, sweet tea, and smoked barbecue (Edge, 2007). In contrast, the Midwest embraces hearty, agrarian meals meatloaf, casseroles, and dairy-based dishes reflecting values of abundance and simplicity, whereas the West Coast, particularly California, showcases innovation and global fusion, combining Mexican, Asian and Mediterranean influences with a growing emphasis on organic and health-conscious eating (Trubek, 2008). These regional cuisines, though distinctive, collectively reinforce a national ethos of abundance and choice, often detached from geography due to the industrialization of food production and distribution (Nestle, 2002).

The rise of the industrial food system in the twentieth century marked a turning point in American foodways. Industrial agriculture, mass production and corporate branding transformed food into a commodity of efficiency and convenience. Supermarkets, packaged goods and fast-food chains became defining features of the American food landscape. The global expansion of brands like McDonald's, KFC and Coca-Cola turned American eating habits into symbols of modernity and consumerism as what sociologist George Ritzer (1993) famously termed the "McDonaldization of America." Yet, as critics such as Marion Nestle (2002) and Michael Pollan (2006) argue, this system also produced environmental degradation, dietary health issues, and a widening disconnect between people and food sources. In response, sustainable food movements, including Slow Food and locavore initiatives,

have emerged to re-establish connections between food, place, and ethics (Petrini, 2003).

Food in the United States also serves as a medium of performance and identity. Politicians publicly eat hot dogs, barbecue, or fried chicken to project solidarity with the common people, while media and celebrity chefs have transformed cooking into a form of entertainment and cultural prestige (Ferguson, 2004). Cookbooks, from *Amelia Simmons' American Cookery* (1796) to *Betty Crocker's Cookbook* have shaped domestic ideals and constructed a shared culinary narrative (Long, 2015). Ritual meals such as Thanksgiving dinner embody notions of family, prosperity, and moral order, even as they reflect complex histories of colonization and exclusion (Neustadt, 1992). Other communal traditions, clambakes in New England, backyard barbecues in the South, and potluck gatherings in the Midwest reaffirm values of community, generosity, and belonging through shared meals (Brown & Mussell, 1984).

Ethnic diversity and fluidity are also central to American foodways. Participation in ethnic cuisines is largely voluntary, allowing individuals to move fluidly among multiple culinary identities. A person of any heritage may eat Chinese takeout, Italian pasta, or Mexican tacos as part of everyday life. This freedom of choice underscores the nation's ethos of individualism and pluralism while revealing how cultural exchange and commodification blur the boundaries between authenticity and adaptation. Scholars such as Gabaccia (1998) and Pillsbury (1998) describe this as a "salad bowl" rather than a melting pot, a coexistence of distinct yet interactive food traditions.

Underlying these practices are key American values expressed through food: abundance, choice, convenience, and innovation. Food reflects broader cultural ideals such as freedom, consumerism, and optimism while simultaneously revealing social inequalities in access, health, and sustainability (Pollan, 2006; Nestle, 2002). In the end, the food culture of the United States is not defined by a single canon of dishes but by a layered history of exchange, adaptation, and performance. From the three sisters to Thanksgiving turkey, from barbecue pits to fast-food franchises, American foodways reveal a society that negotiates identity and modernity through the everyday act of eating. Food in the United States thus stands as both a reflection of its

democratic plurality and a mirror of its contradictions celebrating diversity and abundance while grappling with homogenization and excess (Mintz, 2002).

Italy: Italian food culture is both local and national closely linked to everyday life and ideas of authenticity and quality. Italians see food as more than nourishment, it is part of identity, pride and tradition. Cookbooks, advertisements, and public discussions often treat food as a moral issue, connecting it with health, simplicity, and honesty (Mikulak, 2013). Writers like Grassetti & Breschi (1994) and Nowak (2014) show how Italians often describe their food as “genuine” compared to foreign cuisines, creating a sense of cultural difference. Barthes (1977) called this idea “Italianicity,” referring to how foods like pasta, tomatoes, and olive oil symbolize “Italian-ness.” Eating together, or the pleasures of the table, remains an important part of social life where people enjoy long meals and discuss food passionately (Hooper, 2015).

Historically, Italian cuisine grew around cities and regions rather than a single national style. Many dishes are named after their city of origin, such as *pizza napoletana*, *risotto alla milanese*, *bistecca alla fiorentina*, *prosciutto di Parma*, and *pesto genovese* (Dickie, 2007). Famous early cookbooks like Scappi’s *Opera* (1570) and Artusi’s *Scienza in cucina* (1891) helped unite regional cooking traditions while keeping local variations alive (Capatti & Montanari, 2003; Montanari, 2013). Even today, Italians praise restaurants that feel “homemade,” showing how home cooking remains a core of Italian taste and culture (Harper & Faccioli, 2009). In modern Italy, there is a balance between global influence and local protection. Supermarkets and international brands have made food more available everywhere (Poulain, 2017), but Italy also protects its food heritage which safeguard products such as *Parmigiano Reggiano*, *Aceto Balsamico di Modena*, and *Prosciutto di Parma* (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010; Mosconi, 2018). Events like Terra Madre in Turin and Cibus in Parma promote traditional foods, while markets and small family businesses continue to thrive (Scarpellini, 2016). Most Italians still prefer fresh, local ingredients over processed foods.

Everyday eating in Italy follows clear customs. Meals have several courses *antipasto* (starter), *primo* (pasta or risotto), *secondo* (meat or fish), *contorno* (vegetables), and *dolce* (dessert). Meals are eaten slowly, often with wine and end with espresso rather than cappuccino, since milk after meals is thought to hinder digestion (Hooper, 2015). Dinners are eaten late, and Sundays are usually spent sharing traditional meals at home

(Harper & Faccioli, 2009; Scarpellini, 2016). As scholars note, food in Italy represents social ties, memories, and moral values (Appadurai, 1981).

Italy's global image centered on family, warmth, tradition, and health grew after World War II with the idea of the Mediterranean diet as both healthy and culturally rich (Moro, 2014; Dickie, 2007). However, this image also hides the country's past struggles with hunger and migration, which shaped Italian cooking both at home and abroad (Helstosky, 2005). Italian migrants helped spread national dishes overseas, turning foods like *pizza* and *pasta* into global symbols of Italian identity (Parasecoli, 2017). Today, food media, cookbooks and online platforms continue to influence how Italians and others see "authentic" Italian food and often debates about the "right" recipe for *carbonara* are a good example. In essence, Italian food culture combines tradition and change. It adapts to modern life while keeping the appearance of timelessness, new trends are accepted only if they seem traditional (Dickie, 2007). Everyday rituals like shopping at local markets, making coffee, or sharing Sunday lunch reflect deeper ideas of belonging and pride. Italian food remains a powerful expression of identity, bringing together history, family, and a shared sense of quality and pleasure (Parasecoli, 2017).

France: The history of French food culture reaches back to the Middle Ages, when meals were not only a necessity but also a reflection of status and refinement. By the 14th century, elaborate banquets at royal courts had become stages for culinary performance, where chefs displayed their creativity and technical skill. Over time, these chefs developed a distinct style of cooking that emphasized presentation, balance, and taste. The publication of *Le Cuisinier François* by François Pierre La Varenne in 1651 marked a turning point. The book systematized recipes and introduced methods that formed the basis of modern French cuisine, emphasizing sauces, seasonality, and regional ingredients (La Varenne, 1651; Poulain, 2017). During the 18th century, the French Revolution transformed food culture further. Many chefs who had served the aristocracy began opening restaurants, allowing common citizens to experience dishes once reserved for the elite. This development gave rise to the modern restaurant culture that remains central to French society today (Mikulak, 2013).

A hallmark of French cuisine is its careful selection of ingredients and refinement of cooking techniques. French chefs value freshness, locality, and seasonality, using

ingredients such as seafood, poultry, vegetables, herbs, and wine in ways that enhance natural flavours. Classic dishes like *boeuf bourguignon* require long, slow cooking to create tenderness and depth, while *foie gras* is prepared with precision and patience to achieve its signature richness (Nowak, 2014). Culinary techniques such as sautéing, roasting, braising, and poaching are applied with exact control over timing and temperature, highlighting the French pursuit of balance between taste, texture, and aroma (Grassetti & Breschi, 1994). Meals are structured with a strong sense of order and ritual moving from *entrée* (starter) to *plat principal* (main course), *fromage* (cheese), and *dessert* and each stage is carefully paired with wine to complement the flavors.

Dining in France is also shaped by etiquette and atmosphere. The French view eating as a social act that brings people together rather than a mere physical need. Traditional restaurants are arranged with aesthetic care, featuring coordinated tableware, wine glasses, and floral arrangements that create a sense of elegance and calm. Meals are meant to be savoured slowly, with conversation seen as part of the dining experience (Mikulak, 2013; Nowak, 2014b). This ritualized form of eating expresses broader cultural values of leisure, beauty, and civility. French food thus becomes a way of performing identity both personal and national where the act of dining is associated with grace and pleasure.

French cuisine also stands out for its aesthetic and artistic sensibility. Chefs often describe their work as a form of art, paying close attention to colour, presentation, and balance on the plate. This pursuit of beauty extends to the language of food itself. The French language adds elegance to culinary expression, with dishes named poetically and precisely to describe ingredients and origins (Barthes, 1977). Maintaining original French names on menus around the world reinforces their prestige and cultural symbolism, helping the cuisine retain its identity even in global contexts (Nowak, 2014).

The global influence of French cuisine dates back to the expansion of France's political and cultural power in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. French chefs worked in royal households across the continent, spreading techniques that came to define high cuisine. After the Revolution, the restaurant model further popularized French cooking both at home and abroad. By the 19th century, colonial trade and international contact carried French food practices to other continents, while

translated cookbooks helped spread its methods to a global audience (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010). In the 20th century, culinary institutions such as Le Cordon Bleu trained students from around the world, many of whom returned to their home countries to develop new fusion cuisines, combining French methods with local ingredients (Mosconi, 2018). Countries like Japan embraced French culinary principles, blending precision and artistry with native aesthetics to create refined hybrids (Poulain, 2017).

French cuisine has also become the benchmark of Western fine dining, influencing how menus are structured, how service is organized, and how food is discussed academically and artistically. International hotels and luxury restaurants often base their service rituals on French standards, while the Michelin Guide, originating in France, has become a global measure of culinary excellence (Moro, 2014). The technical precision, balance of flavor, and emphasis on quality that define French gastronomy continue to inspire chefs worldwide. Dining in the French style is not simply eating, it is a sensory and cultural experience that engages taste, smell, sight, and even sound, as conversation and the clinking of glasses become part of the meal's rhythm (Grassetti & Breschi, 1994).

In summary, French food culture combines history, technique, art, and ritual. From medieval court banquets to modern restaurants, it reflects a continuous evolution shaped by social change, creativity, and respect for tradition. Its influence extends far beyond France, setting international standards of culinary artistry and sophistication. To the French, eating well is a way of life, a union of pleasure, refinement, and national pride (Mikulak, 2013; Parasecoli, 2017).

United Kingdom: Modern British food culture reflects profound social, economic, and cultural transformations that have unfolded over the past fifty years. Industrialization of food production, the changing roles of women in both domestic and professional spheres, the fragmentation of traditional family life, and increased foreign travel and immigration have collectively reshaped food habits and attitudes in Britain (Chiaro, 2008). These developments have given rise to three defining trends: the growth of convenience foods such as ready meals and take-aways; a growing preference for eating out; and, most significantly, the assimilation of foreign cuisines into everyday diets. Together, these patterns have made the British palate increasingly cosmopolitan,

reflecting both globalization and the multicultural composition of modern British society (Chiaro, 2008).

The integration of diverse culinary influences has been closely linked to Britain's history of colonialism, immigration, and international mobility. From the late 1950s onward, inexpensive Indian and Chinese restaurants became widespread, offering accessible alternatives to traditional British fare. These were soon followed by Cypriot, Middle Eastern, and Italian eateries, while French cuisine occupied a niche of upper-class dining (Oddy, 2003). Indian and Chinese food remain the two most popular ethnic cuisines in the United Kingdom, mirroring the size and cultural influence of the Indian and Chinese diasporas, India and China being the top two countries of origin for immigrants in recent decades (Office for National Statistics 2012). Ethnic restaurants, often run as family businesses, have long provided both livelihoods for immigrants and gateways for cultural exchange.

Britain today exemplifies a food culture that embraces diversity. According to market studies, the United Kingdom leads Europe in the market value of ethnic cuisines, surpassing France and Germany (Bouckley, 2011). Within this expanding culinary economy, Indian cuisine accounts for roughly 42% of the ethnic food market, followed by Chinese at about 28%, with emerging interest in Caribbean and Polish dishes. These shifts correspond with demographic trends, the Caribbean population ranks as the fourth-largest non-white group in Britain, while Polish immigration has grown significantly since the early 2000s (Rayney, 2013; ONS, 2012). Italian cuisine also enjoys strong popularity, driven by celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver and chains like Carluccio's and Pizza Express, which have encouraged a "renaissance" of Italian dining in the UK (Allegra Strategies, 2011). Interestingly, while Britons are adventurous eaters when dining out, traditional British foods such as *fish and chips*, *Yorkshire pudding*, *roast beef*, *shepherd's pie*, and *Sunday roast dinners* remain dominant within the home, reflecting a balance between novelty and nostalgia (Ibid). The very names of these dishes which are simple, descriptive, and rooted in locality evoke a sense of home and heritage, linking food to social ritual and memory. Dishes like *Cornish pasty*, *Lancashire hotpot*, and *Cumberland sausage* also reflect the regional pride embedded in British naming traditions, where geography and identity intertwine through food.

These culinary developments mirror broader social and psychological patterns. As Stedman (2006) observes, food serves as a useful marker of cultural exchange, revealing how societies respond to external influences not only through material adaptation but also through self-definition and identity construction. The relationship between food and identity is deeply rooted in the domestic sphere, where food preparation and consumption reinforce emotional ties and social belonging (Rabikowska, 2010). For many Britons, eating traditional dishes at home provides continuity and comfort, while trying foreign cuisines outside the home allows for exploration and self-expression within a multicultural context.

However, the cosmopolitanism of British cuisine coexists with a counter-trend among ethnic minority communities, particularly first-generation immigrants, who often retain strong ties to their traditional diets. Research by Helman (1994) and Jerome (1969) indicates that food habits are among the most enduring aspects of migrant culture. Rabikowska (2009) shows that for Polish migrants in London, cooking and consuming Polish food are acts of cultural belonging that reinforce identity and draw boundaries between “us” and “others.” Similarly, first-generation Bangladeshi immigrants have largely maintained their traditional dietary practices, adhering to Islamic dietary laws and showing limited adaptation to British food habits (Chowdhury et al., 2000). For these communities, food serves as a symbol of faith, morality, and collective memory, providing stability in the experience of migration. The persistence of ethnic dietary practices highlights another cultural dimension i.e. collectivism which contrasts with the individualism of mainstream British society. Minority communities often emphasize family cohesion and shared identity, and these values manifest through the preparation and consumption of familiar dishes (Willis, 2012). Ethnic identity, therefore, mediates between collectivism and individualism, shaping how different communities relate to food (Gaines et al., 1997, as cited in Acevedo, 2003). While the wider British population celebrates diversity through culinary experimentation, minority groups may affirm belonging by preserving and ritualizing their traditional foods.

In essence, contemporary British food culture is characterized by its paradoxical blend of global openness and local rootedness. It reflects both the multicultural transformation of British society and the enduring emotional ties between food, home, and identity. The evolution from the “meat and two veg” meals of the 1950s to today’s

eclectic culinary scene mirrors broader shifts in class structure, migration, and globalization. As Britain continues to redefine itself as a pluralistic society, its food culture stands as one of the clearest expressions of how difference, familiarity, and identity coexist at the national table. The Western world reveals how industrial capitalism transforms food into both a commodity and a moral battleground, while the return to “local” food marks a search for authenticity within modernity.

- 2) African and Latin American Contexts: This context includes regions such as South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, and Mexico, which show how food embodies histories of adaptation, resilience, and colonisation.

Food in Africa tells a long story of movement, contact, and creativity. Every country on the continent carries memories of migration, trade, and colonial history through its cooking. Over centuries, people have exchanged ingredients, tools, and ways of preparing food. European colonial powers brought new crops and cooking techniques, while Asian and Arab traders introduced spices and new tastes. Yet African people did not simply copy these foreign traditions, they combined them with their own local foods, farming practices and beliefs about sharing and family. This mixing gave birth to a wide range of cuisines that are different from one region to another but all share a deep connection between food, community, and culture (Odeyemi, 2019). Three countries namely South Africa, Nigeria and Morocco show how these exchanges have shaped African food culture in unique ways (El-Hadji, 2018; Akinyemi, 2020). *South African* cuisine reflects a long and complex history of colonization and migration. For more than 300 years, South Africa was ruled by the Dutch, French, German, and British, and each left its mark on local food habits. When the Dutch arrived in 1652, they started farming in the Cape Town area and brought their own food traditions. They introduced dishes such as *melktert* (milk tart) and *souskluitjies* (sweet dumplings with cinnamon), which became household favorites (Naidoo, 2017). Later, the French brought their taste for cream, sauces, and mutton dishes. The Germans introduced sausages and cured meats, especially *boerewors*, a sausage made from beef or pork whose name combines the words *boer* (farmer) and *wors* (sausage). The British brought new breakfast ideas, such as *eggs Benedict* and the habit of drinking tea in the morning. During the British period, many enslaved workers and laborers from India, Malaysia, and Indonesia came to South Africa. They carried their love of spices and flavors with them, which changed the local cuisine forever. South African cooking

soon became full of flavors from curry, coriander, pepper, garlic, and anise (El-Hadji, 2018). A well-known dish, *bobotie*, shows this mixing of cultures, it is made with minced beef, curry powder, milk, and bread, and baked in the oven with an egg topping. It looks like a European casserole but tastes like something from India. This blending of tastes created what many people today call the “rainbow cuisine” of South Africa.

South Africans also have a strong tradition of making and eating bread, both wheat and corn bread, which they often eat with meat and vegetables. They also dry meat with salt and spices, a tradition that may come from German methods of food preservation. For dessert, they enjoy light sweets such as *milk tart* or *souskluitjies* with jam. Another popular tradition is the making of home-brewed beer, which was first introduced by Dutch settlers. All these influences, both European and Asian, have mixed with local African cooking methods to make South African cuisine rich, colourful, and full of variety (Naidoo, 2017).

Nigerian cuisine tells a different story of how Africa combined local crops and foreign influences into one of the continent’s most vibrant food cultures. The Portuguese and the British were the main colonial powers in Nigeria, and they introduced several new ingredients such as rice, potatoes, and bread (Odeyemi, 2019). However, Nigerian cooking kept its strong connection to local crops like yams, beans, okra, and tropical fruits. Spices and hot peppers, which came through trade with India, became important in everyday meals. Nigerians enjoy spicy, flavourful foods that are shared among family and neighbours. Common dishes include *jollof rice* (made with tomatoes, onions, and pepper), *egusi soup* (made with melon seeds, meat, and fish), *ogbono soup* (made from wild mango seeds), *moin-moin* (a steamed bean pudding), and *suya* (grilled meat skewers seasoned with pepper). Other favorites include *kilishi* (dried spicy beef) and *plantain* (fried banana), which is often eaten at breakfast or as a sweet treat (Eze, 2020). These dishes are simple but full of flavor, showing how Nigerians adapt their cooking to their tropical environment.

Nigerians greatly enjoy potatoes and regard them as a healthy food because they are rich in beta-carotene. Historical accounts suggest that Portuguese sailors introduced potatoes to Nigeria from the Americas during the colonial era. Since then, potatoes have become a popular part of the Nigerian diet, used in stews, soups, and fried dishes. Nigerians also prepare sweet potatoes in many ways such as boiled, grilled, or mashed

showing how local creativity has turned an imported crop into a national favorite (Eze, 2020). Foods like *egusi* and *ogbono* can be stored for a long time, which was useful for sailors and traders, while *jollof rice* is often made for big gatherings and celebrations. Eating together is an important part of Nigerian culture, and meals are usually shared from a large bowl, showing the value of family and community.

Moroccan cuisine represents another kind of cultural mixture. It carries the legacy of Berber, Arab, Ottoman, and European influences. Morocco's food reflects both desert and coastal lifestyles and is closely tied to religion, family, and hospitality. A typical Moroccan meal starts with *harira*, a soup made with chickpeas, lentils, lamb, and spices. It is often eaten to break the fast during Ramadan (Bencheikroun, 2019). The main dish is usually *tajine*, a stew made with meat, vegetables, and spices cooked slowly in a clay pot also called a *tajine*. The word itself refers to both the pot and the dish, showing how cooking and serving are connected. The national dish of Morocco is *couscous*, made from semolina grains. It is served on Fridays, at weddings, and on special family occasions. Eating couscous together, often with one's hands, is a sign of unity and respect (El-Hadji, 2018). Another key element of Moroccan cooking is *ras el hanout*, a spice blends whose name means "top of the shop." Every family has its own version, often made from cinnamon, cloves, cumin, turmeric, and coriander. Moroccans also love sweets and tea. Popular desserts include *chebakia* (honey-coated cookies) and *m'hanncha* (a rolled pastry with almonds and cinnamon, shaped like a snake). These are served with *mint tea*, which is an important part of Moroccan hospitality. Tea is often prepared and poured by the host in front of guests, showing honor and friendship (Bencheikroun, 2019). Breakfasts are usually light bread with butter or jam while lunch is the main meal, filled with soups, grains, and stews. Many customs, such as eating with three fingers or ending a meal with fruit, have symbolic meanings linked to blessings and tradition. Moroccan cuisine, with its slow-cooked dishes and fragrant spices, reflects both ancient heritage and a long history of cultural exchange.

When we look at these three examples, South Africa, Nigeria and Morocco, it becomes clear that African cuisines have absorbed many influences but have turned them into something entirely their own. The names of dishes such as *boerewors*, *melktert*, *bobotie*, *jollof rice*, *egusi soup*, *harira*, and *tajine* are living records of history. Each dish connects the past with the present, and each meal tells a story of

resilience and adaptation. Cooking methods also reflect environment and lifestyle: drying meat in South Africa's dry climate, making thick soups in Nigeria's humid regions, or slow-cooking in clay pots in Morocco's desert areas (Naidoo, 2017; Benchekroun, 2019). In every region, eating together remains an important act of care and togetherness. From Friday couscous in Morocco to shared family bowls in Nigeria and community barbecues in South Africa, food continues to be a way of building and expressing identity. African cuisines, rich in flavour and history, remind us that food is more than sustenance, it is a story of people, place, and belonging.

Mexico: Mexican food culture is one of the most diverse and colorful in the world, shaped by geography, history, and the blending of many civilizations. The country's varied climate and landscape have made it possible to grow a wide range of ingredients, which has contributed to its rich culinary diversity (Guibrinet, 2023). Mexican cooking also follows a traditional belief that meals should balance "hot" and "cold" foods. According to this idea, foods like meat, garlic, and chili peppers are considered hot because they raise body temperature, while starchy foods such as rice, corn, and beans are seen as cold. Eating both types together is believed to keep the body in balance (Weller, 1983; Mil, 2016).

Among the staples of Mexican cuisine, the *tortilla* is the most essential. The word comes from the Spanish term *torta*, meaning "round cake." Tortillas are thin, round breads made from corn or wheat flour and are eaten at nearly every meal (Algor Cards, 2024). Another important traditional dish is *tamale*, believed to have originated from ancient Inca practices. It consists of dough filled with meat, cheese, or vegetables, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, and steamed (BBC Good Food, 2024). Mexican sauces, or *salsas*, are also central to the cuisine and vary in flavor and texture. They are commonly made with chili, tomatoes, onion, garlic, and coriander, and sometimes include pumpkin seeds or avocado. The most famous sauce is *mole*, a thick blend made from ground chili, spices, and broth, often served with meat or beans (Campos-Montiel et al., 2022). Another well-known sauce is *guacamole*, first prepared by the Aztecs using avocado, tomato, lemon juice, and red pepper (Hongu et al., 2016). Popular desserts include *cajeta*, a sweet made from goat's milk, and *churros*, fried dough pastries served with cinnamon and sugar (Barajas-Ramírez, 2021). Among drinks, *tequila* is the best-known beverage, often served with salt and

lime, while *horchata*, made from rice, almonds, and cinnamon, is also a traditional favorite (Denizer, 2005; Mil, 2016).

Mexican gastronomy has developed over thousands of years through the blending of native and foreign cultures. Early civilizations such as the Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs laid the foundation of the cuisine. The Olmecs improved farming through irrigation systems, while the Mayans cultivated maize, beans, pumpkins, and chili peppers, which remain the core of Mexican cooking today (Conway, 2018). The Mayans also created dishes like *atole* (a corn-based drink) and *tamale*, which continue to be popular (Özkaya & Sarıcan, 2014). The Aztecs expanded the use of corn, beans, and tomatoes, and introduced tropical foods such as avocado, vanilla, and cocoa (Soustelle, 2006). When the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, they brought European ingredients such as milk, cheese, wheat, pork, rice, citrus fruits, and olive oil, which became part of local cooking (West, 2005). Through trade and colonial exchange, sugarcane, potatoes, and new spices like cinnamon and parsley also entered Mexican kitchens (Guibrinet, 2023). Over time, these influences combined to create the rich mixture of tastes that defines modern Mexican cuisine.

In the 19th century, French influence brought new dishes and cooking methods, such as the use of olive oil instead of animal fat and the introduction of restaurant-style dining with menus and chefs (Iturriga, 1993). Italian and German immigrants also left their mark by establishing pasta factories and breweries. In more recent times, globalization and American fast-food trends have shaped urban food habits (Şengül, 2013). However, Mexico has also taken strong measures to preserve its traditional food heritage, and in 2010, Mexican cuisine was recognized by UNESCO as part of the World Cultural Heritage (Banerjee-Dube, 2016).

Food in Mexico is deeply tied to family life, religion, and community celebrations. The preparation of *tamales*, for example, is often a family activity shared among women during holidays and festivals (Conde et al., 2011). Food also plays an important role in national celebrations such as Independence Day, the Day of the Dead, and Christmas. During the Day of the Dead, people honor their ancestors by preparing their favorite dishes and baking special breads called *pan de muerto* (Acapulcos, 2024). For Independence Day, the dish *Chiles en Nogada* made of stuffed peppers with a white sauce and red garnish is served to represent the Mexican flag (Mexican Food Journal, 2019). Tequila drinking also follows a ritual sequence

involving salt, lime, and a single quick sip (Özdemir, 2005). These customs highlight how food in Mexico connects daily life with symbolism and celebration.

In daily routines, Mexicans typically have three main meals and snacks throughout the day (Ardıç Yetiş & Bozok, 2022). Breakfast, known as *El Desayuno*, is eaten between 7 and 10 a.m. and includes coffee, hot chocolate, or *atole*, along with *huevos rancheros*, fried tortillas topped with eggs and chili sauce (Civilisable, 2024). Lunch, or *La Comida*, is considered the main meal and is eaten around midday. It often includes soup, salad, a main course, dessert, and a fruit drink (Doğdubay, 2016). Dinner, called *La Cena*, is lighter and served between 8 and 9 p.m., consisting of soup, bread, or small dishes such as tacos. These structured meal times reflect not only nutrition but also the social rhythm of Mexican life (Çakmak, 2017).

Overall, Mexican cuisine showcases a remarkable mix of ancient traditions and global influences. From tortillas and tamales to mole and guacamole, each dish tells a story of cultural blending, local creativity, and family life. Its strong ties to community, ritual, and identity have helped preserve it as one of the world's most celebrated and living culinary traditions.

- 3) The Asian Context: Regions like China, Japan, and Korea are examined in this context in order to comprehend how food in Asian countries reflects cultural values, customs, and social meanings.

China: Chinese food culture reflects both regional diversity and deep social meaning. In southern China, rice is the main staple, while in the north, people depend more on wheat-based foods such as steamed bread, noodles, and buns (Ma, 2015). These habits are carried across borders. Chinese migrants around the world continue to prefer Chinese dishes even after years of living abroad, showing how food connects them to their homeland. In China, food is more than nourishment; it represents family, respect, and symbolic values. Traditional dishes often express good wishes, noodles represent long life, peanuts symbolize longevity, oranges and chestnuts suggest good fortune, rice cakes mean promotion and success, while glutinous rice balls stand for family unity. Similarly, certain foods are used or avoided during weddings and births: fish symbolizes abundance, wine expresses a long-lasting relationship, and red-dyed eggs celebrate the birth of a child, while pears are avoided because their name sounds like “separation” in Chinese (Ibid).

Modern life has introduced changes through Western influence, for instance, people now celebrate birthdays with cake and candles along with traditional longevity noodles. These combinations show how Chinese people blend new customs with old ones (Ma, 2015). Inside the home, traditional gender roles have also evolved. In rural areas, women still handle most domestic chores like cooking and cleaning, following the traditional idea of “men outside, women inside.” In contrast, urban families increasingly share household tasks, and it is now common for men to cook or assist with meal preparation. Food purchasing decisions also reflect social patterns. A study found that mothers make most of the household food purchases, focusing on freshness, hygiene, nutrition, and children’s preferences. Children, in turn, strongly influence shopping choices and many parents buy foods their children request. Traditionally, Chinese families spent two to three hours a day cooking, but modern technology, such as microwaves and electric cookers, has shortened cooking time. As income and urban life increase, people eat out more often, showing a shift toward convenience (Ibid). Within families, food distribution reflects social values and practical needs. When food is limited, family members are served according to either demand, those needing more nutrition or contribution, those who work or earn for the household. In such cases, elders and men often eat first, while women may eat less, leading to nutritional inequalities. Children and older adults are generally prioritized, reflecting the traditional virtue of respecting elders. Chinese dining culture usually follows a group dining system, where dishes are shared from a central table. This reinforces togetherness but also poses hygiene challenges, especially in modern public settings. While individual dining has been encouraged for health reasons, it remains culturally uncommon. Meal patterns are well-structured in China. Most people have three meals a day, though some rural families still eat two meals depending on the season and work conditions. Breakfast is eaten between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. and varies by region: the Cantonese enjoy “morning tea” with shrimp dumplings, steamed buns, chicken legs, fritters, and soy milk, while northern Chinese prefer bread, porridge, dumplings, and noodles. Lunch is usually eaten between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., at home in small towns or in canteens and fast-food shops in big cities. Dinner, held around 6:30-7:30 p.m., is often the most important family meal, featuring two to four dishes and one soup, and typically takes about one to two hours to prepare (Ma, 2015). Chinese food culture, therefore, is a living system that combines symbolism, family structure,

and adaptation to social change. Despite modernization and globalization, food continues to embody respect for family, harmony, and tradition in Chinese life (Ibid). *Japan*: Japanese food culture is far more complex than the common image of sushi and white rice. It has developed over thousands of years through local exchanges within the islands and contact with foreign cultures. This long history has created many ways of cooking and eating that differ by class, region, and time. Japanese cuisine is a result of borrowing, adapting, and re-creating dishes and techniques that came from both within Japan and abroad. Over centuries, food has reflected social class, religion, geography, and moral ideas about how life should be lived (Markovitch, 2023; Ishige, 2012).

During the Muromachi period (1336–1573), food became a sign of social standing. Among the ruling warriors, *honzen ryōri* (“main tray cuisine”) developed as an elaborate banquet style with three to seven trays of dishes and sake served throughout the meal. Later, during the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods, this cuisine was simplified but continued to represent refinement and hierarchy. Around the same time, *kaiseki ryōri* appeared in connection with the tea ceremony. Created by tea masters, it began as a light meal to prepare guests for drinking tea. By the 17th century, it had divided into two forms i.e. formal banquet *kaiseki* and the simpler tea-based *kaiseki*. Even today, *kaiseki* remains one of Japan’s most respected food traditions, known for its seasonal balance and delicate presentation (Markovitch, 2023; Ishige, 2012).

While these elite cuisines expressed order and ceremony, the food of ordinary people was simpler but just as meaningful. Rural diets relied on grains, pickled vegetables, and strong flavors, while city life gave rise to early forms of street food from the 17th century onward. Dishes such as sushi actually began as cheap street snacks before becoming refined dishes served in high-class restaurants. The idea of *home cooking* (*katei ryōri*) did not appear until the early 20th century, influenced by both Western family ideals and the growing middle class. The typical home meal comprising of a bowl of rice, soup, pickles, a main protein, and two side dishes still represents comfort and family unity today (Cwierotka, 2006).

Religion has also played an important part in shaping food habits. Buddhism, introduced from China during the Nara period (710-794), discouraged killing animals, leading to the development of vegetarian temple cuisine (*shōjin ryōri*). Though the

rule was often ignored by the upper classes, it influenced Japanese ideas about purity and respect for life. Meat eating was slowly accepted after the Meiji Restoration, when the government encouraged Western-style diets rich in meat and dairy. By the 20th century, meat had become normal in Japanese meals (Ishige, 2012). Today, some of the most popular foods like *ramen*, *gyōza*, *tempura*, *karē raisu* (curry rice), and *tonkatsu* (breaded pork cutlet) come from foreign influence but have become entirely Japanese in flavor and identity (Markovitch, 2023).

Cultural exchange has been a driving force throughout Japanese food history. China was Japan's earliest culinary influence, bringing noodles, oil-based frying, spices, and pork. Chinese communities in Nagasaki introduced restaurant dining in the 18th century, with styles like *fucha ryōri* (vegetarian tea meal) and *shippoku ryōri* (shared table cuisine). These were inspired by Chinese cooking but adapted to Japanese tastes. During Japan's expansion into Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, contact with Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria further diversified ingredients and tastes. Korean cuisine, for instance, helped popularize meat dishes such as *yakiniku* (grilled meat) after World War II (Ibid).

European influence began even earlier, with the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch traders in the 16th century. They introduced deep-frying techniques that gave rise to *tempura*, as well as *kasutera* (sponge cake) and *ponzu* (citrus-based sauce). During the Meiji era, Japan's growing ties with the West brought new foods like meat, butter, milk, and Western fruits and vegetables which completely changed the diet of the elite. British and American meals influenced the middle class, while French cuisine became the standard for aristocratic and imperial dining (Cwierka, 2006). By the early 20th century, a hybrid cuisine called *yōshoku* ("Western-style Japanese food") had appeared, featuring dishes like *omuraisu* (omelet rice) and *korokke* (croquette). These foods symbolized modern life and Japan's openness to change (Ibid).

In 2013, UNESCO recognized *washoku*, or the traditional dietary culture of Japan as an *Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This acknowledgment celebrated Japan's respect for nature, seasonality, and balance in meals. Yet scholars remind us that there is no single Japanese cuisine, but rather many cuisines shaped by different histories, regions, and classes (Markovitch, 2023; Stalker, 2018; Quellier & Cornette, 2021). Japanese food culture, therefore, is not fixed, it continues to evolve through a blend of old traditions and new ideas. From temple vegetarian meals to elaborate *kaiseki* dinners and

everyday home cooking, Japan's cuisine reflects its long history of cultural mixing, social change, and creative adaptation.

Korea: South Korea's food culture reflects both its long agricultural history and its deep connection to philosophy, geography, and social order. With a culinary tradition that has evolved for over a thousand years, Korean cuisine today maintains strong links to ancient dietary practices while also embracing modern global influences (Ming, 2009; Ni, 2016). For Koreans, food is not merely sustenance but one of the "five blessings" of life, symbolizing health and harmony. Rooted in traditional Chinese ideas of *Yin-Yang* balance and the *Five Elements* theory, Korean cooking emphasizes equilibrium between the "five tastes" i.e. sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, and salty and the "five colors" namely white, green, red, black, and yellow. These principles guide both flavor and visual presentation, expressing the Korean belief that food should nourish body, mind, and spirit (Li, 2016; Zheng, 2019).

Rice is the central element of the Korean diet, often accompanied by kimchi, miso soup, seafood, and various side dishes known as *banchan*. The saying "You don't want to eat without kimchi" captures how essential kimchi is to daily meals (Guo, 2020). The tradition of fermenting vegetables, especially cabbage and radish, dates back centuries and continues to represent Korean identity both at home and abroad. The government even established a national "Kimchi Museum" to preserve and promote this cultural heritage (Ni, 2016). Beyond kimchi, fermentation plays a vital role in Korean cuisine, producing foods such as *doenjang* (soybean paste), *gochujang* (chili paste), and *ganjang* (soy sauce). These condiments are the foundation of countless soups, stews, and marinades, making Korean food rich in umami and deeply aromatic (Ming, 2009; Gao, 2022).

Korea's geography and seasonal diversity have also shaped its regional cuisines. The country's mountainous terrain and four distinct seasons encouraged early agricultural practices based on grains, particularly rice cultivation during the Joseon dynasty. In the north, dry-field farming led to a reliance on mixed grains and preserved foods, while in the central and southern regions, fertile plains allowed for abundant rice production. Coastal areas, especially Jeju Island, developed diets based on sea fish, seaweed, and vegetables, whereas Jeolla Province became famous for its variety of side dishes made from grains and fresh seafood (Ming, 2009; Zheng, 2019). Each

region's cuisine reflects adaptation to local environments, forming a mosaic of food traditions that share common roots yet differ in flavor and preparation.

Korean meals typically follow a grain-centered pattern, combining rice with soups, stews, and cold side dishes. The preference for raw and lightly seasoned foods such as lettuce wraps, cucumbers, sashimi, and octopus reveal a respect for natural taste and freshness. In contrast to China's heavy use of stir-frying, Koreans favor steaming, boiling, marinating, and fermenting, which preserve both nutrients and authentic flavors (Ni, 2016; Gao, 2022). Among iconic dishes, kimbap i.e. rice rolled with seaweed, kimchi, seafood, and vegetables illustrates Korean ingenuity in creating portable, balanced meals. These dishes are not only about taste but also about maintaining physical harmony, reflecting the nation's long-standing idea of "food as medicine" (*sik-yak dongwon*) (Li, 2016).

Korean dining etiquette mirrors the country's Confucian social values of respect, hierarchy, and harmony. Seating and eating arrangements are determined by age and status, elders are served first, and younger members wait until their seniors begin eating. Traditionally, people sat on the floor while eating, cross-legged for men and with legs tucked neatly for women, though modern households increasingly use chairs and tables influenced by Western habits (Ji, 2019; Gao, 2022). Chopsticks and spoons are used together but for different purposes chopsticks for solid food, spoons for rice and soup. It is considered impolite to start eating before elders, eat too quickly, or leave the table before they finish. Such etiquette expresses collective consciousness and the emphasis on togetherness, reflecting the broader Korean values of unity and mutual care (Guo, 2020; Zheng, 2019).

In recent decades, Korean cuisine has gained global recognition through the rise of cultural exports such as television dramas and music, the so-called *Korean Wave* (*Hallyu*). Dishes like bibimbap, bulgogi, tteokbokki, and kimchi stew are now internationally popular, symbolizing both tradition and modern identity. South Korea's ability to preserve ancient food customs while creatively adapting to global tastes shows how its food culture continues to evolve as a form of cultural diplomacy and pride (Ni, 2016; Gao, 2022).

An overview of the global context

In this section, the thematic review has been organised into three global clusters such as Western, African/Latin American, and Asian to show how different histories such

as industrialisation, colonisation, migration, and globalisation have shaped food cultures in unique ways. Across these regions, food traditions are not fixed but constantly changing through exchanges between local and global influences. The Western context highlights how eating has become commercialised alongside movements for local and ethical food; African and Latin American examples show resilience and community-based traditions shaped by colonial encounters; while Asian cases reveal long-standing cultural systems of taste that adapt global influences through local practices and rituals. This comparative analysis indicates that Mizoram's foodscape may be examined by exploring how class, gender, and rural-urban status influence the adoption of "global" foods. Overall, the global mapping helps us understand Mizo data by showing us what to look for like selective adoption, boundary-setting, and moralising taste and how to explain it through historical routes, infrastructures, and everyday agreements.

The Western Context examines regions including the United States, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. Food culture in the United States reflects a dynamic interplay of migration, geography, and industrialization, producing one of the most diverse culinary landscapes in the world. Rather than a unified cuisine, American foodways form a mosaic shaped by indigenous traditions, colonial exchanges, and successive waves of immigration. Native American agricultural wisdom symbolised by the "three sisters" of corn, beans, and squash laid the foundation for later European influences that introduced new grains, animals, and cooking techniques. Over time, African, Mexican, Italian, Asian, and other immigrant cuisines contributed distinctive ingredients and methods, creating a plural and evolving food system that continually redefines itself through adaptation and innovation.

Regional variation further enriches American cuisine, the Northeast's maritime dishes, the South's comfort foods, the Midwest's agrarian simplicity, and the West Coast's global fusion collectively reflect the nation's diversity and ideals of abundance. Industrialisation in the twentieth century transformed eating habits through mass production, convenience, and the global expansion of fast-food culture what Ritzer (1993) termed the "McDonaldization of America." Yet, counter-movements such as Slow Food and locavore initiatives emerged to restore ethical and ecological balance to the nation's diet.

Ultimately, food in the United States functions as a powerful marker of identity, performance, and ideology. It expresses national values of freedom, choice, and progress while simultaneously exposing inequalities in health and access. American cuisine thus embodies both diversity and contradiction celebrating abundance and innovation while negotiating issues of homogenisation, sustainability, and authenticity. Moving from the pluralism of the United States to Europe, Italy offers a contrasting case where food culture is deeply tied to place, authenticity, and moral value, illustrating how culinary identity can be both local and national in character. Italian food culture is deeply intertwined with everyday life, where eating signifies identity, morality, and community (Mikulak, 2013). Scholars such as Grassetti & Breschi (1994) and Nowak (2014) note that Italians often describe their cuisine as *genuine* and morally superior to others, linking food to honesty, simplicity, and tradition. Barthes (1977) famously termed this cultural ideal “Italianicity,” referring to how foods like pasta, olive oil, and tomatoes symbolise national identity. Historically, Italian cuisine evolved regionally rather than nationally, with dishes such as *pizza napoletana*, *risotto alla milanese*, and *pesto genovese* illustrating strong local roots (Dickie, 2007; Montanari, 2013). Early cookbooks like Scappi’s *Opera* (1570) and Artusi’s *Scienza in cucina* (1891) helped unify regional practices while preserving local diversity (Capatti & Montanari, 2003). In contemporary Italy, globalisation coexists with efforts to protect heritage through systems like the PDO labels for Parmigiano Reggiano, Aceto Balsamico di Modena, and Prosciutto di Parma (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010; Mosconi, 2018). Events such as *Terra Madre* and *Cibus* further reinforce Italy’s culinary pride (Scarpellini, 2016). Everyday practices shopping at local markets, sharing long family meals, and maintaining rituals such as ending with espresso reflect enduring values of conviviality and belonging (Hooper, 2015; Harper & Faccioli, 2009). At a global level, the Mediterranean diet popularised after World War II projected Italian cuisine as healthy and culturally rich (Moro, 2014), while migration helped spread national dishes worldwide (Helstosky, 2005; Parasecoli, 2017). Overall, Italian food culture balances tradition and change, adapting to modern life while preserving the moral and emotional meanings that make food a central marker of Italian identity. Where Italian cuisine celebrates simplicity and authenticity, France represents a model of refinement and artistry, where food evolved into a national symbol of civilisation and aesthetic excellence.

French food culture is deeply rooted in history, refinement, and symbolism, where cooking evolved from royal spectacle to national identity. From the medieval banquets that showcased power and artistry to La Varenne's *Le Cuisinier François* (1651), which systematised recipes and methods, France established the foundations of modern gastronomy (La Varenne, 1651; Poulain, 2017). The 18th-century Revolution further democratised dining, transforming aristocratic cuisine into a public experience through the rise of restaurants (Mikulak, 2013). This transition marked the beginning of a national culinary ethos centred on technique, presentation, and taste. French cooking emphasises seasonality, precision, and balance, with classic dishes like *boeuf bourguignon* and *foie gras* reflecting patience and artistry (Nowak, 2014; Grassetti & Breschi, 1994). Dining in France is regarded as a social ritual, a slow, deliberate act that unites pleasure, civility, and conversation (Mikulak, 2013; Nowak, 2014b). Barthes (1977) observed that the aesthetic and linguistic elegance of French cuisine transforms food into a cultural art form, where the naming and presentation of dishes carry symbolic weight. French gastronomy also achieved global influence through colonial expansion, cookbooks, and culinary institutions like *Le Cordon Bleu*, which spread French techniques worldwide (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010; Mosconi, 2018). The Michelin Guide continues to define global standards of fine dining (Moro, 2014). In essence, French cuisine represents a synthesis of art, order, and social meaning where food is not simply consumed but performed, celebrated, and used to express national pride and cultural sophistication (Parasecoli, 2017). While France refined food into a cultural art form, the United Kingdom represents a more hybrid and evolving foodscape shaped by industrialisation, migration, and multiculturalism. Modern British food culture reflects the nation's transformation through industrialisation, migration, and globalisation. The rise of convenience foods, eating out, and the incorporation of foreign cuisines have reshaped British eating habits over the past five decades (Chiaro, 2008). Rooted in a colonial past and marked by continuous immigration, Britain's foodscape has become increasingly multicultural, with Indian and Chinese cuisines remaining the most popular ethnic foods (Oddy, 2003; ONS, 2012). While dining out reveals cosmopolitan openness, traditional dishes such as fish and chips, shepherd's pie, and Sunday roast persist within homes, reflecting the coexistence of novelty and nostalgia (Rayney, 2013). Food in Britain functions as both a marker of diversity and a symbol of belonging. As Stedman (2006)

and Rabikowska (2010) argue, food mediates between individual expression and collective identity, linking domestic comfort with multicultural exploration. Among ethnic minority communities, however, food often preserves faith and memory, serving as a site of cultural continuity (Helman, 1994; Rabikowska, 2009). For example, Bangladeshi and Polish migrants maintain traditional foodways to affirm heritage and social cohesion (Chowdhury et al., 2000; Willis, 2012). Overall, British cuisine today mirrors a society negotiating between individualism and collectivism, where both mainstream and migrant food practices express adaptation, memory, and identity in an ever-diversifying nation.

Taken together, the Western contexts of the United States, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom reveal how food operates as both a cultural system and a social language, reflecting broader histories of modernisation, migration, and identity formation. Each nation demonstrates a distinctive balance between tradition and transformation as the United States embodies plurality and innovation shaped by immigration; Italy celebrates authenticity and locality amidst global circulation and France elevates cuisine into an art form that fuses refinement and national pride; and the United Kingdom negotiates diversity and belonging through its multicultural foodscape. Collectively, these examples illustrate how Western societies have turned food into a marker of modern identity linking pleasure, memory, and morality with class, nation, and global exchange. This synthesis underscores the central insight that food, beyond nourishment, is a key medium through which social meanings, hierarchies, and cultural values are continually produced and reimagined.

African and Latin American context includes regions such as South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, and Mexico, which show how food is a living record of migration, trade and survival. The cuisines of these regions reflect centuries of contact among indigenous people, European colonisers, and Asian or Arab traders who exchanged crops, tools, and culinary ideas. While colonial powers introduced new ingredients and techniques, local communities reinterpreted them through their own traditions, giving rise to hybrid food cultures that remain deeply rooted in family, spirituality, and community life (Odeyemi, 2019).

In Africa, particularly in South Africa, Nigeria, and Morocco, the evolution of cuisine reveals both historical layering and cultural creativity (El-Hadji, 2018; Akinyemi, 2020). South African food, for instance, reflects centuries of colonial rule under

Dutch, French, German, and British influences, all of which contributed ingredients, methods, and taste preferences. Dishes such as *bobotie*, a baked minced-meat casserole seasoned with curry and topped with egg, illustrate this cultural blending combining European and Asian elements in a distinctly local way (El-Hadji, 2018). The presence of Indian, Malay, and Indonesian labourers further enriched the country's culinary repertoire through the use of spices like curry, pepper, coriander, and anise, creating what is often described as South Africa's "rainbow cuisine." Traditional staples such as maize and bread, cured meats like *boerewors*, and sweets like *melktert* (milk tart) or *souskluitjies* (dumplings) represent the coexistence of indigenous practices with colonial legacies (Naidoo, 2017).

African cuisines thus tell a broader story of resilience, adaptation, and creativity where foreign influences are continually reinterpreted through local techniques and meanings. Similarly, in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, food represents centuries of encounter and fusion, where indigenous crops like maize, beans, and chili merged with European, African, and Asian ingredients to create one of the world's most complex culinary traditions. In both continents, cooking stands as an act of cultural survival and collective memory preserving histories of struggle while expressing joy, identity, and belonging through taste and tradition.

Nigerian cuisine offers a different narrative of cultural synthesis, where indigenous crops and colonial imports coexist harmoniously. Portuguese and British influences introduced foods such as rice, potatoes, and bread, but Nigeria maintained strong ties to its native crops' yams, beans, okra, and tropical fruits (Odeyemi, 2019). Through trade with India, spices and hot peppers became essential to everyday meals, leading to a rich palette of flavours. Popular dishes like *jollof rice*, *egusi* and *ogbono* soups, *moin-moin* (steamed bean pudding), and *suya* (spiced meat skewers) reflect this blend of local and global elements (Eze, 2020). The communal act of eating often from a shared bowl expresses family unity and collective identity. Potatoes, introduced by Portuguese sailors, have been fully integrated into Nigerian cuisine, appearing in stews, fried dishes, and sweet preparations. Such transformations highlight the creativity through which Nigerians localised foreign ingredients within their ecological and cultural environment.

Moroccan cuisine represents yet another form of cultural fusion, shaped by Berber, Arab, Ottoman, and European influences. The country's geographical diversity

spanning mountains, deserts, and coastlines produced a cuisine rich in both ingredients and symbolism. Meals often begin with *harira*, a hearty soup made of chickpeas, lentils, lamb, and spices, traditionally served to break the Ramadan fast (Bencheckroun, 2019). The national dish, *tajine* a slow-cooked stew prepared in a clay pot of the same name embodies the harmony between method and meaning in Moroccan cooking. Likewise, *couscous*, served on Fridays and during family gatherings, symbolises unity and shared faith (El-Hadji, 2018). Central to Moroccan flavour is *ras el hanout*, a complex spice blends whose name translates to “top of the shop,” with each family preparing its own variation using cinnamon, cloves, cumin, and turmeric. Moroccan hospitality is expressed through rituals of sharing tea and sweets such as *chebakia* (honey-coated cookies) and *m’hanncha* (almond-filled pastry), where mint tea is ceremonially poured by the host as a gesture of honour and warmth (Bencheckroun, 2019).

Taken together, South Africa, Nigeria, and Morocco reveal how African cuisines have absorbed multiple global influences while maintaining distinct local character. The names of dishes such as *boerewors*, *bobotie*, *jollof rice*, *egusi soup*, *harira*, and *tajine* serve as living records of history linking the past with the present. Environmental adaptations also shape food practices: drying meat in South Africa’s arid climate, preparing thick soups in Nigeria’s humid regions, or slow-cooking stews in Morocco’s desert landscapes (Naidoo, 2017; Bencheckroun, 2019). Across all regions, eating together remains a central expression of care, identity, and belonging from communal couscous on Fridays in Morocco to shared family meals in Nigeria and outdoor barbecues in South Africa. African cuisines, rich in flavour and symbolism, thus remind us that food is both a reflection of heritage and a living narrative of resilience and unity.

Mexico offers one of the most diverse and colourful culinary traditions in the world, an intricate fusion of geography, history, and multiple civilisations. Its varied climate and terrain have allowed the cultivation of a vast range of ingredients, forming the foundation of its rich gastronomic diversity (Guibrinet, 2023). Mexican cooking is guided by the traditional principle of balancing “hot” and “cold” foods: meat, garlic, and chili peppers are considered *hot* as they raise body heat, while starchy foods such as rice, corn, and beans are viewed as *cold*. Consuming both together is believed to maintain bodily balance and harmony (Weller, 1983; Mil, 2016).

Among its staples, the tortilla holds a central place. Derived from the Spanish word *torta* (meaning “round cake”), tortillas are thin breads made from corn or wheat flour and consumed with nearly every meal (Algor Cards, 2024). Other iconic dishes include tamales, steamed parcels of corn dough filled with meat, cheese, or vegetables, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, a practice that traces back to pre-Columbian times (BBC Good Food, 2024). Mexican sauces or salsas ranging from simple chili blends to the complex mole, a thick sauce of chili, spices, and broth are integral to its flavour identity (Campos-Montiel et al., 2022). Similarly, guacamole, originally prepared by the Aztecs using avocado, tomato, and chili, remains one of Mexico’s most recognisable dishes (Hongu et al., 2016). Sweet delicacies such as cajeta (goat’s milk caramel) and churros, along with drinks like tequila and horchata, illustrate how Mexican cuisine bridges indulgence, ritual, and national pride (Barajas-Ramírez, 2021; Denizer, 2005).

The origins of Mexican cuisine extend back thousands of years, shaped by ancient civilisations such as the Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs. The Olmecs developed irrigation systems that improved agriculture, while the Mayans cultivated maize, beans, and chili peppers staples that continue to define the Mexican table (Conway, 2018). The Aztecs expanded this culinary base by incorporating tropical ingredients such as avocado, vanilla, and cocoa, and by establishing the ritual and symbolic role of food in everyday life (Soustelle, 2006). The Spanish conquest in the 16th century introduced new ingredients milk, cheese, wheat, rice, pork, citrus fruits, and olive oil creating a fusion between indigenous and European traditions (West, 2005). Subsequent trade routes added sugarcane, potatoes, and spices like cinnamon and parsley (Guibrinet, 2023). Later, French, Italian, and German influences introduced refined techniques and urban dining practices, from the use of olive oil to the establishment of restaurants and bakeries (Iturriga, 1993; Şengül, 2013). Despite these foreign layers, Mexican cuisine maintained its local integrity, blending imported flavours into distinctly national forms.

In the 21st century, globalisation and fast-food culture have altered urban eating habits, yet Mexico has remained committed to preserving its culinary heritage. In recognition of this deep cultural continuity, UNESCO declared Mexican cuisine an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 (Banerjee-Dube, 2016).

Food in Mexico is deeply entwined with family, religion, and national celebrations. The preparation of *tamales* often becomes a communal activity during holidays, reflecting the gendered and generational transmission of culinary knowledge (Conde et al., 2011). Food also plays a central role in national and religious observances such as Independence Day, the Day of the Dead, and Christmas. During the Day of the Dead, families prepare favourite dishes of deceased relatives and bake *pan de muerto*, a special bread symbolising the cycle of life and death (Acapulcos, 2024). On Independence Day, *Chiles en Nogada* stuffed peppers served with white walnut sauce and red pomegranate is eaten to represent the colours of the Mexican flag (Mexican Food Journal, 2019). Even the ritual of drinking tequila with salt and lime illustrates how food and drink are intertwined with performance and identity (Özdemir, 2005). Daily meals in Mexico follow a structured rhythm that reinforces both nourishment and social connection (Çakmak, 2017). El Desayuno (breakfast), eaten between 7 and 10 a.m., typically includes coffee, hot chocolate, or *atole* with dishes like *huevos rancheros* fried tortillas topped with eggs and chili sauce (Civilisable, 2024). La Comida (lunch) is the main meal, taken around midday and consisting of soup, salad, a main course, dessert, and fruit drink (Doğdubay, 2016). La Cena (dinner) is lighter and eaten later in the evening, often featuring soups or small dishes such as tacos (Ardıç Yetiş & Bozok, 2022).

In essence, Mexican cuisine exemplifies the enduring dialogue between the local and the global, the traditional and the modern. From *tortillas* and *tamales* to *mole* and *guacamole*, each dish tells a story of cultural exchange, community, and continuity. It remains one of the world's most vibrant living food cultures, an art form through which Mexico expresses its history, identity, and collective joy.

The Asian context examines regions such as China, Japan, and Korea to understand how food reflects the cultural values, traditions, and social meanings embedded within these societies. Chinese food culture reflects both regional diversity and deep social meaning. The north-south divide is particularly significant, rice forms the staple diet in southern China, while wheat-based foods such as noodles, steamed buns, and dumplings dominate the north (Ma, 2015). These food habits travel with Chinese migrants across the world, sustaining cultural continuity and identity even far from home. In China, food is more than nourishment. It embodies values of family, respect, and symbolism. Many dishes express good wishes, noodles represent long life,

peanuts longevity, oranges and chestnuts good fortune, rice cakes promotion, and glutinous rice balls family unity. Certain foods are used or avoided during weddings and births based on wordplay or symbolism: fish denotes abundance, wine signifies a long relationship, and red-dyed eggs celebrate childbirth, while pears are avoided since the word for “pear” sounds like “separation” (Ma, 2015).

With modernisation, Western influences and urban lifestyles have introduced new customs, such as celebrating birthdays with cake and candles alongside traditional longevity noodles. This blending of traditions illustrates how Chinese society negotiates continuity and change (Ma, 2015). Within domestic life, gender roles have evolved, while rural women still handle most cooking and household tasks, urban families increasingly share these responsibilities. Men are now more involved in cooking, and children influence food purchasing decisions based on taste and advertising. Mothers remain primary decision-makers, often prioritising freshness, hygiene, and nutrition. Traditional cooking once required two to three hours daily, but modern technology such as microwaves and electric cookers has shortened preparation time. Eating out has also become common, marking a cultural shift toward convenience and speed in urban areas (Ibid).

Food distribution within Chinese families mirrors social hierarchy and moral order. When food is scarce, portions are allocated according to need or contribution, elders and working men are typically served first, reflecting patriarchal norms and respect for age. Despite such inequalities, children and older adults are generally prioritised, preserving Confucian ideals of filial piety. Group dining remains central to Chinese eating culture, symbolising togetherness and harmony. Dishes are shared from a central table, reinforcing community bonds though raising modern hygiene concerns. While individual servings have become more common in public spaces, the traditional collective dining format remains culturally dominant (Ibid).

Meal times in China follow a structured rhythm, usually with three main meals a day. Breakfast is eaten between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. and varies by region as the Cantonese enjoy “morning tea” with shrimp dumplings, steamed buns, fritters, and soy milk, while northern regions favour bread, porridge, dumplings, and noodles. Lunch, taken between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., may be eaten at home in small towns or in workplace canteens in cities. Dinner, usually held between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m., is the most important family meal, consisting of multiple shared dishes and soup (Ma,

2015). Despite technological modernisation and globalisation, food in China remains a cultural anchor linking generations, reinforcing moral values, and preserving harmony within both family and society (Ibid).

Japanese food culture is far more complex than the common image of sushi and rice. It has evolved over thousands of years through local exchanges within the islands and contact with foreign influences. This long history has produced diverse culinary practices shaped by class, geography, religion, and moral thought (Markovitch, 2023; Ishige, 2012). Japanese cuisine is essentially a story of borrowing, adapting, and reinventing, absorbing techniques and ingredients from abroad while transforming them into distinctly Japanese forms. Over time, food became a reflection of order, refinement, and social philosophy.

During the Muromachi period (1336–1573), food began to signify rank and social position. Among the warrior elite, *honzen ryōri* (“main tray cuisine”) emerged as a formal banquet system featuring multiple trays of dishes and sake. It represented hierarchy and precision in presentation. In the later Edo (1603–1868) and Meiji (1868–1912) periods, this cuisine became simpler but retained its ceremonial meaning. Around the same time, *kaiseki ryōri* developed alongside the tea ceremony, emphasizing aesthetic harmony and seasonal balance. By the 17th century, it had split into two forms, formal banquet *kaiseki* and a lighter tea-based version. Today, *kaiseki* continues to embody Japan’s ideals of elegance and seasonality (Markovitch, 2023; Ishige, 2012).

While elite cuisines expressed ritual and refinement, the food of ordinary people was modest yet meaningful. Rural diets relied on grains, pickled vegetables, and fermented seasonings, whereas urban centres nurtured early street food culture. Many dishes now regarded as national symbols, such as sushi, began as simple snacks sold on city streets. The concept of home cooking (*katei ryōri*) only gained importance in the early 20th century, influenced by Western family ideals and the rise of the middle class. The standard home meal consisting of rice, soup, pickles, a protein, and side dishes remains a symbol of comfort, nutrition, and family unity (Cwiertka, 2006).

Religion has played a central role in shaping Japanese dietary norms. Buddhism, introduced from China during the Nara period (710-794), discouraged the killing of animals and inspired vegetarian temple cuisine known as *shōjin ryōri*. Although upper classes often ignored the ban, the Buddhist view of purity influenced national attitudes

toward food and nature. Meat consumption increased after the Meiji Restoration, when the government promoted Western diets rich in protein and dairy to symbolise progress. By the 20th century, meat had become a staple, and foreign-influenced foods such as ramen, gyōza, curry rice (*karē raisu*), tempura, and tonkatsu became integral to modern Japanese cuisine (Ishige, 2012; Markovitch, 2023).

Culinary exchange has long been a defining feature of Japanese food culture. China was Japan's earliest influence, introducing noodles, oil-based frying, and pork, while Chinese settlers in Nagasaki popularised dining styles such as *fucha ryōri* and *shippoku ryōri*, blending Chinese techniques with Japanese aesthetics. Japan's later expansion into Asia brought new influences from Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria, leading to meat-based dishes like *yakiniku* after World War II (Ishige, 2012). European contact began even earlier, with Portuguese and Dutch traders introducing frying methods that evolved into *tempura*, along with sweets like *kasutera* (sponge cake) and *ponzu* sauce. During the Meiji era, Western foods such as butter, milk, and bread entered elite and middle-class diets. A hybrid cuisine known as *yōshoku* ("Western-style Japanese food") soon emerged, with dishes like *omuraisu* (omelet rice) and *korokke* (croquette), symbolising Japan's embrace of modernity and cultural fusion (Cwierka, 2006).

In 2013, UNESCO recognised *washoku*, the traditional dietary culture of Japan as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, celebrating its emphasis on seasonality, balance, and respect for nature. Scholars, however, remind us that there is no single Japanese cuisine but rather multiple cuisines shaped by class, region, and history (Markovitch, 2023; Stalker, 2018; Quellier & Cornette, 2021). Japanese food culture remains dynamic, continually evolving through the negotiation of old and new, local and global. From temple vegetarian meals and refined *kaiseki* dinners to home-cooked rice bowls and contemporary fusion dishes, Japanese cuisine embodies a living tradition, one that expresses creativity, social change, and enduring cultural values.

South Korea's food culture reflects its long agricultural history and deep connections to philosophy, geography, and social order. With roots stretching back over a millennium, Korean cuisine maintains continuity with ancient dietary systems while embracing modern global influences (Ming, 2009; Ni, 2016). For Koreans, food is not merely sustenance but one of the "five blessings" of life symbolising health, harmony, and prosperity. Grounded in traditional Chinese philosophies of Yin-Yang balance

and the Five Elements theory, Korean cooking strives for equilibrium among the “five tastes” (sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, salty) and the “five colors” (white, green, red, black, yellow). These principles guide both flavour and presentation, embodying the Korean belief that food should nourish body, mind, and spirit (Li, 2016; Zheng, 2019).

Rice forms the foundation of the Korean diet, commonly accompanied by kimchi, soups, seafood, and assorted side dishes known as *banchan*. The popular saying “You don’t want to eat without kimchi” captures its essential place in everyday meals (Guo, 2020). The ancient art of fermentation especially of cabbage and radish remains a defining feature of Korean identity. The establishment of a national “Kimchi Museum” demonstrates the country’s commitment to preserving this cultural symbol (Ni, 2016). Beyond kimchi, fermentation is integral to Korean cooking, producing key condiments such as *doenjang* (soybean paste), *gochujang* (chili paste), and *ganjang* (soy sauce). These seasonings form the base of countless soups, stews, and marinades, imparting rich umami depth and aroma to Korean cuisine (Ming, 2009; Gao, 2022).

Korea’s geography and four distinct seasons have profoundly shaped its regional foodways. The mountainous terrain encouraged grain-based agriculture, while rice cultivation flourished in the fertile plains during the Joseon dynasty. Northern regions, constrained by dry-field farming, relied on mixed grains and preserved foods, whereas the central and southern provinces benefited from abundant rice harvests. Coastal regions, including Jeju Island, developed seafood-rich diets featuring seaweed and shellfish, while Jeolla Province became celebrated for its diverse *banchan* and vibrant use of grains and vegetables (Ming, 2009; Zheng, 2019). Each regional cuisine reflects adaptation to local ecology, forming a culinary mosaic unified by shared traditions yet distinguished by flavour and preparation styles.

Traditional Korean meals follow a grain-centered structure, combining rice with soups, stews, and an array of side dishes. The preference for lightly seasoned or raw foods such as lettuce wraps, cucumbers, sashimi, and octopus illustrate respect for freshness and natural taste. Unlike Chinese stir-frying, Korean cooking favours boiling, steaming, marinating, and fermenting to retain nutrients and subtlety of flavour (Ni, 2016; Gao, 2022). Signature dishes such as *gimbap* (rice rolled in seaweed with vegetables and seafood) exemplify creativity and balance, serving as portable, nutritionally complete meals. This emphasis on balance aligns with the traditional

concept of *sik-yak dongwon*, the belief that “food and medicine share the same origin” underscoring the health-oriented philosophy of Korean food (Li, 2016).

Korean dining etiquette reflects the Confucian values of hierarchy, respect, and collective harmony. Seating and serving arrangements follow strict social rules i.e. elders are served first, and younger members begin only after them. Traditionally, meals were taken while seated on the floor, men cross-legged, women with legs tucked beneath them. In modern households, Western-style dining tables are increasingly common (Ji, 2019; Gao, 2022). The use of chopsticks and spoons has distinct etiquette using chopsticks for solids, spoons for rice and soups and certain actions, like eating before elders or leaving early, are considered impolite. These customs reflect deep-rooted ideals of order, unity, and respect that structure both the Korean table and society at large (Guo, 2020; Zheng, 2019).

In recent decades, Korean cuisine has gained global prominence alongside cultural exports like K-dramas and K-pop, collectively known as the *Korean Wave (Hallyu)*. Dishes such as *bibimbap*, *bulgogi*, *tteokbokki*, and kimchi stew have become internationally recognised symbols of Korean identity. This global spread demonstrates how South Korea has preserved its ancient culinary traditions while skillfully adapting them to contemporary tastes. Food has become both a medium of cultural diplomacy and an expression of national pride linking Korea’s historical roots to its modern cosmopolitan image (Ni, 2016; Gao, 2022).

The global food culture overview demonstrates how interchange, adaptability, and meaning shape culinary systems. Food is a source of identity, memory, and change in Western, African–Latin American, and Asian cultures. Western countries like the US, Italy, France, and the UK show how industrialisation, migration, and modernity have created varied, interconnected cuisines that balance authenticity with global impact. Africa and Latin America, South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, and Mexico showcase resilience and ingenuity from colonisation and cultural mixing, where indigenous ingredients and foreign methods create hybrid culinary traditions. Asia, particularly China, Japan, and Korea, shows significant continuities between cuisine, philosophy, and social life, where balance, symbolism, and community remain despite growing globalisation. These places show that food cultures globally are dynamic systems moulded by history, nature, and human inventiveness, constantly recreated for survival, belonging, and cultural exchange.

Understanding these global trajectories enables a grounded comparison with the Indian context, where religion, caste, ecology, and globalization similarly shape the moral and material dimensions of food. Like the hybrid resilience of Mexico or the spiritual continuity of Korea, India's foodways embody both diversity and negotiation and thus linking global dynamics to deeply local meanings.

1.6.2 Indian Scenario

Indian cuisine is unquestionably a collection of delicious regional cuisines, each with its own distinct personality and character found in every state in this nation. Each state has its own unique cuisine, which when mixed with other regional cuisines creates the delicious food of India. With 5000 years of history, Indian cuisine has been influenced by many different groups, which has led to the country's unique local cuisines and taste combinations. Indian food culture has grown through four broad phases: prehistoric, Vedic, Mughal, and European colonial, with each era adding ingredients, techniques, and meanings that still shape everyday meals (Jarrige & Meadow, 1980). In the prehistoric and Indus Valley periods, people relied on hunting, herding, and early farming; archaeological finds of bones and grains show mixed diets that included cattle, sheep, goat, fish, and fowl, cooked by grilling, roasting on spits, and boiling in wide-mouthed pots (Piggott, 1950). Pulses such as chickpea and lentil, along with barley and wheat, were common; grinding stones and querns suggest flour making and spice processing, even if the source of spices, local or traded remains uncertain. (Prakash, 1961).

The Vedic era linked food with ethics, ritual, and health, recording grains, milk, ghee, and sweets in texts that framed diet as both nourishing and spiritually meaningful. Barley dominated early on, with wheat, millets, and later rice added, preparations like *apūpa* (now *malpua*), *saktu/sattu*, *odana* (porridge), and *karambha* (barley with yogurt) show continuity with present kitchens. Debates over meat are visible in sources that reference cattle, goat, and even horseflesh, while spices (sesame, turmeric, mustard, pepper) and fruits (bael, mango) broadened flavors. The *soma* drink remains debated variously linked to millets, cannabis, or mushrooms illustrating how ritual beverages complicate neat historical claims (Mehta, 2013; Sarkar et al., 2015).

The Mughal period accelerated culinary change. Courtly kitchens blended Central Asian and Persian forms with regional Indian ingredients to create rich stews, layered

rice dishes, grills, and sweets. Texts like the *Ni'matnāma*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Jahangirnama*, and *Nushka-i-Shahjahani* record recipes for *sambusa/samosa*, *seekh kabab*, *yakhni*, *shurba*, *khichri*, *pulao*, and diverse breads (naan, roti). Spice circuits stretched from Kashmir saffron to Malabar aromatics, giving Mughlai dishes their signature perfume. Politics also mattered as pork remained taboo in Muslim courts, while beef avoidance appeased Hindu elites and mutton and fowl became mainstays (Titley, 2004; Narayanan, 2016).

European colonization added another wave. Through the Columbian Exchange, potatoes, chilies, tomatoes, maize, and peanuts entered Indian kitchens and became “local” essentials such as thick tomato-onion gravies or potato-filled samosas (Crosby, 2003; Boivin et al., 2014). The Portuguese spurred cheese making (*chhānā*), inspiring Bengali sweets like *rasgulla* and *sandesh*, and sparked Goan fusions such as *vindaloo*, *caldo verde*, and *xacuti*; printed accounts by Garcia de Orta catalogued Indian botanicals and kitchen practices (Kronl, 2010). The British scaled tea agriculture and brewing culture; post-colonial *chai* reflects Indian preferences for milk and spice, and Anglo-Indian cookery bridged club kitchens and vernacular tastes (Fielder, 1869; Brown, 1998). By the 20th century, India was among the world leaders in potato production and consumption, mirroring the deep integration of New World crops into Indian diets (FAO, 2009).

Across this long arc, caste, region, and religion shaped who ate what, how, and with whom structuring ideas of purity, hierarchy, and everyday practice while Ayurveda and temple traditions kept alive the principle of food as medicine and moral order (Jha, 2002; Khare, 1992; Sarkar et al., 2015; Sen, 2014). At the same time, regional cuisines diversified: North India cultivated rich Mughlai-influenced dishes like biryani and kebabs; South India emphasized rice lentil staples such as dosa, idli, and sambar; West India (Gujarat, Maharashtra) developed robust vegetarian repertoires including *dhokla* and *vada pav*; East India (Bengal, Odisha) refined fish curries and milk-based sweets (*rasgulla*, *sandesh*); Central India popularized dishes like *poha*; and the Northeast highlighted bamboo shoots, herbs, *momo*, and *thukpa*, reflecting Himalayan and Southeast Asian ties (Sen, 2014; Achaya, 2003). Through all regions, spices remain the grammar of flavor and meaning: *masala* blends transmitted within families carry medicinal and symbolic roles as much as taste (Sarkar et al., 2015; Achaya, 2003).

Food in India is not merely a source of sustenance, it is a vibrant reflection of the nation's cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and historical evolution. Every meal tells a story of geography, religion, and community life. From the snowy peaks of the Himalayas to the tropical coasts of Kerala, India's culinary map mirrors its immense diversity and layered cultural influences (Achaya, 1994; Khare, 2004). The act of eating itself often carries ritual and symbolic meaning, reinforcing values of hospitality, purity, and social order. Across generations, food has served as a powerful expression of belonging, shaping how people identify themselves in regional, caste, and religious terms (Sen, 2015; Sarma, 2011).

India's regional diversity forms the backbone of its food culture. In the north, the culinary influence of Persian and Mughal traditions is evident in rich gravies, aromatic spices, and dishes like biryani, kebabs, and kormas that rely on ghee, yogurt, and dried fruits for depth and flavor (Achaya, 1994; Narayan, 2006). By contrast, the south presents an entirely different flavor profile dominated by rice, lentils, coconut, and tamarind, with staples such as idli, dosa, and sambar representing a delicate balance of spice and sourness (Menon, 2003; Sarma, 2011). Eastern India, especially Bengal, celebrates its love for fish, rice, and sweets like rasgulla, while the western regions, including Gujarat and Rajasthan, showcase ingenuity in vegetarian cooking and the use of millets, pulses, and yogurt to suit arid climates (Khare, 2004). These variations demonstrate how local environments and histories, from river deltas to desert plains that shape food systems and taste preferences.

Religion plays a defining role in shaping India's food practices. Hindu dietary customs often emphasize vegetarianism and ritual purity, guided by the principle of *ahimsa*, or non-violence (Sharma, 2009). In contrast, Islamic influence introduced sumptuous meat-based dishes, such as haleem, nihari, and seekh kebabs, which continue to mark festivals like Eid with communal feasting (Ali, 2001). Sikhism reinforces the value of equality through the *langar*, a communal meal where everyone, regardless of background, eats together (Singh, 2014). Likewise, Buddhist and Jain food traditions emphasize simplicity and compassion, while Christian and Jewish communities in Kerala, Goa, and Maharashtra have maintained unique cuisines that blend faith-based rules with local ingredients (Sen, 2015). Through these practices, food functions as both a spiritual and social connector, reinforcing collective identity.

Food and festivals in India are inseparable. Each celebration carries its own culinary symbolism. Diwali is marked by sweets like laddoos and barfis to signify joy and prosperity; Eid brings feasts of biryani and sewaiyan; Onam in Kerala is celebrated with the grand Onam Sadhya, a multi-course vegetarian meal served on banana leaves; and Pongal in Tamil Nadu features sweet and savory versions of the dish *pongal*, symbolizing gratitude for harvest abundance (Khare, 2004; Sarma, 2011). These ritual foods sustain the emotional and spiritual fabric of Indian life, transforming cooking and eating into acts of celebration, devotion, and community sharing.

In modern India, globalization has transformed eating habits without erasing cultural depth. The influx of fast food, packaged snacks, and fusion dishes such as Indo-Chinese cuisine reflects urban adaptation, yet traditional foodways remain deeply cherished at home (Deshpande, 2012; Kumar, 2015). The resilience of regional cuisines and the continued importance of ritual eating underscore that food in India remains a living expression of history and identity, a means of preserving culture while engaging with change.

India's culinary traditions embody centuries of adaptation, innovation, and cultural exchange. They have evolved through a complex interplay of indigenous practices, religious norms, trade routes, and colonial encounters, each leaving its mark on the national palate (Achaya, 1994; Sengupta, 2008). From the ancient Ayurvedic emphasis on balance and health to the Mughal and British legacies of refinement and hybridity, Indian food history mirrors the subcontinent's dynamic past. The Mughal period profoundly shaped North Indian cuisine, introducing aromatic rice dishes like biryani, creamy curries such as korma, and rich desserts flavored with saffron and nuts. These dishes reflected both royal opulence and Persian techniques of slow-cooking (*dum* style), combining local ingredients with foreign sophistication (Achaya, 1994; Ali, 2001). Later, British colonization spurred new hybrid forms, blending European techniques with Indian flavors to produce Anglo-Indian specialties like mulligatawny soup and railway curry (Sengupta, 2008). These encounters expanded India's culinary vocabulary, demonstrating its remarkable capacity to absorb and reinvent.

Regional variation remains the soul of Indian cuisine. North India favors wheat, dairy, and rich gravies based on onions, tomatoes, and cream (Narayan, 2006). South India, in contrast, relies on rice, lentils, and coconut, balancing sharp, sour, and spicy tastes

through dishes like rasam, idli, and uttapam (Menon, 2003). Coastal regions such as Kerala and Bengal showcase seafood stews, coconut-based curries, and mustard-seed seasoning, revealing centuries of maritime trade and cross-cultural contact (Chatterjee, 2005). In every region, the spice palette is central and not merely for flavor but for health and balance, as emphasized in Ayurveda, where turmeric, cumin, and cardamom are valued for their medicinal properties (Gupta, 2010; Prakash, 2011). The careful blending of these spices into *masalas* represents an artistry passed through families and communities, symbolizing the heart of Indian cooking.

Equally significant are the social and moral dimensions of food. In many homes, cooking is an act of devotion. Kitchens are treated as sacred spaces where ingredients are purified through prayer and ritual (Sharma, 2009). Eating together, whether in family meals or at public gatherings like Sikh langars, reaffirms collective identity and equality (Singh, 2014). At the same time, traditional food hierarchies, what can be shared and with whom reflect broader social structures, illustrating how cuisine embodies India's complex intersections of caste, class, and faith (Khare, 2004).

Today, Indian culinary traditions are both local and global. Indian restaurants flourish worldwide, serving dishes like chicken tikka masala, butter chicken, and samosas that have become symbols of diasporic pride and cross-cultural exchange (Kumar, 2015; Deshpande, 2012). Within India, regional cuisines continue to inspire innovation, from home-based cooking revivals to high-end reinterpretations of street food. The enduring adaptability of Indian cuisine and its ability to evolve while retaining its emotional and cultural essence speaks to its deep-rooted connection to both place and people.

Finally, Indian food today travels and adapts within India and across the world through diaspora, restaurants, and creative chefs who keep core flavours while innovating for new contexts. In cities like Amsterdam, Indian restaurants act as cultural bridges preserving family recipes, introducing local diners to regional diversity, and experimenting with fusion illustrating how Indian cuisine sustains heritage and sparks dialogue far from home (Boivin et al., 2014; Sengupta, 2010; Sen, 2014). Together, these strands show an enduring pattern, Indian cuisine is not a single canon but a living archive of encounters, prehistoric techniques, Vedic ethics, Mughal courts, colonial exchanges, regional ecologies, and contemporary global circuits, held together by everyday cooking and the social meaning of sharing food (Sen, 2014; Achaya, 2003).

An overview of the Indian Scenario

The formation of Indian culinary culture exemplifies an ongoing interplay of nature, religion, authority, and exchanges. Indian food has always taken in and reinterpreted a wide range of influences, from prehistoric subsistence and Vedic ritualism to Mughal refinement and colonial hybridity. It has always had a strong moral and symbolic core. Each regional and community-based tradition adds to a bigger picture of preferences, where variety is the main idea and adaptability is a way to keep things going. From a food-studies point of view, Indian food is an example of what experts call the moral economy of taste. This is a cultural system in which food connects material demands and moral worlds, showing affiliation, hierarchy, and memory. Hindu families practise ceremonial vegetarianism, Islamic and Sikh traditions celebrate meat-based dishes, and regional repertoires show how eating habits support both identity and moral order. Indian foodways continue to blend new ideas with local ones, keeping strong ties to the land, the seasons, and community life, even as globalisation changes everything. Indian cuisine is not a set of rules. It is a living cultural archive that tells the narrative of India's social history and its ability to adapt to change through the daily activities of preparing and sharing food. Indian cuisine is a blend of many regional food traditions, each with its own taste, ingredients, and cooking methods. With a history of over 5,000 years, it has been shaped by cultural exchanges and historical changes. Over time, Indian food developed through four major phases- prehistoric, Vedic, Mughal, and European colonial, each adding new ingredients and techniques. Early communities during the Indus Valley period depended on hunting, herding, and farming, eating grains like barley and wheat along with pulses, fish, and meat. Evidence of grinding stones and cooking pots shows that people already processed grains and spices. Altogether, Indian cuisine today reflects a long journey of adaptation, creativity, and cultural mixing that continues to define the nation's diverse food traditions.

During the Vedic era, food was closely tied to ethics, health, and spirituality. Texts from this period describe a balanced diet that included grains, milk, ghee, and sweets, reflecting both nourishment and religious meaning. Barley was the main grain, later joined by wheat, millets, and rice, and many early dishes such as *apūpa* (sweet cakes) and *karambha* (barley with yogurt) still resemble foods eaten today. Spices like turmeric, mustard, and pepper, along with fruits such as bael and mango, added flavor

to meals. References to meat and the ritual drink *soma* show that diet was not only about sustenance but also a key part of cultural and spiritual life in ancient India.

The Mughal era marked a turning point in Indian culinary history, bringing together Central Asian and Persian influences with local Indian ingredients. Royal kitchens created rich stews, layered rice dishes, grilled meats, and sweets that later shaped regional cuisines. Texts like the *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Ni'matnāma* recorded recipes for *samosa*, *seekh kabab*, *yakhni*, *pulao*, and various breads such as *naan* and *roti*. Spices from across India from Kashmiri saffron to Malabar aromatics added fragrance and depth to Mughlai dishes. Religious customs also guided eating habits, pork was avoided in Muslim courts, while beef was avoided among Hindu elites, making mutton and poultry the main sources of meat. Overall, the Mughal period enriched Indian cuisine through cultural blending, refinement, and the creation of dishes that remain popular today.

During European colonization, Indian cuisine underwent major changes through the introduction of new crops and ingredients from the Americas. Potatoes, chilies, tomatoes, maize, and peanuts entered local diets and soon became everyday essentials in dishes like curries and samosas. The Portuguese introduced cheese making (*chhānā*), which led to famous Bengali sweets such as *rasgulla* and *sandesh*, and also influenced Goan dishes like *vindaloo* and *xacuti*. The British promoted tea cultivation and popularized the habit of drinking spiced milk tea, or *chai*. They also created Anglo-Indian dishes that mixed European and Indian styles. By the 20th century, India had become one of the world's leading producers and consumers of potatoes, showing how global exchanges permanently reshaped Indian food traditions.

Over centuries, caste, religion, and region have shaped what people in India eat, how they prepare it, and with whom they share it reflecting deep ideas of purity, hierarchy, and everyday ritual. Systems like Ayurveda and temple food traditions preserved the belief that food is both medicine and moral practice (Jha, 2002; Khare, 1992; Sarkar et al., 2015; Sen, 2014). Regional cuisines evolved distinct identities: North India became known for Mughlai-influenced dishes like *biryani* and *kebabs*; South India centered on rice and lentil foods such as *dosa*, *idli*, and *sambar*; West India (Gujarat, Maharashtra) favored vegetarian dishes like *dhokla* and *vada pav*; East India (Bengal, Odisha) perfected fish curries and milk sweets like *rasgulla* and *sandesh*; Central India popularized *poha*; and the Northeast embraced bamboo shoots, herbs, *momo*,

and *thukpa*, showing Himalayan and Southeast Asian connections (Sen, 2014; Achaya, 2003). Across all regions, spices remain central, with *masala* blends passed down through families valued not only for taste but also for their medicinal and symbolic meanings (Sarkar et al., 2015; Achaya, 2003).

Food in India is more than nourishment as it reflects the nation's cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and historical development. Each meal tells a story shaped by geography, religion, and community traditions. From the Himalayas in the north to the coasts of Kerala in the south, India's food culture showcases vast diversity and multiple layers of influence (Achaya, 1994; Khare, 2004). Eating is often a ritual act that expresses values of hospitality, purity, and social order. Across generations, food has remained a strong marker of belonging, helping people define themselves within regional, caste, and religious identities (Sen, 2015; Sarma, 2011).

India's regional diversity forms the foundation of its food culture, with each part of the country offering distinct flavors and ingredients. In the north, Persian and Mughal influences shaped rich gravies, aromatic spices, and dishes like *biryani*, *kebabs*, and *kormas* that use ghee, yogurt, and dried fruits for depth (Achaya, 1994; Narayan, 2006). The south developed a contrasting style centered on rice, lentils, coconut, and tamarind, seen in staples such as *idli*, *dosa*, and *sambar*, known for their balance of spice and sourness (Menon, 2003; Sarma, 2011). Eastern India, especially Bengal, is known for its love of fish, rice, and sweets like *rasgulla*, while western regions such as Gujarat and Rajasthan specialize in vegetarian dishes made from millets, pulses, and yogurt suited to dry climates (Khare, 2004). These regional differences show how geography, climate, and history shape India's diverse food systems and taste preferences.

Religion strongly shapes Indian food traditions. Hinduism promotes vegetarianism and purity through *ahimsa* (non-violence), while Islam introduced rich meat-based dishes like *haleem* and *seekh kebab*. Sikhism emphasizes equality through the communal *langar*, where everyone eats together. Buddhism and Jainism encourage simplicity and compassion, while Christian and Jewish communities in regions like Kerala and Goa mix faith-based customs with local ingredients (Sharma, 2009; Ali, 2001; Singh, 2014; Sen, 2015). Overall, food acts as both a spiritual and social bond, strengthening collective identity. Festivals in India are inseparable from food, with each celebration carrying symbolic meaning. *Diwali* features sweets like *laddoo* for

prosperity, *Eid* includes *biryani* and *sewaiyan*, *Onam* in Kerala is marked by the grand vegetarian feast *Onam Sadhya*, and *Pongal* celebrates harvest abundance with sweet and savory *pongal*. These ritual foods express joy, gratitude, and community spirit, turning meals into acts of devotion and sharing (Khare, 2004; Sarma, 2011).

In modern India, globalization has changed food habits through the rise of fast food, packaged snacks, and fusion dishes like Indo-Chinese cuisine. Yet, traditional cooking practices and regional cuisines remain central to Indian households. This balance between modern change and cultural continuity shows that food still represents identity, tradition, and adaptability (Deshpande, 2012; Kumar, 2015). Indian cuisine reflects centuries of cultural mixing and innovation. Influences from trade, religion, and colonial encounters shaped its diversity. Ancient Ayurvedic principles emphasized balance, the Mughals brought rich dishes like *biryani* and *korma*, and the British introduced fusion recipes such as *mulligatawny soup* and *railway curry*. These exchanges expanded India's culinary creativity and ability to adapt (Achaya, 1994; Sengupta, 2008). Regional cuisines across India display remarkable variety. Northern food uses wheat, dairy, and creamy gravies, while southern food is rice-based with lentils, coconut, and tamarind. Coastal areas like Kerala and Bengal focus on seafood and coconut curries, shaped by maritime trade. Spices such as turmeric and cumin are valued for both flavor and health, representing Ayurvedic ideas of balance (Menon, 2003; Chatterjee, 2005; Gupta, 2010). Cooking and eating hold deep moral and spiritual meaning in India. Many families view kitchens as sacred spaces, and meals are often shared communally to express equality and devotion, as seen in the Sikh *langar*. However, food hierarchies related to caste and class also persist, reflecting broader social divisions (Sharma, 2009; Singh, 2014; Khare, 2004).

Indian food today is both local and global. Dishes like *chicken tikka masala* and *samosa* are enjoyed worldwide, symbolizing cultural pride. Within India, regional foods are being reimagined through home revivals and modern restaurants. This shows Indian cuisine's strength, its ability to evolve while keeping its emotional and cultural roots intact (Kumar, 2015; Deshpande, 2012). Indian cuisine continues to travel globally through migration and the diaspora. Restaurants abroad preserve traditional recipes while adapting to new tastes, creating cultural bridges between India and the world. This ongoing exchange shows that Indian food is not fixed but a

living archive of history, blending ancient traditions with modern innovation (Boivin et al., 2014; Sengupta, 2010; Sen, 2014; Achaya, 2003).

Religion, festivals, class, caste, and ethnicity have profoundly shaped India's food culture, making it one of the most complex and symbolically rich in the world. In India, food is not merely a matter of taste or nutrition, it is a language of belief, identity, and social belonging. Religious values have played a central role in determining what people eat, how they prepare it, and even with whom they share it. Hinduism, guided by the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence), encourages vegetarianism and the idea of purity in food, classifying it into *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic* categories based on spiritual and moral attributes. The sacredness of the cow reinforces the avoidance of beef, while specific fasting and ritual foods express devotion and self-control. In contrast, Islam brought sumptuous meat-based cuisines such as *biryani*, *haleem*, and *seekh kebab*, which continue to mark celebrations like Eid, symbolizing generosity and community unity. Sikhism promotes the value of equality through the *langar*, a communal kitchen where everyone, regardless of caste or background, eats together while Buddhist and Jain traditions advocate compassion and simplicity, often through strict vegetarianism. Christian and Jewish communities in regions like Kerala, Goa, and Maharashtra have preserved distinctive cuisines that blend biblical food customs with local ingredients. Thus, religious beliefs and taboos have ensured that food in India remains both a spiritual and social connector, shaping collective identity and ethical practice.

Festivals across India further highlight how food operates as a cultural expression of joy, gratitude, and togetherness. Each celebration is marked by special dishes that carry symbolic meanings of prosperity and renewal. *Diwali* is associated with sweets such as *laddoo* and *barfi* representing light and abundance, *Eid* with rich dishes like *biryani* and *sewaiyan* shared across households, *Onam* in Kerala with the grand vegetarian *Sadhya* feast served on banana leaves; and *Pongal* in Tamil Nadu with the sweet and savory versions of *pongol* offered in thanks for a good harvest. These festive foods are more than meals, they are rituals of sharing, devotion, and continuity that bind families and communities across generations.

Caste and class, too, have long influenced dietary behavior and the social meanings attached to food. In the traditional caste hierarchy, what and with whom one eats signified social status and ritual purity. Upper castes often adhered to vegetarian diets

and avoided foods considered polluting, while lower-caste and tribal groups, excluded from temple food systems, consumed meat, fermented products, and locally available grains. Cooking and serving food were also governed by caste boundaries and certain groups were permitted to prepare or serve meals for others, while some were restricted entirely. Though modernization and urbanization have softened these boundaries, traces of such hierarchies persist, reflecting how cuisine remains tied to India's moral and social structure. Class differences add another layer, while the affluent increasingly consume global or "cosmopolitan" foods as markers of modern lifestyle, lower-income households continue to rely on staple grains and locally grown vegetables, sustaining traditional foodways that reflect resilience and resourcefulness. Ethnicity and region further enrich this mosaic of Indian food culture. The country's vast geography and cultural diversity have produced distinct cuisines that reflect both local ecology and historical contact. Northern India, shaped by Mughal and Persian influences, is known for its wheat-based breads, dairy-rich gravies, and aromatic spices. Southern India, in contrast, revolves around rice, lentils, coconut, and tamarind, producing dishes like *idli*, *dosa*, and *sambar* that balance spice and sourness. In the East, Bengal and Odisha celebrate fish, rice, and milk-based sweets such as *rasgulla* and *sandesh*, while the arid West particularly Gujarat and Rajasthan show ingenuity in vegetarian cooking through the use of pulses, yogurt, and millets. The Northeastern states, influenced by Southeast Asian foodways, feature bamboo shoots, herbs, and fermented dishes that reflect tribal heritage and mountain ecologies. Each of these cuisines tells a story of adaptation, migration, and exchange, illustrating how deeply food is tied to regional identity.

Altogether, religion, festivals, caste, class, and ethnicity intertwine to create the vibrant, layered food culture of India. These forces influence not just dietary choices but also the emotional and symbolic meanings of food as to who prepares it, who shares it, and how it expresses faith, belonging, and difference. While modernization, migration, and globalization have introduced new habits and tastes, traditional foodways continue to hold moral and cultural significance. Food in India, therefore, remains a living expression of the nation's history, diversity, and spirituality, a space where sacred and social values meet, and where eating becomes both an act of identity and a celebration of community life.

The next section, “Food Practices in Northeast India,” builds on this national overview by putting the region’s unique culinary systems into the larger Indian context. It looks at how ecological conditions, ethnic diversity, and historical contact have shaped food traditions that are both unique and connected.

1.6.3 Food Practices in Northeast India

North-East India’s food is best understood “on the ground” in places like paddy fields and jhum plots, lush forest edges, rivers full of small fish, and kitchen courtyards where bamboo, gourds, and chillies grow. This is because every day foodways in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura are closely linked to ecology, mobility, and family relationships (Das, 2018; Baruah, 1999). In this area, rice is not only a basic food but also a language that shapes meals including plain cooked rice, sticky types for travel and holidays; puffed, beaten, or fermented types that are used to make breakfast porridges, cakes, and traditional gifts (Das & Sarma, 2018; Saikia, 2019). Boiling, steaming, smoking, and fermenting are common ways to prepare food because they keep nutrients and bring out the natural flavours of fish, veggies, and meats. They also work well in the rainy environment, where low-oil methods and storage are culturally and practically important (Sen, 2015; Sharma, 2016). Fermentation is one of the most important cooking skills. For example, bamboo shoots turn sour into bright, tangy relishes, soy beans turn into akhuni/axone (Naga) or tungrymbai (Khasi) and fish turns into ngari (Manipuri), all of which add layers of umami and gentle acidity while also making the food last longer (Sharma, 2016; Sangtam, 2016).

Assamese usually eat steamed rice with mild mustard-oil curries, river fish lightly spiced with turmeric and mustard seed, and boiled wild greens for lunch. During festival times, they eat Bihu specialities like pitha (rice cakes), laru (jaggery-coconut balls), and seasonal vegetables, connecting harvest cycles to family exchanges (Das & Sarma, 2018; Singh, 2022). Puddings and ritual sweets are made with black rice (chakhao). This is an example of how local varieties hold taste and memory (Das & Sarma, 2018). Foraging is an important part of farming. Depending on the weather and access to forests, plants, wild mushrooms, tender bamboo, and river snails can be eaten. This means that food is linked to micro-ecologies and seasonal knowledge (Dutta, 2020).

In Meghalaya (Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo), sticky rice (ong) is served in the middle with meats in soup and strong ferments. Khasi tables might have jadew (pork cooked with ginger, garlic, and a fermented soy flavour), tungtap (fermented fish pounded with onions and green chillies), and hot rice cakes wrapped in leaves for breakfast or on the go (Lahiri, 2016; Kumar, 2018; Saikia, 2019). In Garo homes, Nakham Bitchi, a spicy soup made of dried fish, is often served before a meal to help with digestion and keep warm in cold weather. This shows how taste, health, and the season are all connected (Sangma, 2019; Yengkhom, 2021). It is practical to cook over wood fires and in clay pots. It also softens the sharp edges of wild greens and fills the air with a mild smoke that people associate with “home” (Saikia, 2019; Lahiri, 2016).

Nagaland is known for preserving and stepping it up. Pork is smoked for days in kitchens that hang from the eaves, fish is dried and saved for the rainy season and Bhut Jolokia (ghost pepper) lights up broths and chutneys (Jamir, 2017; Rengma, 2021; Zeliang, 2019). Akhuni or axone gives meat stews and vegetable boils a strong, cheesy flavour. Fresh, dried, or pickled bamboo shoot gives pork and fish a crisp texture and a sour taste (Ao, 2018; Chang, 2020; Sangtam, 2016). Meals are still simple, often just a pot of boiled leafy greens with pork or smoked beef but they smell great from the smoke, ferment, and chile heat. Zutho (rice beer) is served at births, house-raising, and holidays. Brewing is done by a group of people, and sharing the first pour shows respect and gratitude (Longkumer, 2019).

In both Manipur and Mizoram, everyday food is also based on balance rather than too much spice. Mizo people eat pork with mustard greens and bamboo shoots often seasoned with fermented condiments and served with plain rice to keep the flavours pure (Sen, 2015; Sharma, 2016). Manipuri people eat rice with eromba (pounded boiled vegetables with fermented fish and chiles), leafy stews and a thin fish broth. In Sikkim and the eastern Himalayan belt, Tibetan-style dumplings (momo) and noodle soups (thukpa) go well with millet or buckwheat dishes. The high elevation and cold winters cause people to eat warming broths and preserved meats (Sen, 2015; Chakraborty, 2019).

Food is also a way to express who you are. At Bihu (Assam), Chapchar Kut (Mizoram), and the Hornbill Festival (Nagaland), community feasts and rice-beer traditions reinforce connection and order. Who makes, who serves first, and who sits where are just as important as what is eaten (Singh, 2022; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Many Naga, Mizo, and Khasi groups eat pork, which sets them apart from neighbours who have different food taboos. Different fermented foods, like akhuni, tungrymbai, and ngari, are also food symbols of place (Appadurai, 1981; Das, 2018). Medicinal and traditional foods, like sour herbs after giving birth and fish drinks to help people get better, carry native pharmacologies that move between women of different ages and networks (Roy, 2017; Sarma, 2017).

Change in the modern world goes both ways. Globalisation and people moving to cities have made packed snacks and fast food more common in school lunches and evening markets. Studies in Shillong and other cities have found that young people are eating less fermented foods every day (Borah & Kikon, 2021). But there is also a heritage turn, with cookbooks written in local languages, recipe channels on YouTube, farmers' markets that sell sticky rice and native chillies, and festival food courts that serve tourists local specialities (Gohain, 2017; Roy & Choudhury, 2020; Sarma, 2017). Home kitchens keep low-oil pots and cooked greens the same, right next to restaurant "Northeast menus." This is a warning that in this part of the world, caution, preservation, and flavour are not trends but long-term ways of life (Sen, 2015; Das, 2018).

To sum up, North-East Indian foods combine different but related elements like fermentation, smoke, wild hunting, and festival conviviality to create unique but connected menus. Flavours are not weaker when there are fewer dried spices. Instead, taste comes from the process (fermenting, smoking), the place (river, forest, slope), and the people (ritual, exchange). To put it another way, the area is not on the edges of "Indian food." Instead, it shows how diverse it is and how environments can be eaten with care and memory (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Das & Sarma, 2018; Sharma, 2016).

An overview of the Food Practices in Northeast India

The food culture of Northeast India comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura is deeply connected to ecology, mobility, and kinship. Across these states, diets are closely tied to local resources, seasonal rhythms, and the knowledge of forests, rivers, and fields. Traditional cooking methods such as boiling, steaming, fermenting, and smoking are preferred over frying or heavy spicing, reflecting a balance between practicality, health, and environmental adaptation.

In Assam, food reflects a gentle harmony between river and land. Daily meals typically include steamed rice served with mildly spiced curries made with mustard oil, river fish seasoned with turmeric and mustard seed, and wild greens. During festivals like *Bihu*, people prepare rice cakes (*pitha*), jaggery-coconut sweets (*laru*), and black rice puddings (*chakhao*), linking food to harvest cycles and family exchanges. Foraging remains a key activity where people gather wild mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and river snails depending on the season, revealing how ecological knowledge shapes everyday diets.

In Meghalaya, home to the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo communities, foodways are defined by fermentation and balance. Sticky rice (*ong*) forms the meal's base, complemented by meat soups and ferments like *jadew* (pork with ginger, garlic, and fermented soy), *tungtap* (fermented fish with onions and green chillies), and steamed rice cakes wrapped in leaves. Among the Garos, *Nakham Bitchi*, a spicy dried fish soup, is served to aid digestion and warmth in the cold. Cooking over wood fires in clay pots is common, imparting a smoky flavor that locals associate with comfort and home.

Nagaland is renowned for its intense yet simple cuisine centered on preservation. Pork, fish, and beef are smoked or dried over kitchen fires and paired with *Bhut Jolokia* (ghost pepper) for heat. Fermented soybean (*akhuni* or *axone*) and bamboo shoot, fresh, dried, or pickled add depth and sourness to stews. Meals are often plain, consisting of boiled greens with smoked meat, but they carry rich aromas of ferment and fire. Social life revolves around *zutho* (rice beer), brewed communally and shared ceremonially to express gratitude and solidarity.

In Manipur and Mizoram, food embodies restraint and natural balance rather than heavy spice. Mizo households commonly eat pork with mustard greens and bamboo shoots, flavored by fermented condiments and served with plain rice to highlight simplicity and freshness. Manipuri cuisine, likewise, centers on rice accompanied by *eromba* (pounded boiled vegetables with fermented fish and chillies), thin fish broths, and leafy stews—flavors that are earthy, clean, and balanced.

Finally, in Sikkim and the eastern Himalayan belt, food culture reflects Tibetan and Himalayan influences. Common dishes include *momo* (dumplings) and *thukpa* (noodle soup), along with millet or buckwheat-based items suited to the cold climate.

The emphasis on warm broths and preserved meats responds to the high-altitude environment, where food serves both nutritional and protective functions.

Taken together, the foodways of Northeast India reveal a living relationship between people and nature. Across the region, meals express ecological awareness, communal labor, and the rhythms of the seasons. Though the ingredients and techniques differ from valley to highland, they share a deep respect for freshness, moderation, and the social meaning of eating together.

Food in Northeast India is not merely a source of nourishment but a language of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. It expresses who people are, where they come from, and how they relate to their communities. Festivals such as *Bihu* in Assam, *Chapchar Kut* in Mizoram, and the *Hornbill Festival* in Nagaland illustrate this vividly where collective feasting, brewing of rice beer, and shared meals are acts of reaffirming social bonds and communal order. Within these celebrations, the smallest gestures *who cooks, who serves first, and who sits where* carry as much meaning as the food itself (Singh, 2022; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). Such details reflect deeply ingrained cultural codes of respect, hierarchy, and reciprocity.

Among the Naga, Mizo, and Khasi communities, the choice of food also signals distinct cultural identities. Pork, for instance, is a valued and commonly consumed meat that differentiates these groups from neighboring societies that avoid it for religious reasons. Fermented foods like *akhuni* (Nagaland), *tungrymbai* (Meghalaya), and *ngari* (Manipur) act as powerful food symbols of place embodying both local taste and social belonging (Appadurai, 1981; Das, 2018). The preparation and sharing of these foods are intimate communal acts, linking individuals through memory, sensory experience, and inherited knowledge.

Moreover, traditional medicinal foods form another layer of identity and care within these societies. Sour herbs consumed after childbirth or fermented fish broths given to the sick reflect not just dietary custom but a form of indigenous pharmacology passed down through women's networks and generational learning (Roy, 2017; Sarma, 2017). These practices show how food embodies both healing and heritage, blending nutritional wisdom with emotional and social meaning. Thus, in the context of Northeast India, food functions as a living marker of who people are, it is both a mirror of cultural identity and a means through which that identity is continually performed, shared, and renewed.

Modernisation has brought both transformation and continuity to foodways across the Northeastern region of India. With the growth of cities, migration, and exposure to global markets, eating habits have shifted from slow, home-prepared meals to more convenient, ready-made options. Packed snacks, processed foods, and fast-food outlets have become increasingly common, particularly among the younger generation who now include such items in school lunches and evening street meals. Studies in cities like Shillong show a noticeable decline in the daily use of traditional fermented foods once an essential part of the regional diet (Borah & Kikon, 2021). This change reflects a broader lifestyle shift shaped by modern work schedules, limited time for cooking, and the influence of globalised media and advertising.

Yet, this movement toward convenience does not mean the disappearance of local traditions. In fact, there is a simultaneous revival a *heritage turn* where communities are reclaiming and celebrating their food heritage. Local cookbooks written in regional languages, YouTube recipe channels featuring traditional methods, and farmers' markets selling indigenous produce such as sticky rice, native chillies, and bamboo shoots represent an active effort to sustain local knowledge systems (Gohain, 2017; Roy & Choudhury, 2020; Sarma, 2017). At public events and festivals, food stalls now showcase regional specialities for both locals and tourists, transforming everyday cooking into a form of cultural pride and economic opportunity.

In many households, traditional cooking practices continue to coexist alongside modern influences. Kitchens that simmer low-oil greens in clay pots also stock packaged noodles and instant mixes, reflecting the coexistence of old and new. This blending of worlds demonstrates that modernization in the Northeast is not a rupture but an adaptation where people incorporate new conveniences while holding firmly to the moral, sensory, and ecological values embedded in their traditional cuisines. As Sen (2015) and Das (2018) observe, in this region, *caution, preservation, and flavour* are not fleeting trends but enduring principles of life that guide how food continues to evolve without losing its cultural depth.

The food culture of Northeast India represents a dynamic integration of ecological factors, ethnic diversity, and daily practices. In its eight states, cooking and eating are fundamentally linked to the land, forest, and seasons, reflecting what anthropologists refer to as a cultural ecology of subsistence (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Das & Sarma, 2018). Fermentation, smoking, and limited oil usage reflect environmental adaptation

and aesthetic preference, resulting in flavours that are grounded in locality rather than spiciness. Food mediates ritual, reciprocity, and kinship in these kitchens; just as much as hospitality, moral order is signalled by who prepares, serves, or makes rice beer. Despite urban transformations and global influences, traditional knowledge systems particularly women's expertise in fermentation, foraging, and healing foods preserve the ethical and ecological foundations of these cuisines. Festivals like Bihu, Chapchar Kut, and the Hornbill Festival underscore the significance of food in strengthening community ties, preserving memory, and fostering a sense of belonging. Collectively, these regional foodways counteract homogenisation and demonstrate the coexistence of indigeneity with change through routine practices of care, exchange, and commensality.^[1] The next section focusses on Food Culture in Mizoram, where ecological logics and moral meanings are uniquely expressed through Mizo domestic practices, culinary techniques, and symbolic interpretations of food.

1.6.4 Mizoram State in Context

Mizoram possesses a distinctive history characterised by the interplay of indigenous practices and Christian influences. Mizoram attained full statehood within the Indian Union on February 20, 1987. Mizoram, translating to “Mizo Land,” is predominantly inhabited by speakers of the Duhlian language, commonly referred to as the Mizo language. The indigenous population of Mizoram, referred to as Mizos, is classified as scheduled tribes according to the Indian Constitution and is located in the northeastern part of India (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021).

The reconstruction of the Mizos’ past is complicated by the absence of written records; however, it is widely accepted that they migrated to present-day Mizoram in the 17th century (Nunthara, 1996). The gastronomy of the Mizo people serves as a distinctive marker of their culture and ethnicity. This provides an overview of the historical and cultural background of the population. The eating customs and culinary culture of the Mizo people provide significant insights into their food consumption practices and the underlying reasons for these choices. This study aims to differentiate Mizo cuisine from others by examining specific aspects of Mizo eating practices that are common to both the Mizo people and the broader Northeast Indian region.

Rice has been the primary food of the Mizo people for hundreds of years; meat and other vegetables are still only served as accompaniments. In Mizo, one can enquire by asking, “*Chaw i chhum tawh em?*” (“Have you made any food preparations?”) is

equivalent to ‘Have You Prepared Rice?’. Food, which signifies “chaw” is not included in the question since it is not the only food being made. This reflects the strong connection individuals have with food and rice. If a Mizo eats cooked rice alone, without any other food, he is considered to have had his meal. But, if he eats other things to fill his hunger at mealtime such as fruits, vegetables, meat, or other foods, he is not considered to have had his true meal. The phrase “*Chaw-ah a ring*” translates to “He takes it as food.” In the Mizo language, the phrase indicating a lack of “food to cook” specifically refers to the absence of rice, which is essential to the identity of a Mizo meal. All side dishes served with rice are classified as chawhmeh. They are referred to as chawhmeh, regardless of whether they are consumed with rice and accompanied by salt or water. This principle applies equally to all types of meat and vegetables. Therefore, rice cannot serve as the primary entrée in the traditional context. It is limited to the role of a side dish or chawhmeh. This custom, which has endured to the present day serves as a foundation for the “memories generated” and is a consequence of cultural experiences.

The significance of rice as a central component of meals among the Mizos illustrates its cultural relevance and serves as a basis for examining the historical development of their dietary practices. This discussion proceeds with an analysis of food culture during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods, emphasizing the transformations and consistencies that have influenced Mizo cuisine throughout history.

Pre-colonial period: The Mizo people are believed to have migrated from northern Yunnan Province in China to Hukaung Valley in Myanmar around the fourth century A.D. It is believed that they arrived in the hilly regions of Northeast India, later recognised as Mizoram, during the late seventeenth century. Mizo historical texts indicate that the Mizo people seldom established permanent settlements prior to their arrival in present-day Mizoram, with conflicts and feuds likely serving as primary factors for this behaviour. The fact that they had to move a lot to get away or make plans meant that they had to live a very simple and quick life to save time. They were required to prepare their meals in a manner that was simple, rapid, and efficient.

The Mizos inhabit Mizoram, a state in Northeast India, and are classified linguistically within the Assam-Burma branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, with origins traced to Mongolian ancestry. The pre-Christian religious customs of the Mizos indicate

minimal influence from the teachings of Buddha or Confucius. They asserted having significant interactions with previous generations of more advanced races, as indicated by their stated affinity for “traits of nobility, bravery, and hospitality typical of the most cultured understandings of human relationships.” (McCall, 2008).

The Mizos employed shifting agriculture to enhance soil fertility, given the limitations of the mountain slopes in retaining it. This was a primary reason for their relocation from hilltop to hilltop every four to five years (Zawla, 2011). Their swift migration hindered the establishment of well-developed culinary traditions. Mizoram’s geographical location historically hindered access to salt, thereby contributing to the increased blandness of its cuisine.

For reasons that are unclear, the Zoclans migrated into the mountainous areas of the Chin State of Myanmar about 1200 A.D., leaving behind the Burmese lowlands of the Kabaw Valley. The sub-clans dispersed across the current Chin State of Myanmar, extending into the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and, until the early 20th century, into the Indian States of Mizoram, Manipur, and Tripura. The Mizo people migrated to Mizoram during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, having resided in the hilly regions between the Run and Tiu Rivers since the 1500s. The Mizos did not remain in a single location for extended periods, even after settling in Mizoram as they frequently moved from one mountain to another.

The Mizo people, despite having encountered civilisation, reverted upon reaching Mizoram. For an extended period, there was a lack of formal interaction with mainland Burmese or Indians, resulting in a decline in civilisation and suboptimal culinary practices. The clans became so fragmented that each town, irrespective of its population, operated autonomously as an independent nation within its own territory. Historically, the sole administrative authority in such a hamlet was the chief. Despite the administration’s efficiency, conflicts among sub-clans intensified due to the fragmentation of clans into smaller groups, as each village possessed the autonomy to either protect or infringe upon the territories of neighbouring villages. Their lifestyle was characterised by strangeness and nomadism, significantly influencing their customs. Their culinary customs reflect historical challenges, evident in the traditional methods of meal preparation that have persisted for centuries. Their inadequate nutrition and overall restlessness may be associated with their small stature.

In the precolonial period, the Mizo population is thought to have practiced shifting cultivation as a method of food production. Their main sources of food production consisted primarily of hunting and fishing (Dawar, 2019). Jhum cultivation yielded a significant surplus of subsistence crops, particularly rice. In addition to rice, the Mizos historically cultivated millets, vegetables, and peas.

Colonial period: The social life of the Mizo people has historically been shaped by their religious and cultural practices. The Mizo people exhibited a nomadic lifestyle and a volatile mentality prior to the arrival of the British and missionaries. The Christian missionaries significantly influenced the lifestyle of the Mizo people. In 1894, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, English Baptist missionaries affiliated with the Arthington Aborigines Mission, commenced their service in the Lushai Hills, now known as Mizoram. The arrival of education and Christianity significantly transformed the Mizo people's worldview. The Mizo people established a distinct culture, custom, tradition, and identity. Significant transformations have occurred, yet the Mizo people continue to value their traditional customs and cultures. A recent trend has emerged focussing on a return to origins. Furthermore, both recognise the significant impact of Western culture on their lifestyle, behaviours, cuisine, music, and values. Following the adoption of Christianity, the three main Mizo traditional festivals namely Chapter Kut, Mim Kut, and Pawl Kut experienced a decline in prevalence within the community. Following decades of work by Welsh and British missionaries beginning in the 1890s, the majority of Mizos, who had previously followed a kind of animism, have become Christians.

The Mizos' shifting agriculture has consistently served as the foundation of their economy. Prior to the introduction of wet rice cultivation (WRC) as an alternative, the Mizo people practiced only shifting agriculture. Colonial officials promoted WRC in the Champhai and Thenzawl valley areas starting in 1898, subsequently extending it to additional regions (Dawar, 2019). Both types of cultivation are currently practiced in the state, and as Dawar indicates, they have become contentious and are a subject of considerable discourse. Some scholars, including Lianzela (1997) have documented the significant contribution of Jhum cultivation to land degradation, while others such as Sati (2014) argue that WRC yields substantially more than shifting agriculture.

According to their perspective, government initiatives like the New Land Use Policy and its various versions (1985, 1987, 1990, 2000, 2008) have primarily focused on effectuating the paradigm shift in land ownership initiated during colonization, rather than genuinely empowering rural Jhumias. The initiatives aimed to provide beneficiaries with alternatives to Jhum cultivation. Formerly communal land, which included special privileges for chiefs, increasingly transitioned to state and private ownership. Concurrently, perceptions of land evolved from “primitive bounded space” to “sacred space,” and from “commodity” to “civilized space.”

Mizo cuisine is characterized by its simplicity, as demonstrated by the everyday food preparation and cooking methods employed by the Mizo people, distinguishing it from the more diverse and complex cuisines of other tribes in the Northeast. Mizos traditionally prepare their food whether meat, grains, or vegetables by boiling it in water (*chhum han or tlak*), frequently without the addition of seasonings or sauces, including salt.

Variations exist in the preparation methods of boiled foods. Boiled vegetables are a common staple, whereas boiling meat typically involves the addition of aromatic herbs. Buhchiar, a rice-and-beef stew, is typically prepared for special occasions and festive events. Bai, another traditional Mizo cuisine, is made with seasonal boiled vegetables and ching al, or ash filtrate, which is commonly replaced with baking soda these days. Although there exist written accounts of frying as a cooking technique, boiling has historically been and continues to be the predominant method employed by the Mizos for food preparation. Instances occurred when our ancestors prepared fried meals. Due to the unavailability of refined oil, rendered animal fat, known as sa-hriak, was predominantly used, regarded as a luxury during that period. In the past, the Mizo people’s food processing technique appeared to be quite consistent across the state, though there may have been a few small variances from location to location. After British missionaries introduced Christianity to this state in the 1890s, food preparation techniques significantly advanced. The city may no longer be consuming many of the meals listed in this article. The Mizo traditional foods and processing techniques are poorly recorded, with limited or no literature available (Lalthanpuui et.al, 2015).

Major A.G. McCall, a British author, unquestionably portrayed the Mizo foodways’ undemanding nature in his book *Lushai Chrysalis*: Lushai cuisine and tastes are almost

simplicity itself. Meal ingredients are rarely prepared in separate pots, boiling is the only method of cooking that is frequently employed. They eat three different meals, one right after sunrise, one at noon, and one at dusk, all of which consist primarily of rice cooked with roots, mustard, and jungle vegetables. The main ingredients that provide variety in taste and meet mineral requirements are salt, chilies, ginger, turmeric, green vegetables, and egg yolk. It is the exception when it comes to using fats or oils in cooking (Mc Call, 2008).

The vegetables were mainly prepared in two broad ways- *tlak* and *bai*. *Tlak* is the simpler form of the two, it is simply boiled or cooked vegetables with soup, without adding salt. Whereas, for *bai*, the ingredients can go up to seven or eight in the mixture varieties including salt. It is important to note that salt is the essence of Mizo *bai*, because this dish can be prepared in a number of ways using mustard leaves, pumpkin leaves, beans leaves, bamboo shoot, yam, banana flower, *bekang ro* (dried fermented soya bean) or *saum* (fermented fatty pork), ginger, spice, aromatic herbs etc., on the other hand, one can exclude any of them without taking away the *bai*-ness in the *bai*, but if there is no salt or the presence of saltiness in it, it cannot be *bai* regardless of the variety of the ingredients (Dokhuma, 2008). One of the most important vegetables introduced by the British was Potato, it was introduced in 1907 and it was a new colonial food hitherto unknown in the hills. According to Liangkhaia (1938), the cultivation of potato was first started by Major Cole in 1907 before that Mizos never cultivated the plant.

Post-colonial period: The current trend of consuming fresh produce remains a defining feature of Mizo cuisine, persisting even in the face of the extensive production and accessibility of processed foods in Mizoram. Our taste buds are primarily accustomed to fresh meals. Despite the availability of canned and frozen goods, such as frozen chana, we continue to favour the fresh chana sourced from the market. Farmers did not pack the food themselves, despite the necessity of spending several days or an overnight stay on their farms. Instead, they would prepare fresh fruit and gather all possible produce from the gardens. Mizos hunted, fished, and foraged for wild, edible plants in neighbouring forests (Dawar, 2019). Many of these customs are still in place today, with vendors selling edible wild plants at various markets and bazaars around the state. In reality, during the height of the COVID-19 epidemic, a noteworthy occurrence occurred when the people of the border village of

Saipum came together to pick wild vegetables and other forest items to transport to the state capital of Aizawl, which was the most severely impacted by the pandemic (Khojol, 2021).

The prevalence of fermentation, drying, and smoking in Mizo cuisine is important to consider as it serves as a preservation technique and a way to create “distinct accounts of community histories including gender relations and social practices” (Kikon, 2021). Freshly cooked seasonal produce and rice are preferred by Mizo people, and this preference is an essential aspect of their eating habits. Lalthanpuii et al. (2015) provide a detailed explanation of the Mizo people’s traditional methods of food processing, including fermentation, drying, and smoking, along with an overview of several food products and their preparation methods. Certain foods, like *saum* (fermented pig fats), *ching al* (ash filtrate), *chhium* (fermented sesame), *bekang-um* (fermented soybean), and *anthur rep* (dried/smoked roselle) are used as spices. The Mizo people eat exclusively rice and other items like vegetables and meats are viewed as side dishes. Rice is the basic food. The usage of spices is generally lower than in other Indian cooking styles. But since there was relatively little rice or grain harvested during the famine, edible roots and leaves were also eaten.

An overview of Mizoram context

Mizoram, situated in the northeastern region of India, possesses a distinctive cultural and historical background shaped by the interplay of indigenous traditions and Christian influences. The state, whose name translates to “Land of the Mizos,” achieved full statehood on February 20, 1987, and is predominantly inhabited by Mizo-speaking communities classified as Scheduled Tribes under the Indian Constitution (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021). Despite the absence of extensive written records, it is widely accepted that the Mizos migrated from northern Yunnan in China through Myanmar, eventually settling in present-day Mizoram during the 17th century (Nunthara, 1996).

The food culture of the Mizo people is a defining aspect of their identity, symbolizing both continuity and adaptation. Rice forms the foundation of Mizo meals and holds deep cultural and linguistic significance. The word *chaw* (meaning rice) is synonymous with food itself, reflecting the centrality of rice in daily life. Expressions such as “*Chaw i chhum tawh em?*” (“Have you made any food preparations?”) actually refer to rice preparation, illustrating that a true meal is considered incomplete

without rice. All other components, meat, vegetables, and condiments are collectively referred to as *chawhmeh* (side dishes), which accompany rice rather than replace it. This linguistic and cultural framing underscores rice as both a physical and symbolic core of Mizo sustenance, representing comfort, stability, and collective memory.

The historical background of Mizo cuisine is closely tied to the community's migration patterns and shifting agricultural practices. Before colonization, the Mizos practiced *jhum* or shifting cultivation, which required frequent relocation every few years to maintain soil fertility on the hill slopes (Zawla, 2011). Their subsistence lifestyle demanded quick, simple methods of cooking that matched the demands of mobility and limited resources. Meals were largely based on rice, supplemented by millets, vegetables, peas, and wild foods obtained through hunting and fishing (Dawar, 2019). Geographic isolation restricted access to commodities such as salt, leading to a preference for mild, unspiced, and natural flavors that still characterize Mizo food today.

Culturally and linguistically, the Mizos belong to the Tibeto-Burman family and are believed to have Mongoloid ancestry. Prior to the advent of Christianity, Mizo religious practices showed minimal Buddhist or Confucian influence but emphasized bravery, hospitality, and communal cohesion (McCall, 2008). Their fragmented clan system and semi-nomadic lifestyle shaped their food habits simple, utilitarian, and grounded in community sharing. Even though the Mizos encountered more advanced civilizations during migration, their isolation in the hills led to limited external influence and a reliance on locally available ingredients.

In essence, Mizo foodways mirror their historical circumstances, migration, adaptation, and resilience. The enduring centrality of rice and the persistence of *chawhmeh* as cultural categories reflect not only subsistence patterns but also collective identity and social cohesion. As the discussion moves forward into the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial transformations, these foundational practices form the basis for understanding how Mizo cuisine evolved while retaining its deep-rooted cultural meanings and ecological sensibilities.

The pre-colonial period in Mizoram was marked by migration, mobility, and the formation of a subsistence-based lifestyle that profoundly shaped Mizo food culture. Historical and linguistic evidence suggests that the Mizo people migrated from northern Yunnan Province in China to the Hukaung Valley in Myanmar around the

fourth century A.D., eventually settling in the hilly regions of present-day Mizoram by the late seventeenth century (Zawla, 2011). During this migratory phase, the Mizos rarely established permanent settlements due to frequent clan conflicts and inter-village feuds. Their constant movement required a lifestyle centered on simplicity and efficiency, including quick and easily prepared meals.

Linguistically, the Mizos belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, and anthropological studies trace their ancestry to Mongoloid origins (McCall, 2008). Their pre-Christian belief system was rooted in animism and distinct from the philosophical influences of Buddhism or Confucianism. Social life revolved around clan structures led by village chiefs who maintained local order, but the fragmentation of clans into smaller autonomous units led to limited inter-village cooperation. This isolation also contributed to minimal contact with neighboring civilizations, resulting in the preservation of a simple material and culinary culture.

Agriculturally, the Mizos practiced *jhum* or shifting cultivation, which involved clearing hill slopes and rotating plots every four to five years to maintain soil fertility. This method, while sustainable for small populations, hindered the development of stable agricultural settlements or diverse culinary systems (Zawla, 2011). The rugged terrain also made access to resources such as salt difficult, giving rise to a relatively mild and unseasoned food tradition. Their diet primarily consisted of rice, which became the central crop and staple of Mizo subsistence, complemented by millets, peas, vegetables, and foraged items from surrounding forests. Hunting and fishing were important supplementary sources of protein (Dawar, 2019).

Culinary practices during this era reflected the Mizos' nomadic and resource-constrained existence. Meals were prepared with minimal ingredients and simple cooking techniques, often boiled or roasted over open fires. The absence of elaborate seasoning, coupled with the use of wild herbs and fresh produce, lent Mizo food its characteristic plainness a trait that continues to define the cuisine even today. McCall (2008) described these early Mizos as embodying virtues of "nobility, bravery, and hospitality," despite their isolated and modest way of life.

Overall, the pre-colonial period laid the foundation for the Mizo relationship with food, one that emphasized practicality, adaptability, and community sharing. These patterns, born from historical mobility and ecological constraints, continue to influence the cultural meaning and preparation of food in contemporary Mizo society.

Colonial: The colonial period marked a profound transformation in Mizo society, lifestyle, and foodways. Before British rule and the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Mizos lived a semi-nomadic life governed by indigenous customs and animist beliefs. The introduction of education and Christianity by English Baptist missionaries J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge in 1894 under the Arthington Aborigines Mission reshaped Mizo social life and worldview, creating a distinct cultural and religious identity (Nunthara, 1996). Christianity replaced older animist traditions, leading to the decline of traditional festivals such as *Chapchar Kut*, *Mim Kut*, and *Pawl Kut*. Although Western influence changed Mizo behaviour, values, and even cuisine, contemporary Mizos have shown a growing interest in reconnecting with their roots (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021).

Economically, the colonial administration introduced new agricultural practices that altered the Mizo relationship with land. Jhum (shifting cultivation) remained the dominant method of farming, but in 1898 colonial officials promoted wet rice cultivation (WRC) in Champhai and Thenzawl, expanding later to other regions (Dawar, 2019). This marked a shift from subsistence-based, communal farming to more individualized systems of land use. Subsequent government initiatives such as the New Land Use Policy (1985-2008) continued this colonial legacy by encouraging alternatives to shifting cultivation. As scholars such as Lianzela (1997) and Sati (2014) note, debates around jhum and WRC reflect ongoing tensions between environmental sustainability, productivity, and state control over land ownership.

In terms of food culture, Mizo cuisine retained its characteristic simplicity. Meals were typically boiled (*chhum han* or *tlak*) rather than fried or heavily seasoned. Vegetables and meat were boiled with minimal ingredients sometimes just water and aromatic herbs. The traditional dishes *buhchiar* (rice and beef stew) and *bai* (a mixture of seasonal boiled vegetables with *ching al*, or ash filtrate) are enduring examples of this minimalist culinary style. *Bai*, as Dokhuma (2008) explains, can vary in ingredients but must always include salt to preserve its defining flavour. Frying was rare due to the unavailability of refined oils. Instead, rendered animal fat (*sa-hriak*) was occasionally used and considered a luxury.

British colonial contact also introduced new ingredients such as the potato, first cultivated by Major Cole in 1907, which became a staple addition to local diets (Liangkhaia, 1938). Despite such introductions, the Mizo preference for boiled foods,

modest seasoning, and natural flavours persisted. British officer Major A.G. McCall (2008) observed that Lushai (Mizo) cuisine was “simplicity itself,” centred on rice, roots, mustard, and jungle vegetables, eaten thrice daily with little use of fats or spices. Overall, the colonial period in Mizoram was one of simultaneous change and continuity. The imposition of new religious and agricultural systems transformed the social fabric and food economy, while traditional food practices rooted in simplicity, community, and adaptation to the environment remained largely intact. These enduring culinary customs continue to represent both resilience and cultural memory, linking the present-day Mizo identity to its historical foundations (Lalthanpuii et al., 2015; McCall, 2008).

In the post-colonial period, Mizo food culture has retained its emphasis on freshness, simplicity, and self-sufficiency despite the growing availability of processed and packaged foods. Fresh produce remains a defining feature of Mizo cuisine and daily diet. Even with access to canned and frozen goods, Mizos continue to prefer freshly sourced ingredients such as *chana* (gram) and local vegetables from nearby farms and markets. Farmers and villagers typically prepare food using fresh produce gathered directly from their gardens or nearby forests rather than relying on stored or industrially packed items (Dawar, 2019). This preference reflects not only culinary taste but also a deep-rooted cultural value of freshness and immediacy. Foraging, hunting, and fishing once central to subsistence continue as part of everyday life and local trade, visible in markets across the state where edible wild plants are sold. A striking example of this communal resilience occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when residents of Saipum village collectively harvested wild vegetables and forest produce to send to the capital, Aizawl, which faced severe food shortages (Khojol, 2021).

Traditional preservation techniques such as fermentation, drying, and smoking remain vital to Mizo cuisine, serving both practical and cultural functions. These methods ensure food longevity while encoding memories of community, gender roles, and social organization (Kikon, 2021). According to Lalthanpuii et al. (2015), the Mizos employ various traditional methods to process food: *saum* (fermented pork fat), *ching al* (ash filtrate), *chhium* (fermented sesame), *bekang-um* (fermented soybean), and *anthur rep* (dried or smoked roselle leaves) are widely used to enhance flavour and aroma. These fermented and smoked items also function as condiments or natural

spices, showing the ingenuity of Mizo households in making use of minimal resources.

Rice continues to be the dietary core, while vegetables, meat, and fermented foods serve as *chawhmeh* (side dishes). The Mizo use of spices is minimal compared to other Indian cuisines, maintaining the focus on the natural taste of ingredients. Historical experiences, particularly the famine periods, have influenced these eating habits during times of scarcity, people adapted by consuming edible roots, leaves, and forest produce, reinforcing their adaptive food systems.

Overall, the post-colonial period reflects both continuity and adaptation in Mizo foodways. While modern influences and market goods have entered domestic spaces, traditional values of freshness, frugality, and communal sharing remain central to Mizo culinary identity. The enduring use of indigenous ingredients and preservation techniques illustrates a strong link between ecology, memory, and sustenance in the everyday food practices of Mizoram (Lalthanpuui et al., 2015; Kikon, 2021).

This section categorizes Mizoram's food culture into three historical phases: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. This framework facilitates a systematic analysis of the evolution of food culture alongside social, political, and religious changes. The pre-colonial period of the Mizos was characterized by a migratory lifestyle and reliance on shifting cultivation, which, along with ecological constraints, led to the development of straightforward and resourceful cooking methods. These practices primarily involved boiling, foraging, and minimal seasoning, illustrating adaptations to mobility and subsistence needs. The colonial period represented a significant transition, characterized by the introduction of British administration and Christian missions, which facilitated the dissemination of education, Christianity, and new agricultural practices, including the cultivation of potatoes and wet rice, as well as modifications to land-use systems. The alterations in foodways modified traditional animist rituals, while establishing new moral and social hierarchies related to cleanliness, modernity, and domestic reform. The post-colonial era continues the negotiation between tradition and change. Despite urbanization and market expansion leading to the availability of processed and packaged foods, Mizo households maintain a strong preference for fresh produce, fermented condiments, and communal rice-based meals, which reflect a connection to ancestral tastes and ecological knowledge. Throughout all three phases, rice remains the central element of Mizo

culture and nutrition, serving as a foundation for both identity and memory. The history of Mizo food practices reflects broader processes of adaptation, wherein external influences were indigenized rather than merely adopted. Cuisine serves as an indicator to resilience, belief, and belonging in the evolving narrative of Mizoram.

1.8 Overview and Statement of the problem

The opening chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding the interrelationship between food, culture, and identity. It begins by situating food as more than a biological necessity portraying it as a vital social and cultural phenomenon embedded within everyday life and symbolic interaction. Drawing on Mintz and Bois (2002), Barthes (2008), and Visser (1999), the discussion traces how food operates as a cultural marker that reflects and shapes social transformation, tradition, and modernity. Long et al. (2017) further expand this by framing food culture as a comprehensive system encompassing production, distribution, and consumption illustrating how culinary practices mirror the structures of society itself. This conceptual grounding leads naturally to an exploration of food culture in global and regional contexts, where cultural diversity, ecological conditions, and historical processes shape distinct culinary expressions.

Building upon this premise, the next section turns toward the conceptual linkage between *culture* and *identity*, establishing that both are mutually constitutive dimensions of social life. Culture, as noted by Tylor (1871), Haviland (1990), and Giddens (2005), is learned and transmitted through socialization, encompassing material and non-material aspects that evolve through interaction and adaptation. This dynamic quality of culture provides the ground upon which identity both individual and collective is expressed, maintained, and transformed across generations.

The following discussion extends this theoretical base to the question of *identity*, conceptualizing it not as a fixed essence but as an ongoing process of becoming. Hall (1992; 2015), Erikson (1963), and Bauman (2004) emphasize identity's fluid, historical, and dialogical nature constructed through cultural experience, social recognition, and belonging. Food becomes one of the most immediate and symbolic sites of this construction. As Bhugra (2005) and Adler (2002) argue, cultural identity is historically produced and socially shaped, while food practices express both continuity and transformation. Ethnic and culinary identities thus converge, with food

acting as a medium through which memory, belief, and belonging are negotiated (Ternikar, 2014; Gvion, 2012; Karaosmanoğlu, 2020).

From here, the discussion advances into the sociological context of identity, where theorists such as Mead (1934), Cooley (1962), and Jenkins (1996) highlight the social processes of recognition and validation that constitute identity formation. Giddens (1991) and Castells (1996) link identity to modernity's structural shifts connecting reflexivity, globalization, and technological change while Hall (1996) frames the postmodern subject as fragmented and discursively produced. These perspectives collectively illustrate that identity is both relational and contingent, shaped through interaction, narrative, and social power.

The chapter then transitions to food as a marker of cultural identity, connecting sociological theory to everyday practice. Food, as Hasty et al. (2022) and Sibal (2018) emphasize, carries deep emotional, historical, and communal significance. It functions as a bridge between generations, transmitting collective memory through shared tastes and rituals. Culinary traditions anchored in geography, ecology, and belief mirror social organization while adapting to modern influences. Through these processes, food serves not merely as sustenance but as a communicative symbol of heritage and empathy.

These interconnections find formal grounding in the multidisciplinary field of food studies, which examines the symbolic and material dimensions of food in relation to culture, identity, and power. Scholars such as Miller and Deutsch (2009) and Inglis and Gimlin (2010) have explored how food mediates social differentiation, gender relations, and global interconnectedness. The intellectual lineage, from Goody (1982) and Lévi-Strauss (1969) to Bourdieu (1984) and Barthes (2008) demonstrates how food evolved from a functional necessity to a cultural text laden with social meanings. Feminist and postmodern perspectives further deepen this understanding, revealing how culinary practices reflect broader negotiations of class, gender, and modernity (Adams, 1990; Bell & Valentine, 1997).

Finally, the chapter situates food culture in context showing how food practices reveal the interplay of global, national, and local influences. As Nagla (2020) observes, food culture is both a social process and a symbolic system that organizes collective life. Globally, culinary traditions reflect industrialization, colonial encounters, and hybridization, while in India, they embody pluralism shaped by ecology, caste, and

religion. The global context collectively illustrates how food serves as a dynamic social system that reflects adaptation, exchange, and meaning across diverse historical and cultural settings. Organized into Western, African/Latin American, and Asian clusters, this comparative framework reveals that no food culture exists in isolation and that each is shaped by its encounters with trade, colonization, migration, and modernization. In the Western context, regions such as the United States, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom demonstrate how industrialization and global circulation transformed cuisine into an expression of identity, class, and nationhood balancing authenticity with innovation. The African and Latin American contexts, exemplified by South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, and Mexico, highlight resilience and hybridity, where indigenous traditions merged with colonial and global influences to create rich, community-centred cuisines that narrate histories of survival and belonging. The Asian context, encompassing China, Japan, and Korea, underscores the continuity between food, philosophy, and social structure, where ideas of balance, symbolism, and respect for nature guide everyday eating practices even amidst globalization. Together, these global trajectories underscore that food is not merely sustenance but a cultural text through which societies articulate memory, morality, and identity while continually negotiating the relationship between the local and the global.

Within Northeast India, food signifies adaptation to ecology and kinship, marked by fermentation, smoking, and seasonal patterns. The food culture of Northeast India, encompassing Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, represents a deeply rooted relationship between people, ecology, and identity. Across this diverse region, food is not merely a means of sustenance but a living expression of cultural values, environmental adaptation, and social belonging. Meals are intimately tied to the land and seasons, reflecting a deep knowledge of forests, rivers, and agricultural rhythms. Traditional cooking methods boiling, steaming, fermenting, and smoking prioritize health, balance, and practicality over elaborate spicing, illustrating how foodways evolved in harmony with the natural environment (Das & Sarma, 2018; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Each state exhibits distinct culinary traditions shaped by local geography and ethnic diversity. Assam's cuisine balances riverine and agrarian abundance through dishes made with mustard oil, river fish, and leafy greens, with festive foods like *pitha* and

laru marking harvest celebrations such as Bihu (Das, 2018). Meghalaya's Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo communities emphasize fermented flavours and simplicity serving sticky rice, meat soups, and ferments like *jadew* and *tungtap* that embody both sustenance and comfort. Nagaland, known for its smoky and pungent dishes, features preserved meats and fermented soybean (*akhuni*) alongside the fiery *Bhut Jolokia*, reflecting both practicality and cultural symbolism. In Manipur and Mizoram, restraint defines the palate: meals of rice with boiled vegetables, bamboo shoots, and fermented condiments showcase a preference for freshness and moderation, while Sikkim's foodways shaped by Himalayan conditions combine Tibetan influences through *momo*, *thukpa*, and millet-based staples.

Beyond their flavours, these regional cuisines carry deep social meanings. Food acts as a medium of identity and belonging expressing who people are and how they relate to their land and kinship networks. Festivals such as Bihu (Assam), Chapchar Kut (Mizoram), and the Hornbill Festival (Nagaland) celebrate community unity through collective feasting and the brewing of rice beer, where the smallest social gestures who cooks, who serves first, who sits where symbolize respect and hierarchy (Singh, 2022; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). Among the Naga, Mizo, and Khasi, the consumption of pork marks cultural distinctiveness, while local fermented foods *akhuni*, *tungrymbai*, and *ngari* serve as culinary markers of place and identity (Appadurai, 1981; Das, 2018). Medicinal foods, such as sour herbs used postpartum or fermented fish broths for recovery, illustrate indigenous health knowledge transmitted across generations (Roy, 2017; Sarma, 2017).

Modernization, however, has introduced new dynamics. Urbanization, global exposure, and time constraints have popularized fast food, packaged snacks, and processed ingredients, particularly among younger populations. Yet, this shift has not erased traditional practices; instead, a heritage revival has emerged. Local cookbooks, online recipe platforms, and farmers' markets promoting indigenous produce highlight a renewed pride in regional cuisines (Gohain, 2017; Roy & Choudhury, 2020). The coexistence of traditional and modern elements clay-pot cooking alongside instant noodles reflects adaptation rather than loss, where change is absorbed without compromising cultural depth (Sen, 2015; Das, 2018).

In sum, the foodways of Northeast India reveal a cultural ecology where cooking, eating, and sharing food embody the region's intertwined histories of survival,

exchange, and resilience. Food mediates relationships between humans and nature, reinforces moral and social order, and sustains collective memory through everyday acts of care and commensality. Despite the forces of globalization, the cuisines of Northeast India continue to assert their uniqueness anchored in ecological wisdom, gendered knowledge, and communal values. Together, they offer a vivid testimony of how tradition and transformation coexist, ensuring that food remains both a marker of identity and a vessel of continuity across generations.

In Mizoram, rice-centred meals symbolize both nourishment and identity, embodying the values of simplicity, community, and continuity. Mizoram, located in the northeastern region of India, presents a rich cultural and historical landscape shaped by its indigenous heritage, Christian influences, and ecological setting. Known as the “Land of the Mizos,” the state attained full statehood in 1987 and is largely inhabited by Mizo-speaking tribal communities (Ratnamala & Malsawmzuala, 2021). The history of the Mizo people traces back to their migration from northern Yunnan in China through Myanmar, eventually settling in the hilly terrains of present-day Mizoram during the 17th century (Nunthara, 1996). Their food culture, closely linked with patterns of migration, ecology, and belief, reflects both continuity and transformation. Rice, linguistically referred to as *chaw*, forms the essence of a Mizo meal and is synonymous with food itself, while all accompaniments such as meat, vegetables, and fermented condiments are collectively termed *chawhmeh*. This linguistic framing signifies rice not only as a staple food but as a cultural symbol of nourishment, unity, and memory.

The evolution of Mizo foodways can be understood through three distinct historical phases: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. During the pre-colonial period, the Mizos led a migratory and semi-nomadic life, relying heavily on *jhum* or shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing, and foraging. Their cooking methods were simple and resourceful mainly boiling and roasting over open fires, with minimal use of seasoning reflecting adaptability to mobility and ecological constraints (Zawla, 2011; Dawar, 2019). Meals were straightforward yet sustainable, mirroring a lifestyle rooted in practicality and communal sharing.

The colonial period brought major transformations under British rule and missionary activity. The arrival of J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge in 1894 introduced education and Christianity, reshaping the Mizo worldview and daily life (Nunthara, 1996).

Traditional animist festivals like *Chapchar Kut*, *Mim Kut*, and *Pawl Kut* declined, while new agricultural practices such as wet rice cultivation replaced purely shifting methods (Dawar, 2019). British officers like Major A.G. McCall (2008) described Mizo cuisine as “simplicity itself,” noting that it largely consisted of boiled rice, roots, and wild greens. Even as new ingredients like potatoes were introduced (Liangkhaia, 1938), the Mizos retained their preference for boiled, mild-flavored dishes such as *buhchiar* (rice and beef stew) and *bai* (mixed boiled vegetables with ash filtrate). Thus, colonial rule brought structural and cultural change, but the essential traits of Mizo cuisine freshness, moderation, and simplicity remained intact.

In the post-colonial era, Mizoram continues to balance tradition and modernity. Despite urbanization and the widespread availability of packaged foods, the Mizo preference for fresh produce, wild greens, and home-grown vegetables persists. Foraging, hunting, and small-scale farming still supplement household diets, reinforcing communal and ecological connections (Dawar, 2019). Traditional preservation methods such as fermentation, smoking, and drying exemplified by *saum* (fermented pork fat), *ching al* (ash filtrate), and *bekang-um* (fermented soybean) not only ensure food longevity but also embody cultural memory and gendered knowledge (Kikon, 2021; Lalthanpuii et al., 2015). Events like the collective harvesting of wild vegetables during the COVID-19 lockdown (Khojol, 2021) illustrate the persistence of community-oriented values and ecological resilience.

Across all three historical phases, rice remains the constant anchor of Mizo identity, both materially and symbolically. The shifts from mobility to settlement, from animism to Christianity, and from isolation to global connectivity have each left their imprint on Mizo foodways, yet none have erased the foundational ethos of simplicity, self-reliance, and cultural continuity. The story of Mizo cuisine thus encapsulates the broader history of adaptation and resilience in Mizoram: an evolving tradition that transforms external influences into locally meaningful practices while preserving the moral and ecological balance that defines Mizo life (Lalthanpuii et al., 2015; Kikon, 2021).

Food, as established in the preceding discussions, extends far beyond biological sustenance, it is a medium of cultural expression that embodies identity, belief systems, and social organization. In the Mizo context, however, systematic academic inquiry into food remains sparse. While scholars such as Mintz and Du Bois (2002),

Barthes (2008), and Visser (1999) have explored the cultural meanings of food in global contexts, Mizoram has yet to receive comparable ethnographic and sociological attention. Traditional Mizo cuisine, deeply intertwined with the region's ecology and social life, is still largely documented through colonial accounts and early ethnographic records, which often provide fragmentary and outsider perspectives rather than indigenous interpretations. Early writings by A.G. McCall (1949) and later indigenous historians offer limited insights, focusing primarily on subsistence rather than the social meanings of cooking, eating, and sharing. Central to Mizo food culture is rice, which transcends its role as a staple to symbolize the very essence of life and identity its absence renders a meal incomplete, while all other dishes, known as *chawhmeh*, serve as mere accompaniments. This deep-seated bond between rice and hunger reveals the cultural and emotional weight food carries in Mizo society. Reconstructing the food history of Mizoram is further challenged by the lack of pre-colonial written documentation, leaving oral traditions, missionary narratives, and administrative records as primary sources. Sangkima (1992) notes that before the widespread cultivation of rice, Mizos relied on maize, millet, arum bulbs, and sweet potatoes, while Lalrimawia (1986) and McCall (1949) describe meat as both a delicacy and a scarce resource. The annexation of the Lushai Hills in 1890-1891 and subsequent missionary influence marked a decisive shift in Mizo foodways: the introduction of new ingredients, changing agricultural practices, and moral restrictions such as the discouragement of *Zu* (rice beer) consumption altered not just diets but the symbolic and social meanings of food. Yet, despite extensive studies on the political and religious impacts of colonialism and Christianity, the transformation of traditional food practices remains an underexplored but crucial lens for understanding Mizo identity and cultural change.

Taken together, these interrelated sections form a cohesive intellectual framework for understanding *Cultural Identity in Food Habits and Culinary Practices of Mizo Society*. They demonstrate that food, beyond its biological necessity, serves as a cultural text that communicates belonging, mediates modernity, and reflects the evolving identity of a people shaped by history and environment. The broader overview underscores that food operates as a potent expression of identity, belief, and social transformation across different contexts, while Mizo food culture in particular mirrors the community's ecological setting, historical experience, and moral values.

Despite its richness, there remains a significant lack of systematic documentation and scholarly analysis of Mizo foodways. Most existing literature derives from colonial or missionary accounts, leaving critical gaps in understanding how modernization, religious conversion, and intercultural exchange have reshaped traditional culinary practices. It is from this lacuna that the present study emerges, seeking to explore the intricate relationship between food, identity, and culture within Mizo society. The research aims to uncover how everyday food practices act as cultural markers expressing belonging, reinforcing or contesting social hierarchies, and adapting to the changing pressures of globalization and modernity. By linking domestic food habits with questions of identity, gender, health, and social transformation, this study highlights the importance of examining cuisine not only as nourishment but as a living archive of Mizo cultural continuity and change.

In light of this, several key questions emerge: Is there a link between Mizo food and identity? What is the place of food in contemporary Mizo society and culture? How can ethnic identity be connected to food habits? How do foodways in Mizo society influence social prestige, gender, and health consciousness? Are the culinary practices within urban areas different from those in rural regions? How do gender and age affect food choices and preferences? Can food serve as a medium for intercultural adaptation within Mizo society and culture? How can food be added as a marker of culture? An in-depth inquiry into these questions forms the central focus of the chapters that follow. The next chapter, therefore undertakes a detailed review of literature organized under theoretical, methodological, and thematic headings.

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Chapter II

THE STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Review of literature is done to establish the academic and research areas which are of relevance to the subject of the research. Review of literature means to enumerate, collect, describe, summarize, objectively evaluate and clarify the previous works of researchers. It can include books, book chapters, articles, abstracts, review of review, monographs, dissertations, reports and works available in electronic media. The review work tends to terminate in finding the research gap and deciding the objectives of the study. A review of pertinent literature is essential in academic research as it establishes the foundational basis for the current study. Prior to initiating research, it is crucial to review existing scholarly literature to comprehend the extent of current knowledge, identify conceptual and methodological weaknesses and position the study within a recognised academic context. Examining the relevant literature enhances understanding of the research issue, clarifies theoretical viewpoints and improves the justification for the study to be conducted in the remaining sections. The review of literature is classified into three heads such as *theoretical, methodological and thematic* literature review.

2.2. Theoretical Perspective

It is important to conduct a theoretical review since it lays the conceptual groundwork and establishes the guiding principles for the research. It gives the researcher the capacity to investigate previously established theories that are pertinent to the subject matter, determine whether or not such theories are applicable, and construct a cohesive framework for understanding the research challenge. Atkins and Bowler (2001) demonstrated the rich variety of theoretical contexts regarding the study of food. The article mentioned various theories associated with food study such as Functionalism, Structuralism and Structural-Marxism. In addition to these theories, the theory of McDonaldisation, the theory of the leisure class, Bourdieu's theory of Habitus, theory of Food as Gift and Reciprocity and Symbolic Interactionism are also reviewed.

2.2.1. Functionalism: Functionalism conceptualizes society as a structured system where each component plays a role in maintaining overall stability and cohesion. Food practices encompassing production, preparation, and consumption serve as social

functions that sustain relationships, reinforce norms, and uphold cultural order. Each theorist listed has utilized or expanded this approach to the analysis of food in unique manners.

Malinowski (1939) considered food practices essential to societal functioning. The fieldwork conducted among the Trobriand Islanders demonstrated that food-related rituals including communal feasts and food exchanges function not only to satisfy nutritional requirements but also to strengthen kinship ties, reciprocity and economic cooperation. Malinowski through a functionalist perspective illustrated that food distribution and ritual feasting play a crucial role in maintaining social equilibrium by fostering interdependence among community members. He connected food to the preservation of social cohesion and the fulfilment of both biological and psychological requirements.

Radcliffe-Brown (1940) enhanced the functionalist approach by emphasizing the structural dimension of social systems. Food rituals, taboos, and sharing practices are perceived as mechanisms that sustain social order. The symbolic regulation of food determining what can be consumed, when, and by whom mirrors the moral framework of a society. The analysis highlighted that food taboos and communal meals function to express and reinforce social hierarchies, roles, and collective unity. He interpreted food as a functional instrument that continually reproduces social relationships.

Richards (1939), a student of Malinowski was one of the pioneering anthropologists to explicitly apply functionalism to the study of food and nutrition. In her analysis of the Bemba people in *Land, Labour, and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, she investigated the interconnections between food production, preparation and consumption with kinship, gender roles and social organization. The author conveys that food-related activities serve as manifestations of cooperation and obligation within familial networks. Richards regarded food as a biological necessity and a form of social communication with actions like preparing porridge symbolizing kinship obligations and respect. Her approach connected nutrition with emotional and social wellbeing demonstrating that food practices play a role in the stability of social systems.

Hasty et al. (2022) re-examined functionalist concepts in a contemporary framework analyzing the role of food in fulfilling integrative functions in both egalitarian and stratified societies. Food functions as a means of sustaining social cohesion and representing social hierarchies. By linking contemporary food studies with classical

functionalism, the authors demonstrate that modern industrial food practices reflect patterns of cooperation, class distinction and shared values that contribute to social cohesion.

Richards & Widdowson (1939) enhanced the discourse by connecting dietary practices to psychological factors and human life stages. The authors proposed that food production, preparation and consumption are intricately linked to social and emotional experiences. Food serves to reinforce individual roles within the collective, fulfilling psychological needs and the social function of strengthening bonds and interdependence.

Nagla (2020) analyzed functionalism in food studies as a framework linking cultural patterns to societal stability. She recognized that although functionalists like Richards and Goody provided important perspectives on the role of food in promoting continuity and cohesion, they frequently neglected the aspects of social conflict and change. Nagla asserted that functionalism is valuable for analyzing the role of traditional food customs in establishing order and reinforcing community identity.

Lupton (1996) examined food through a sociological functionalist lens, emphasizing the customs and rituals that promote stability and continuity. The author reveals that food rituals, including daily meals, festive feasts and fasting play a crucial role in sustaining social structure by reinforcing tradition and collective identity. Food serves as a social adhesive linking individuals to shared memories and values while maintaining the continuity of social norms through generations.

Goody (1982) work linked functionalism to historical sociology. He highlighted that dietary habits and food systems mirror larger societal frameworks and values. Goody examined the ways in which food preparation, meal organisation and dining etiquette function to articulate and reinforce social stratification. The comparative analysis of food systems reveals that food regulation defining what is deemed “appropriate” to consume and in which contexts serves to maintain social order. His research established a basis for comprehending food as a mechanism of social integration, while also recognising its reflection of existing inequalities.

These theorists demonstrate that, from a functionalist perspective, food is essential for sustaining social and cultural equilibrium. Early anthropologists, including Malinowski and Richards examined the role of food in promoting cooperation and kinship ties. Subsequent scholars such as Lupton and Goody, broadened this

perspective to illustrate how food systems mirror and uphold social values, identities and hierarchies. Despite criticisms regarding its neglect of social change and conflict, functionalism continues to serve as a useful framework for analysing the role of food in promoting unity, stability, and order within society. The following theoretical perspective, Structuralism moves beyond functionality to examine how the symbolic meanings and foundational structures of food influence cultural systems and human cognition.

2.2.2. Structuralism: Structuralism is a theoretical framework that examines the underlying structures influencing human thought, language and culture. In the context of food, it aims to reveal the symbolic meanings and concealed patterns that inform culinary practices, preferences and meal structuring. The structuralists focused on the gastronomic dimensions of eating, analysing how cuisine functions as a cultural system of meaning. Fischler (1988) noted that functionalists focused on food while structuralists concentrated on cuisine. Structuralism extends beyond the material and nutritional roles of food, interpreting it as a cultural language. Each dish, ingredient and culinary process embodies broader systems of classification, belief and social order. The structuralist perspective as articulated by Lévi-Strauss (1969), Douglas (1972), Barthes (2008), Fischler (1990) and Goody (1982) explain the ways in which food expresses and shapes human experience within the broader societal framework (Nagla, 2020).

Lévi-Strauss (1969) was among the pioneering and most significant scholars to implement structuralist theory in the study of food. In ‘The Raw and the Cooked’ (1969), he introduced the concept of the “culinary triangle” which encompasses three symbolic states of food i.e. the raw, the cooked and the rotten. These states signify transformations between nature and culture. The raw represents nature and the unrefined, the cooked signifies culture and human transformation through tools and fire while the rotten denotes the return to nature through decay. Through this model, Lévi-Strauss argued that food preparation reflects how societies order the natural world and impose cultural meaning on it. Cooking exemplifies the human attempts to mediate between nature and culture. His approach emphasised that food serves not only as sustenance but also as a coded system of classification through which societies articulate social values, boundaries as well as relationships.

Douglas (1972) expanded upon Lévi-Strauss's concepts by analysing the role of meals and food categories as "texts" that convey social structure. In her essay "Deciphering a Meal" (1972), Douglas examined the parallels between the structure of a meal and societal structure, noting that each course, ingredient and combination adheres to implicit rules that denote boundaries and relationships. Distinctions such as "main meals" versus "snacks" or "meat" versus "pudding" reflect underlying social hierarchies and moral codes. Douglas perceived the meal as a social microcosm that reinforces concepts of purity, order and hierarchy. Her research utilised structuralism to analyse the ordinary act of eating thereby demonstrating how culinary organisation mirrors wider cultural classifications including sacred/profane, public/private and male/female.

Barthes (2008), a semiologist and cultural theorist analysed food as a sign system within contemporary consumer society. In works like *Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption* and his collection *Mythologies* (2008), Barthes conveys that food embodies symbolic meanings that extend beyond its nutritional role, serving as a medium for identity, ideology, and national culture. He illustrated how wine, bread, and steak serve as 'myths' of French culture, embodying values of pleasure, vitality, and French-ness. Advertising, packaging, and presentation contribute to a broader semiotic system that constructs social meaning in food. Barthes expanded structuralism from anthropology to mass culture by interpreting cuisine as a language, where each food item functions as a sign within a complex social grammar.

Fischler (1990) is recognised as a prominent contemporary sociologist who has developed and critiqued structuralist concepts. In *L'Homnivore* (1990), the author analysed the ways in which contemporary societies navigate identity and anxiety through food selections. Fischler, drawing on Lévi-Strauss highlighted the symbolic interplay between nature and culture while critiquing early structuralism for its inflexibility and disregard for change. He dismissed the notion of a rigid dichotomy between nature and culture, labelling it a "false contradiction." Fischler concentrated on the notion of food identity, expressed in the phrase "*we are what we eat.*" The study examines the ways in which cultural classification systems, taboos, and dietary norms reflect collective identities, while also adapting to contemporary changes brought about by globalisation and industrialisation. His work preserved the

structuralist focus on meaning, while integrating sociological insights regarding change, diversity, and individual agency.

Goody (1982) work, while frequently situated between structuralism and materialism also exhibits influences from structuralism. In *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), he analysed the influence of cultural codes and social stratification on food systems. Goody proposed that variations in cooking methods, meal structuring, and culinary practices signify systemic inequalities within societies. Through a comparative analysis of European and African food systems, he illustrated the relationship between symbolic distinctions in food preparation and consumption and the factors of class and cultural differentiation. His analysis linked the symbolic structures highlighted by structuralists to the material and historical forces influencing cuisine, establishing his work as a connection between structuralism and socio-economic analysis.

Structuralist theorists demonstrate that food functions as a symbolic language, enabling individuals to convey order, difference, and identity. Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle and Barthes's concept of food as a system of signs show how consumption carries profound cultural significances that go beyond its material existence. Functionalism examines the role of food in maintaining societal organisation, whereas structuralism investigates the underlying cultural rules that influence dietary practices and preferences. This conceptualisation of food as a system of meaning paved the way for contemporary approaches, such as Structural-Marxism, which link food to culture, power, economy, and class relations.

2.2.3. Structural-Marxism: Structural-Marxism integrates Marxist theory with the analytical framework of structuralism. This study analyses the influence of power structures, economic factors, and class dynamics on social behaviour and cultural practices, particularly in relation to food. Food serves not only as sustenance or a cultural symbol but also as a locus for the reproduction of social hierarchies, class distinctions, and economic inequalities. This analysis examines the impact of material conditions on taste, consumption, and resource access, while also addressing how these practices perpetuate larger systems of domination and ideology.

Bourdieu (1984) is a prominent figure in Structural-Marxism, notably recognised for his significant work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. The author posits that food preferences and eating habits are socially constructed and serve as indicators of class position. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital (economic,

social, cultural, and symbolic), and field explain the ways in which individual tastes are influenced by social structures and how consumption practices perpetuate class distinctions. Bourdieu believes that food choice goes further than mere nutrition or pleasure. It serves as a classification act that reflects an individual's status within the social hierarchy. Upper classes develop sophisticated and aesthetic preferences that highlight health, lightness, and moderation, while working-class groups focus on more substantial, practical, and economical food options. Cuisine functions as an indicator of social power, perpetuating inequality while simultaneously serving as a medium for cultural expression.

Marx's concepts, as analysed by Tucker (1978) and various other scholars provide a framework for analysing food in relation to class struggle and material production. Marx considered agriculture and food production critical domains in the evolution of capitalist relations. Tucker (1978) emphasises Marx's assertion that control over agricultural production and land ownership directly affects class relations, those who possess food resources wield economic power. In a capitalist system, food becomes a commodity focused on profit rather than fulfilling human needs, resulting in alienation during both production for workers and consumption for consumers. This perspective reveals that capitalist systems generate inequality not only in food access but also in the definitions of "quality" or "desirable" food. Bourdieu and Marxist theorists offer a framework for analysing food as a structural locus of power and inequality. Food habits, agricultural systems, and consumption patterns are intricately linked to class structures, illustrating the influence of broader economic and cultural forces on daily life.

In summary, Structural-Marxism offers a critical framework for analysing the integration of food systems within the larger contexts of economic and class structures. This framework connects material production to symbolic consumption, illustrating how food functions as both a product and a generator of inequality. These perspectives illustrate the relationship between structure and agency, showing that food practices are influenced by social power and economic control. As societies advance into globalisation and consumer culture, new frameworks have developed to explain the transformation of food systems and daily dining practices. Ritzer's (1993) Theory of McDonaldization provides an analysis of how efficiency, calculability,

predictability, and control have shaped contemporary food consumption and organisational practices.

2.2.4. Theory of McDonaldization: George Ritzer (1993) introduced the concept of McDonaldization to describe how the principles of fast-food restaurants have increasingly influenced various sectors of American society and global culture. This theory is grounded in Max Weber's concept of formal rationality, highlighting efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control as fundamental elements of contemporary capitalist systems. McDonaldization applies these principles across various sectors of social life, including education, healthcare, entertainment, and consumption. Ritzer proposes that efficiency emphasises the fastest methods to attain objectives, calculability prioritises quantity over quality, predictability guarantees a consistent experience, and control standardises both labourers and consumers using technology and strict systems. Although these principles promote convenience and uniformity, they also result in what Ritzer describes as the "irrationality of rationality," wherein systems intended for efficiency frequently yield dehumanisation, diminished creativity, and environmental degradation.

In the context of food studies, McDonaldization discusses the ways in which globalisation and consumer culture transform eating habits, food production, and cultural significance. The proliferation of global fast-food chains has led to the standardisation of taste and experience, frequently diminishing local traditions and culinary diversity. Food is increasingly commodified, prioritised for its efficiency and uniformity over its cultural significance or nutritional value.

Ritzer and Malone (2000) argue that McDonaldization extends beyond food consumption, serving as a reflection of wider social transformations. The fast-food model's logic impacts home cooking, agricultural practices, and family dining structures, resulting in a homogenised "global palate." The widespread adoption of McDonaldization in various cultures generates a conflict between global standardisation and local opposition, as communities either adapt to or resist these influences in an effort to maintain their culinary identity.

Ritzer's Theory of McDonaldization highlights how consumption patterns reveal deeper social implications while also explaining how globalisation and rationalisation have standardised contemporary food systems via efficiency and uniformity. In a related topic, Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class moves the focus from

mass rationalisation to social division. It focusses on how eating becomes a sign of class identity, status, and polish.

2.2.5. The Theory of the Leisure Class: Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) is one of the foundational sociological frameworks that connects consumption with social hierarchy and cultural significance. Veblen (1899) introduced the notion of conspicuous consumption, characterised by the overt display of wealth and sophistication through goods and activities that are esteemed not for their necessity but for their prestige. In this context, food serves as a fundamental medium for individuals to convey their class status and cultural dominance. Dining, cuisine selection, and taste performance serve as social indicators that convey belonging, privilege, and distinction.

Veblen posited that individuals within the leisure class enhance their social standing through sophisticated and frequently opulent culinary practices, including extravagant banquets, rare ingredients, and intricate dining etiquettes that distinguish them from the working class. In this context, eating surpasses its biological function and transforms into a social performance, with taste serving as a coded language of prestige. Simplicity and moderation may serve as distinguishing factors when they reflect cultivated restraint rather than mere necessity. Food habits serve as indicators of both economic capital and the moral and aesthetic hierarchies present in society.

Later scholars have developed and clarified Veblen's concepts. Bourdieu (1984), in his influential work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, directly referenced Veblen to elucidate the ways in which habitus and cultural capital influence individual preferences and sustain class divisions. Bourdieu asserts that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier," indicating that food preferences are socially constructed, differentiating the "refined" from the "ordinary."

Recent studies by food scholars Johnston & Baumann (2010) have utilised the insights of Veblen and Bourdieu to analyse contemporary food trends. The authors contend that phenomena such as gourmet dining, organic and artisanal food movements, and the emergence of "foodie culture" exemplify novel manifestations of conspicuous consumption. In the global food economy, these practices reflect both economic capability and moral distinction, indicating authenticity, ethical awareness, and cosmopolitan sophistication. Food remains a significant marker of class identity and

social aspiration, even when contextualised within discussions of sustainability or taste.

The Theory of the Leisure Class posits that food consumption functions as a social and symbolic act, interlinking economic, cultural, and identity dimensions. Veblen's foundational ideas and their contemporary reinterpretations provide a framework for understanding food as a medium through which individuals express class, negotiate values, and articulate belonging within evolving cultural hierarchies. Expanding on Veblen's idea of conspicuous consumption and the symbolic role of taste in class distinction, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a deeper knowledge of how these preferences are internalised, reproduced, and expressed in daily food practices.

2.2.6. Bourdieu Habitus: Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1984) offers a robust framework for analysing the influence of social structures on individual preferences, practices, and perceptions. Habitus is the system of long-lasting attitudes such as thoughts, emotion, and behaviour patterns that are formed through socialisation in particular social and cultural situations. Internalised traits shape choices that may seem personal or natural, yet are profoundly influenced by the social environment.

Bourdieu (1984) views taste in the context of food as a fundamental aspect of habitus and a crucial factor in social differentiation. Taste is not an independent or solely aesthetic choice. Rather, it is a socially constructed inclination that mirrors an individual's class status. He articulated, "An agent has what he likes because he likes what he has," highlighting the redefinition of necessity and constraint as virtues within one's social context. Bourdieu's empirical study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) reveals that the working class typically prefers foods that are substantial, heavy, and practical, termed the "taste of necessity" whereas the upper classes exhibit a "taste of luxury," favouring lighter, healthier, and more refined foods that denote restraint and cultural sophistication.

This analysis demonstrates that food choices function as social indicators that both reflect and perpetuate inequality. Access to economic and cultural capital significantly influences eating habits, dining etiquette, and perceptions of what constitutes "good" or "healthy" food. The selection of a meal is not solely an individual choice but rather indicative of wider social hierarchies. His approach links material conditions, including income and education, with symbolic meanings such as distinction and

legitimacy, illustrating how consumption functions as a mode of social communication.

Ehlert (2021) utilises Bourdieu's concept of habitus to examine the production of class and gender distinctions through everyday food and body practices in urban Vietnam. The research demonstrates that habitus elucidates the internalisation and expression of social norms and structural conditions, including economic changes, gender roles, and global consumer trends, through practices related to eating, dieting, and body management. Food consumption serves as a critical arena for the negotiation of class identity and gender performance, connecting bodily discipline to social mobility. This research highlights the importance of habitus in comprehending how larger changes in the food system manifest in everyday life, demonstrating that eating and self-presentation serve as nuanced expressions of class and gender identity. The concept of habitus illustrates the influence of social structures and embodied dispositions on food practices, serving as a transition to the subsequent theoretical perspective i.e. Food as Gift and Reciprocity which examines how the sharing and exchange of food reinforce social relationships and cultural cohesion.

2.2.7 Food as Gift and Reciprocity: Marcel Mauss's 'The Gift (1925)' provides a foundational framework for analysing food as a social medium of exchange based on reciprocity. Mauss (1925) argued that the acts of giving, receiving, and reciprocating are not merely voluntary but are instead moral and social obligations that foster enduring relationships and uphold social cohesion. In this context, food serves not only as sustenance but also as a medium through which social relationships, hierarchies and mutual obligations are articulated and reinforced.

Scholars in food studies have expanded on Mauss's work by examining how the practices of food gifting and sharing shape moral and emotional economies within various cultural contexts. Douglas (1972) highlighted that food exchange mechanisms play a crucial role in establishing social inclusion and exclusion, thereby delineating community membership. Counihan (1999) and Wilk (2012) contended that food gifting perpetuates reciprocity in modern societies, with shared meals, potlucks, and charitable feeding functioning as expressions of care, belonging, and social recognition.

Recent studies have applied Maussian concepts to contemporary food movements, highlighting the role of reciprocity in shaping modern food exchange systems. Carolan

(2016) emphasises that practices like community-supported agriculture (CSA), food-sharing platforms, and solidarity kitchens embody reciprocal ethics that contest capitalist consumption models. Sarmiento (2017) and Hawkins & Kuntsman (2021) analyse the ways in which digital food-sharing networks and urban community gardens foster new relational exchanges based on trust, sustainability, and shared responsibility. Contemporary forms of reciprocity illustrate that, despite globalisation and market-oriented food systems, social relations remain mediated by the moral economy of food exchange.

The theory of Food as Gift and Reciprocity highlights that the acts of eating and sharing food serve to connect individuals and strengthen community ties. Food serves as a medium for expressing generosity, maintaining kinship, and conveying moral values that transcend mere material exchange. The theory of Food as Gift and Reciprocity illustrates the maintenance of social ties through acts of giving and sharing. In contrast, the subsequent section on Symbolic Interactionism examines how individuals construct and interpret the meanings of food in daily interactions and through shared cultural symbols.

2.2.8 Symbolic Interactionism: Symbolic Interactionism as articulated by George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969) offers a micro-sociological framework for understanding the construction of meanings through daily social interactions. Individuals act towards objects, including food, based on the meanings ascribed to them, which are shaped by social processes and continuously altered through interaction. Symbolic Interactionism provides a framework in food studies for analysing how individuals utilise food to convey identity, regulate emotions, and navigate social relationships in everyday contexts.

This approach has been utilised by scholars to analyse the acquisition of symbolic value in food practices within cultural contexts. Fischler (1988) showed that eating serves as a profound communicative act, enabling individuals to convey notions of belonging, exclusion, and moral identity. Lupton (1996) expanded this concept by examining how food consumption reflects emotions, gender, and moral regulation, demonstrating that the meanings associated with food such as “healthy,” “comforting,” or “forbidden” are socially constructed rather than inherent. Warde (2016) and Holm (2023) illustrate how interactionist perspectives elucidate the

evolving meanings of food in modern societies, influenced by globalisation, media, and digital culture, which alter individuals' relationships with their dietary choices.

Symbolic Interactionism in food studies reveals the social and symbolic aspects of eating, highlighting how individuals perceive food as integral to their identity and daily experiences. Food serves as a medium for the communication of values, the sustenance of relationships, and the interpretation of social life. By focussing on how meanings are generated and communicated via contact, Symbolic Interactionism provides insight into the lived experience of food and identity.

In conclusion, the theories reviewed in this section are Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural Marxism, McDonaldization, the Leisure Class, Bourdieu's Habitus, Food as Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism which collectively offer a broad sociological foundation for understanding food as both a social system and a symbolic field. Each perspective contributes to unveiling how food is embedded in networks of meaning, power, and identity. Functionalism elucidates the ways in which food practices reinforce social order and cohesion, while Structuralism views cuisine as a system of signs that communicates social distinctions and collective values. Structural Marxism reveals how production and consumption are entangled with class hierarchies and material inequalities, and Ritzer's McDonaldization foregrounds how global capitalism standardises local tastes and erodes diversity. Similarly, Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class and Bourdieu's Habitus illustrate how food consumption becomes a form of social distinction, while the Theory of Food as Gift and Reciprocity captures the moral and emotional economy of exchange. Finally, Symbolic Interactionism brings attention to the micro-level of experience, showing how individuals construct and negotiate meanings through everyday acts of eating, sharing, and talking about food.

Within this theoretical framework, Claude Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle stands out as a seminal structuralist model that illuminates the symbolic dimensions of food preparation and classification. Lévi-Strauss proposed that the relationship between the *raw*, the *cooked*, and the *rotten* forms a "culinary triangle" that reflects the fundamental structures of human thought. The raw represents nature and the untransformed, the cooked symbolises culture, transformation, and social order; and the rotten embodies decay, taboo, and the boundaries of the permissible. Together, they form a symbolic grammar through which societies express ideas of purity,

danger, morality, and civilisation. The theory demonstrates that cooking is not merely a technical activity but a cultural act, one that mediates the relationship between nature and society, material necessity and symbolic meaning. Thus, the *culinary triangle* provides a powerful interpretive framework for analysing how food practices express cultural logic, encode social hierarchies, and articulate values about transformation, identity, and belonging.

Cuisine is a significant cultural emblem that exemplifies the way in which communities convert the natural world into something meaningful. According to the structuralist perspective of Lévi-Strauss, food functions similarly to language, which is known as a system of signals that individuals use to convey their identity, hierarchy, and worldview. His culinary triangle, which consists of raw, cooked, and rotting foods, exemplifies how cooking serves as a symbolic mediator between nature and society, transforming a biological act into a social one. In addition to being just practical decisions, the foods that people consume, the manner in which they cook them, and the names they give them are all culturally encoded statements. Different cultures have different ways of symbolically interpreting the same substance (ingredients). As a result of these differences, food shows itself to be a symbolic language; it is a language that organises material reality and turns the act of eating into an expression of social meaning and cultural identity.

When viewed through this structuralist lens, the study of Mizo food culture finds a meaningful point of convergence. The transformation of natural ingredients into cooked dishes, the rituals of sharing and preservation, and the symbolic weight attached to staple foods such as rice all mirror the cultural logic that Lévi-Strauss described. Cooking in the Mizo context is not merely about sustenance; it is a communicative act that embodies moral order, social relations, and collective identity. By adopting Lévi-Strauss's *culinary triangle*, the present study situates Mizo foodways within a broader anthropology of meaning linking the material processes of cooking and eating with the symbolic dimensions through which Mizos express social cohesion, continuity, and cultural transformation.

Building on the insights gained from these theoretical views, the following section presents Methodological Review which outlines the research design, methods and tools used in the food studies.

2.3. Methodological Review

Conducting a methodological literature review prior to fieldwork is essential as it enables the researcher to comprehend the spectrum of existing research designs, identify suitable tools and techniques, and refine their methodological choices in accordance with established scholarly practices. This offers insight into the strengths and limitations of different methodologies, aiding in preparedness of challenges related to data collection and analysis. Additionally, it allows the researcher to position their study within recognised methodological frameworks, thereby ensuring theoretical coherence and empirical rigour. Research has utilised various methodological approaches to investigate food culture and its associated issues, predominantly employing qualitative methods. Some reviews are based on fieldwork, utilising ethnographic and participatory observation, whereas others rely on literature, incorporating secondary analyses of cultural and social data. In specific quantitative studies, detailed sampling procedures and statistical designs have been employed to guarantee representativeness and reliability. Careful review reveals that various methods, such as data collection techniques, sampling procedures, and mixed-method designs, are prominently featured in food studies. The subsequent sections address these methodological orientations.

2.3.1. Ethnographies: Ethnography has emerged as a significant and extensively utilised qualitative methodology within the field of food studies. This approach allows researchers to comprehend food within its authentic social context by means of direct observation, participation, and sustained engagement with communities. Mintz and Du Bois (2002) noted that Audrey Richards' classic study (1939) exemplifies ethnographic research in the domain of food. Richards resided with the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, meticulously documenting the processes of cultivation, preparation, and sharing of meals. The fieldwork illustrated that food serves as both a biological necessity and a social institution, intricately linked to kinship, gender, and labour relations. Utilising participant observation and comprehensive field notes, she demonstrated how dietary habits and eating practices sustain social cohesion and reflect cooperation within community life.

Trankell (1995) expanded on Richards' foundational work by conducting an ethnographic study of Thai culinary traditions, dedicating significant time to observing food preparation, serving, and sharing within households and markets. Her

approach demonstrated that culinary practices embody systems of social order, moral hierarchy, and symbolic significance. Ethnography facilitated a deeper exploration beyond mere surface description, revealing the encoding of cultural values in the quotidian practices of cooking and eating.

Kemmer (2000) and Counihan (1999) utilised ethnography to investigate the domestic aspects of food preparation and consumption. Counihan conducted extensive fieldwork in Italy and the United States, engaging in daily kitchen activities to examine how women navigate power and identity through foodwork. Kemmer's research on household meal preparation demonstrated the relationship between food choices and emotional connections, caregiving, and the execution of family roles. Their ethnographic immersion provided access to intimate and relational dimensions of food that are frequently overlooked in alternative research methodologies.

Sutton (2001) employed sensory ethnography in his study of the Greek island of Kalymnos, involving participants through communal meals and narrative recollections. His approach emphasised the sensory, affective, and mnemonic aspects of food, illustrating how taste, smell, and memory preserve cultural identity through generations. In subsequent decades, ethnography has been modified to examine contemporary and global food cultures. De Solier (2013), Long (2010), and Wilk (2012) conducted ethnographic observations and interviews to investigate how individuals engage with global consumerism, "foodie" culture, and evolving concepts of authenticity.

Ethnography's primary strength is its ability to document food as a lived, embodied, and relational practice. This approach enables researchers to observe the negotiation and performance of food meanings in daily contexts, thus proving essential for the analysis of local cultures and the interplay between tradition and change. Having examined the ethnographic foundation of food studies, the subsequent section delves into the application of interviewing methods and oral histories, which serve to augment ethnographic inquiry by recording personal narratives, generational knowledge, and memory related to food.

2.3.2. Oral Histories and Interviewing method: Oral histories and interviewing methods serve as essential instruments in food studies, especially for examining memory, knowledge transmission, and intergenerational practices related to food. These methods enable researchers to capture the subjective, emotional, and

experiential dimensions of food preparation, consumption, and cultural exchange that are frequently unattainable through quantitative approaches. Participants demonstrate that food practices are influenced by family lineage, migration, and identity through their narratives, thereby contextualising food within the wider social framework of daily life.

Parveen (2016) utilised oral histories and in-depth interviews in her research on food preparation and practices within immigrant communities in West Yorkshire. Through the collection of narratives from women who transmitted recipes orally across generations, she illustrated the role of culinary memory in preserving cultural identity within diasporic contexts. Oral history facilitated the examination of recipes as dynamic records of migration, identity, and adaptation. This method allowed for the examination of food not only as a cultural artefact but also as a manifestation of memory and resilience.

Raina, Rana & Thakur (2019) utilised interviews, questionnaires, and observation methods to analyse the consumption patterns of ready-to-eat food products in the Phagwara district of Punjab. The integration of structured interviews and random sampling facilitated depth and representativeness, effectively balancing statistical insight with personal experience. The interview-based method enabled the recording of evolving consumer preferences and lifestyle changes linked to modernisation, convenience, and alterations in family structures.

Interviewing methods, both structured and unstructured, are fundamental in the fields of food ethnography and sociology. Researchers including Counihan (1999) and Lupton (1996) have employed life-history interviews to explore how individuals perceive food habits as manifestations of identity, morality, and belonging. Oral narratives facilitate the connection between individual experiences and collective history, providing insights into cultural continuity and transformation.

The efficacy of oral history and interviewing is evident in their capacity to articulate lived experiences, thereby recovering narratives, recipes, and rituals that inform the quotidian significance of food. The subsequent section will explore participant observation as a method in studying food.

2.3.3. Participant Observation: Participant observation has been fundamental to ethnographic research in food studies, providing a method to acquire direct insights into the performance, experience, and negotiation of food practices in daily contexts.

Researchers who engage directly in the studied settings can observe both the explicit and implicit elements of food behaviour such as rituals, gestures, sensory experiences, and interpersonal dynamics that are frequently overlooked in interviews or surveys. This method facilitates an interpretive and embodied comprehension of food as a social act situated within specific temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts.

Berry (2003) emphasised the methodological contributions of Farquhar (2002) and Gillette (2000) who utilised participant observation to examine contemporary Chinese food culture. Their engagement with daily life, cooking environments, and communal meals enabled them to record how food practices reflect evolving social values, moral standards, and bodily ideologies in contemporary China. Farquhar's research illustrates the intersection of health, medicine, and pleasure within Chinese dietary practices, whereas Gillette's analysis of urban food markets highlights how consumption patterns embody cultural heritage and modernisation. Participation and observation in these studies revealed food as a sensory and moral domain that conveys identity, modernity, and belonging.

Rotenberg (1981) utilised participant observation in his study of eating habits in Vienna, Austria, to examine the impact of industrialisation on everyday life. His fieldwork included participating in family meals, visiting markets, and observing public dining spaces to investigate the broader social context of eating. The method allowed Rotenberg to associate variations in food consumption with alterations in labour, time, and domestic organisation. Participant observation, by contextualising eating within its lived environment, enabled the interpretation of how social transformations manifest in evolving food habits and routines.

Participant observation provides researchers with an in-depth understanding of food systems, successfully linking verbal emotions to real actions. This research uncovers the physical, performative, and emotive dimensions of food culture, yielding insights that move beyond linguistic articulations. The following section examines survey-based and mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques to enhance the breadth of food research.

2.3.4. Survey: Survey methods are widely utilised in food studies to gather systematic and quantifiable data regarding dietary patterns, food preferences, nutritional awareness, and consumption behaviour. Surveys, through the use of structured questionnaires and statistical analysis, facilitate the examination of relationships

among socio-economic variables, cultural values, and food choices in various populations. The survey approach, in contrast to ethnographic or narrative methods, offers a wider and more generalisable comprehension of food-related phenomena, frequently enhancing qualitative insights through empirical validation.

Basu et al. (1987) performed a significant large-scale survey examining food habits across diverse ethnic groups and sub-groups in West Bengal. The research systematically documented dietary preferences, meal frequencies, and nutritional intake patterns via household surveys, demonstrating the impact of socio-economic status, religion, and ecology on regional variations in food consumption. The research highlighted the ability of survey methodologies to delineate cultural diversity and its relationship with material conditions. Khan and Nasir (2013) employed survey questionnaires to analyse food consumption patterns in urban and rural households in Pakistan. Their research illustrated the impact of urbanisation and income levels on dietary preferences, revealing a notable transition towards processed foods and dining out in urban settings. The survey facilitated comparative analysis, revealing emerging nutritional inequalities associated with modernisation.

Wandel & Bugge (1997) employed a quantitative survey methodology to examine attitudes regarding healthy eating and environmental sustainability in Norway. The data indicated gender differences in food consciousness, with women demonstrating a higher likelihood of engaging in sustainable and healthy food practices compared to men. The survey method was crucial in revealing the impact of social values and education on health-related dietary choices. Grunert (2005) conducted extensive consumer surveys in various European countries to evaluate perceptions of food quality and safety, illustrating the influence of trust and awareness on consumer choices in contemporary food systems. Recent studies, including those by Kearney (2010) and Pieniak et al. (2016), have refined survey methodologies by incorporating mixed designs that integrate attitudinal scaling with behavioural frequency measures. These studies emphasise the importance of survey research in comprehending not only dietary choices but also the impact of economic development, media exposure, and cultural transitions on global food habits.

The application of survey methods in food research provides a quantitative basis for analysing social trends and changes in dietary behaviour. The subsequent section examines analytical framework used to enhance the understanding of food culture.

2.3.5. Analytical framework used: An analytical framework is a structured approach that assists researchers in systematically interpreting and organising data. This framework establishes a clear connection between data and pertinent theories and concepts, ensuring that research findings possess theoretical significance beyond mere description. Analytical frameworks in food studies are essential as they connect everyday food practices to wider social, cultural, and economic contexts. The study of food encompasses not only dietary choices but also the ways in which food embodies relationships, values, and power dynamics.

Counihan (1999) employed a feminist anthropological framework to examine the relationship between food practices and gender roles within Italian families. Through the integration of ethnographic research and gender theory, she demonstrated the influence of women's social positions on cooking and eating practices. The analysis demonstrated that food functions as both an essential daily requirement and a representation of care, power, and identity. Warde (1997) established a sociological framework to analyse food consumption within the context of social life. Utilising Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital, he elucidated the impact of class on food selections and meal arrangements. The framework integrated theoretical concepts with empirical data derived from surveys and interviews, demonstrating the strong connection between food, lifestyle, and social distinction.

Mintz (1985) in *Sweetness and Power* utilised a historical-materialist framework to examine the transformation of sugar from a luxury item to a global staple. Mintz illustrated the relationship between economic history, colonial trade, and cultural significance, revealing how food links local consumption to global power dynamics and inequality. His work serves as a crucial reference for comprehending food in global and historical contexts. Fischler (2011) and Guthman (2019) have recently established analytical frameworks that examine globalisation, identity, and health issues. Fischler's concept of the "omnivore's paradox" illustrates the tension modern consumers face between exploring new foods and preserving familiar tastes, emphasising the significance of food in identity formation. Guthman's critical framework examines the contradictions inherent in the organic food movement, highlighting the intersection of ethical consumption and capitalist market systems.

These frameworks collectively aim to utilise theoretical tools to analyse real-life food practices. They assist researchers in linking individuals' dietary practices to broader issues of identity, culture, and power dynamics.

The methodological review examines the various approaches utilised by researchers to analyse food as a material and cultural phenomenon. This study illustrates that food research is enhanced by methodological diversity as qualitative, quantitative and analytical approaches together deepen the understanding of food production, sharing and interpretation within social contexts.

Qualitative methodologies including ethnography, oral history and participant observation have yielded essential insights into food practices as experienced by individuals. Ethnographic studies, exemplified by the works of Richards (1939), Trankell (1995) and Counihan (1999) illustrate the ways in which food influences kinship, labour, and identity through prolonged immersion and direct observation. Oral histories and interviews as demonstrated by Parveen (2016) and Raina et al. (2019) document memory, migration and intergenerational knowledge, highlighting the role of recipes and rituals in maintaining social continuity. Participant observation as utilised by Farquhar (2002), Gillette (2000) and Rotenberg (1981), enabled researchers to investigate the performative and sensory aspects of eating, revealing the expressions of modernity, health, and class through food practices.

In contrast, studies utilising surveys, including those by Basu et al. (1987), Khan and Nasir (2013), and Kearney (2010), employed structured questionnaires and statistical methods to analyse consumption trends, socio-economic differences, and evolving dietary preferences. Surveys enhance qualitative methods by offering quantifiable data on broader trends and societal changes. The application of analytical frameworks, as illustrated by Mintz (1985), Warde (1997), Counihan (1999), and Guthman (2019) has played a crucial role in connecting empirical findings to theoretical constructs. These frameworks facilitate systematic interpretation by linking individual practices to broader cultural, class, gender, and globalisation issues.

The examined methodologies emphasise that studying food necessitates an integrative and reflexive approach. Ethnography and oral narratives provide cultural depth, whereas surveys offer breadth and generalisability. Analytical frameworks establish a consistent relationship between theoretical constructs and empirical evidence. Having outlined the methodological orientation, the next section turns to a thematic review of

relevant literature that provides the intellectual backdrop for analysing food within sociocultural contexts.

2.4. Thematic Review

A thematic review involves the examination of literature based on specific themes or substantive areas related to the research focus. This enables the researcher to identify recurring concepts, theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence that collectively inform comprehension within a discipline. A thematic review in food studies is significant as it organises various perspectives on the intersections of food with culture, identity, society, and change. This also helps in identifying research gaps, refining analytical focus and positioning the current study within existing scholarly discussions. There are several themes or substantive areas associated with food studies. Under the thematic review of literature, various themes such as culturing food, culinary practices, cultural identity, culture, kitchen, eating pattern of family, sociology of food and eating and the role of taste, food choice, eating rituals and symbolism, Food as a fashion, Indian society and food, Mizo society and food, western impact on food habits shall be discussed by carefully reviewing the works of scholars which are as given below:

2.4.1. Culturing food, culinary practices and cultural identity

Freeman (2006) analysed cuisine as an organised element of culture, highlighting the profound connection between food preparation and consumption within systems of meaning and social organisation. The argument posits that culinary experience transcends mere sustenance, embodying aesthetic expression, moral order, and cultural continuity. Freeman posits that food is a crucial locus for analysing the reproduction of culture through daily practices. The act of cooking, dining, and sharing food serves as a reflection of the broader social structure that influences belonging, hierarchy, and identity formation. This study illustrates that cuisine functions as a cultural text, facilitating the communication of values and the maintenance of collective identity within societies.

Ying (2018) examined the variations in culinary practices among societies and the resultant effects of these differences on social connection and alienation. Ying's examination of the symbolic and communicative aspects of food reveals that culinary practices reflect cultural distinctions capable of either uniting or dividing communities. Differences in preparation methods, ingredients, and taste preferences

reflect social identity and cultural boundaries, extending beyond mere culinary distinctions. Ying's argument emphasises that food serves dual roles as a unifier and divider, acting as a medium for individuals to express belonging or distinction. This perspective elucidates the ways in which globalisation and migration consistently transform the cultural significance associated with cuisine.

Fischler (1988), in his significant study on food and identity, posited that humans are characterised by an omnivore's paradox, the concurrent desire for dietary diversity and the apprehension of new or unfamiliar foods. The argument posits that dietary choices are indicative of personal and collective identity, as food serves as a mediator in these contexts. Fischler posits that eating practices are fundamental to the construction of social belonging, as they link the eater's body to cultural identity and memory. The consumption of specific foods fosters stability and familiarity, thereby reinforcing the delineation of social groups. His analysis identified food as a fundamental component of self-recognition and cultural cohesion, establishing what he referred to as the "collective identity" of a community.

Parveen (2016) examined the significance of culinary practices in preserving and reconstructing identity within immigrant communities in the diaspora. Qualitative research conducted in a West Yorkshire neighbourhood demonstrated that cooking traditional dishes functions to preserve memory while also expressing attachment and adaptation. Orally transmitted recipes serve as cultural scripts, conveying familial and ethnic significance across generations. Parveen emphasised that, in diasporic households, food serves as a locus of nostalgia and a means of establishing belonging, allowing individuals to navigate the interplay between inherited traditions and the experiences of migration.

Shah (2018) analysed the connection between food and identity by categorising individuals into four distinct eating identity types: healthy, emotional, meat, and picky eaters. Shah employed a behavioural framework to examine the influence of these identities on attitudes regarding diet, lifestyle, and well-being. The research indicated that individuals who consume meat and those who are selective eaters exhibited less healthy dietary patterns, implying that food choices are indicative of deeper social and psychological factors. Shah conceptualised food consumption as a component of identity work, illustrating how individuals employ eating behaviour to align with broader cultural narratives regarding health, morality, and self-control.

Kelly & Morar (2018) examined the relationship among dining norms, food practices, and personal identity, positing that changes in eating habits frequently indicate more profound transformations in cultural orientation. Their research indicated that food habits serve as both behavioural patterns and indicators of identity transformation. Dietary changes, influenced by ethical considerations, health awareness, or lifestyle trends, reflect alterations in social values and individual self-perception. Eating serves as a context in which personal and collective identities are negotiated and redefined in relation to changing cultural norms.

Motta (2021) examined the dynamics of social change and inequality within the food system, positing that cultural practices related to food are closely linked to power structures. Motta examined the cultural dimensions of food production, distribution, and consumption, illustrating the impact of class, gender, and ethnicity on food access and representation. Her research demonstrated that globalisation and industrialisation not only change dietary practices but also reshape the cultural significances and hierarchies linked to food. Motta's study highlights the importance of interpreting culinary practices as indicators of broader socio-economic changes.

The intersection of food, culture, and identity is a significant focus in food studies, emphasising that dietary choices extend beyond mere biological sustenance. Food serves as a significant medium for the production, sharing, and transformation of cultural meanings. The processes involved in the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food illustrate various dimensions of collective history, ethical values, and a sense of belonging. Culinary practices, both local and global, encapsulate cultural knowledge and perpetuate social hierarchies through ritual and taste. These scholars demonstrate that food functions as an active force in shaping social identities and community life, rather than being a passive element of culture. Food, through its symbolic and everyday aspects, links personal experience to collective memory, functioning as an essential framework for analysing social cohesion, cultural negotiation, and transformation.

2.4.2. Culture, Kitchen and Eating pattern of family

Pollan (2013) examines the philosophical and cultural implications of cooking. He noted that modern societies, especially in the United States have progressively moved away from traditional cooking in favour of industrialised and pre-prepared foods. The duration of time Americans allocate to home cooking has significantly decreased since

the mid-twentieth century, coinciding with an increasing interest in cooking shows and dining out. Pollan observed that cooking, previously a communal activity promoting social bonds, has evolved into an outsourced chore disconnected from the patterns of home life. The act of returning to the kitchen transcends food preparation; it involves reclaiming cultural and familial significance through the processes of making and sharing food. His insights have global relevance, as numerous societies reflect this shift from home-based to convenience-oriented food cultures.

In her seminal essay, *Deciphering a Meal*, Douglas (1972) examined the social logic that informs daily eating practices in familial contexts. She posited that meals are not arbitrary assortments of foods but rather socially organised events that convey order, hierarchy, and moral codes. Douglas analysed the private domain of the home, illustrating how family meals embody rules of inclusion, differentiation, and propriety, thereby distinguishing between ordinary and festive occasions, as well as between hosts and guests. The structuralist framework demonstrated that the kitchen and dining table serve as spaces for the enactment and reproduction of culture through ritualised acts of selection, preparation, and sharing. Douglas primarily concentrated on the domestic sphere, however, she advocated for a more comprehensive inclusion of public food spaces to fully comprehend the social significance of meals within broader cultural systems.

Lee et al. (2014) examined the importance of family meals for students highlighting the impact of home dining on fostering healthy eating behaviours and emotional health. The quantitative study revealed that adolescents who frequently dined with their families were more inclined to maintain balanced diets and demonstrate positive food-related behaviours. The authors associated this finding with the socialisation process that takes place at the family table, where communal eating promotes communication, discipline, and emotional support. The authors contend that family meals serve as a stabilising ritual in a fragmented and fast-paced society, underscoring the significance of the kitchen as a space for nourishment of both body and mind. Their research indicates that, in addition to nutrition, communal eating fosters intergenerational connections and reinforces familial identity.

Jackson & Viehoff (2016) examined the sociological significance of the family meal within the framework of modernity, highlighting how evolving lifestyles have altered domestic eating practices. The ethnographic study demonstrated that although the

concept of the “family meal” persists as a moral and cultural goal, its implementation has evolved to be more flexible and individualised, influenced by differing work schedules, digital distractions, and the diversification of family structures. Despite these changes, the authors observed that family members continue to ascribe significant symbolic meaning to shared meals, which function as moments of connection amid social and temporal fragmentation. Jackson & Viehoff reconceptualised the family meal as a dynamic and adaptive practice, representing an evolving institution that maintains emotional and social cohesion despite contemporary pressures.

Ochs & Shohet (2020) broadened the discourse on domestic food practices via their ethnographic investigation of “kitchen talk” within American households. The study examined how routine dialogues during food preparation and consumption reinforce cultural norms related to gender, care, and morality. The findings indicate that the kitchen functions as a communicative space in which identities are enacted and negotiated through sharing, instructing, and storytelling. These ordinary interactions, they contended, influence emotional intimacy and convey values across generations. Ochs and Shohet illustrated that cooking and eating together transcends mere sustenance, serving as a means to foster belonging and continuity in family life through the lens of language and interaction.

Lupton (2020) presented a modern viewpoint on the evolving function of kitchens in the digital era, emphasising the impact of technology on domestic food practices. Her research on digital food media posits that contemporary kitchens function as hybrid environments, integrating elements of private domesticity and public performance. Digital recipes, social media content, and online cooking tutorials have transformed the ways individuals prepare, share, and express their culinary identities. Lupton emphasised that this transformation illustrates wider changes in gender roles and cultural production, with domestic cooking emerging as a space for self-expression, creativity, and resistance to conventional gender expectations. The analysis highlights that the contemporary kitchen continues to be pivotal to cultural identity, despite its adaptation to technological and social changes.

De Backer et al. (2021) provided a cross-cultural analysis of home cooking and family meal patterns in diverse European contexts. The comparative study revealed that, despite global trends favouring convenience foods and fragmented eating patterns,

numerous households still prioritise home-cooked meals as manifestations of care, tradition, and togetherness. The research revealed distinctions between Northern and Southern Europe, indicating that Southern European families uphold more robust traditions of shared mealtimes. De Backer and colleagues revealed that family meals function as a cultural anchor, reconciling modernity with continuity. They suggest that, even within diverse and globalised societies, the practices of cooking and dining together are fundamentally linked to identity and belonging. Their findings confirm the persistent symbolic and social importance of family meals in various cultures.

These works highlight that the kitchen and family meals are not simply domestic routines but significant cultural practices. They influence interpersonal relationships, convey values, and facilitate social change negotiations. The literature, spanning from Douglas's symbolic anthropology to Lupton's digital sociology, demonstrates that changing patterns of cooking and dining mirror shifts in family structures, gender roles, and cultural identity.

2.4.3. Sociology of food and eating and the role of taste

Ward, Coveney & Henderson (2010) significantly advanced the sociological understanding of food by broadening its focus beyond traditional links to health and nutrition. The authors contend that food consumption represents a complex social process involving identity, markets, cultural symbolism, and social interaction. Their research contextualizes food within larger social frameworks, emphasizing the influence of class, gender, and economic conditions on individual dietary choices. The analysis of the relationship between food and identity reveals that eating functions as both a personal and communal activity, enabling individuals to construct and articulate their social affiliations. The research promoted a transition from biomedical perspectives on food to recognizing it as a domain intricately woven into the social structure of daily existence.

Murcott (2019) urged scholars to adopt a sociological perspective on food, advocating for a departure from viewing food solely in terms of nutrition or behaviour. The author contended that food is defined by cultural contexts and should be examined in relation to social relationships rather than as an isolated individual practice. Murcott highlighted the importance of examining the role of food in mediating relationships between private and public spheres, ranging from household dining settings to larger market systems. The framework encourages researchers to analyze the similarities

and differences in food practices among various social groups. She emphasized the necessity of a critical sociological approach that interrogates established beliefs regarding food, promoting reflexivity and engagement with topics such as inequality, ethics, and globalization within food systems.

Beardsworth et al. (1997) investigated food in Western societies, emphasizing the impact of urbanization and modernization on eating habits. Two key dimensions of food were identified i.e. social and cultural. These dimensions elucidate how food practices mirror broader transformations in social life. Their study indicated that industrialization and urbanization have fostered a culture of “eating out” driven by the growing emphasis on convenience and speed in food selection. Beardsworth and colleagues illustrated that the sociological examination of food must consider the impact of technological and economic changes on the symbolic and emotional significance associated with meals. Their findings are essential for comprehending the impact of modernization on both the physical and social contexts of eating.

In *The Sociology of Taste*, Gronow (1997) offers a theoretical examination of the role of taste as a distinguishing marker in contemporary societies. Utilizing Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, Gronow posited that taste transcends individual preference, serving as a socially constructed category that mirrors class, education, and cultural access. Various social groups develop unique preferences, ranging from daily dietary selections to overarching aesthetic principles, which serve to reinforce social divisions and hierarchies. The study also analysed the influence of consumerism and fashion on the concept of taste, demonstrating that food selection serves as both a reflection of social identity and a performance of cultural belonging. Gronow’s insights are pivotal in sociological discussions concerning food, consumption, and stratification.

Johnston and Baumann (2015) elaborated on Gronow’s concepts in their publication, ‘Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape.’ The study examines the emergence of ‘foodie culture’ as a reflection of novel social differentiation in late modern societies. The pursuit of authenticity, ethical consumption, and culinary exploration serves as a mechanism for individuals to demonstrate cultural capital and moral superiority. Their study demonstrated that contemporary taste, despite its seemingly democratic and inclusive nature, perpetuates existing social hierarchies. The analysis of blogs, restaurants, and media illustrates

how twenty-first-century taste is influenced by class aspirations and moral positioning.

Naccarato & LeBesco (2012) examined the relationship between food consumption and factors such as power, identity, and social inequality, introducing the concept of “culinary capital.” The authors contend that knowledge regarding food specifically understanding what, where, and how to eat has emerged as a novel form of social distinction. Culinary capital functions akin to Bourdieu’s cultural capital, enabling individuals to exhibit refinement and social status via their food practices. Their research integrated the sociology of taste with cultural studies, demonstrating how consumerism, media, and globalisation reshape food into a sphere of symbolic power and identity formation.

Cairns & Johnston (2023) have recently analysed the politics of taste concerning sustainability and plant-based diets. Their research emphasises how emerging moral economies of eating such as veganism, climate-conscious consumption, and sustainable sourcing transform the sociological significance of food. The authors contend that taste is becoming more moralised, as consumers strive to align pleasure with ethical responsibility. This shift in taste from class-based distinctions to environmental and moral awareness signifies a new phase in food sociology, mirroring global concerns and evolving consumption values.

Overall, this section has examined how food and eating transcend their nutritional dimensions to become powerful expressions of social meaning. It highlighted the ways in which eating practices mirror broader structures of class, gender, economy, and culture, illustrating that taste functions as both a form of distinction and a reflection of identity. The discussion underscored that food is deeply situated within networks of power, consumerism, and globalization, where choices around what and how to eat reveal social aspirations, ethical commitments, and moral positioning. By situating taste within the dynamics of modernity, inequality, and sustainability, the section demonstrated that the sociology of food continues to evolve as a lens through which the complexities of contemporary life and cultural transformation can be understood.

2.4.4. Food Choice, Eating Rituals and Symbolism

Jones (2007) examined the complex interplay among food, culture, gender roles, and eating disorders, demonstrating how individuals attribute symbolic significance to the

aspects of eating, including what, where, how, and with whom they consume food. The research indicates that eating is not a neutral act. rather, it is situated within frameworks of value, morality, and identity. Jones demonstrated that food practices reflect social hierarchies, gendered expectations, and cultural boundaries, especially regarding how societal ideals of femininity, discipline, and beauty influence women's eating habits. Qualitative research demonstrated that food choices and eating rituals serve as forms of self-expression and mechanisms of social conformity. Food serves as a medium for both resistance and adaptation within gendered cultural frameworks. Nestle et al. (1998) analysed various factors affecting individual food choices, incorporating insights from psychology, nutrition, and sociology. Food preferences are influenced by social networks, family structures, cultural beliefs, and media representations, rather than being solely personal choices. The study emphasised the significant influence of media and advertising on consumption behaviour, especially in children and youth, by normalising processed and convenience foods. Nestle and colleagues emphasised the significance of accessibility and the overall food environment, illustrating that availability and affordability influence dietary diversity and preferences. Their research is fundamental in elucidating the convergence of structural and social forces in influencing food-related decision-making.

Beardsworth & Keil (1997) analysed the intersection of the sociology of taste and consumption with urban lifestyles, positing that eating patterns are socially structured by class and habitus. Modernity and urbanisation have facilitated the emergence of a "eating-out culture" which serves as a symbol of contemporary aspirations and reflects evolving class identities. The authors highlighted that food selection functions as a cultural code, reflecting lifestyle, social belonging, and economic capital. Their findings emphasise that individual taste preferences are integrated within collective systems of meaning and distinction.

Rozin et al. (2011) advanced the discourse on food choice through an analysis of the cultural psychology associated with eating. The authors contend that food preferences are influenced by moral and affective factors in addition to nutritional and sensory aspects. Cross-cultural data indicate that Western societies frequently frame food choices within narratives of health and guilt, while non-Western societies typically associate food with pleasure, tradition, and collective identity. Their findings indicated that attitudes towards food reveal entrenched cultural narratives concerning

self-control, indulgence, and virtue. This viewpoint elucidates why identical foods can elicit significantly varied interpretations in different cultural contexts.

Fischler (2011) re-examined his previous research on “commensality” and the symbolic significance of shared meals, positing that communal eating is a fundamental practice for sustaining social cohesion and identity. He posited that commensality cultivates trust and reciprocity, delineating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Fischler's sociological framework conceptualises food as a medium of social communication, with eating rituals serving to translate cultural order into everyday practice. He further observed that in contemporary societies, the decline of communal mealtimes attributable to individualised eating practices and accelerated lifestyles indicates wider trends of social fragmentation.

Korsmeyer (2019) provided a philosophical perspective on food symbolism by examining the dual role of taste as an aesthetic and moral experience. The argument presented posits that taste transcends sensory experience, incorporating interpretive elements where individuals assign cultural significance and ethical evaluations to flavours. Korsmeyer analysed food aesthetics by examining rituals including religious feasts, communal banquets, and luxury dining, illustrating their symbolic negotiation of purity, identity, and hierarchy. Her research connected philosophy and food studies by highlighting that eating rituals serve as aesthetic performances that reflect cultural values and moral sentiments.

Rokach (2020) examined food rituals as manifestations of belonging, continuity, and significance within various cultures. He recognised familial bonding through shared meals as a significant global ritual that transcends both temporal and spatial boundaries. The comparative analysis of food customs across societies indicates that communal dining promotes social solidarity and emotional intimacy. Rokach noted that in East Asian societies, including China and Japan, elaborate meals and costly ingredients serve as indicators of wealth as well as expressions of respect and hospitality. This study explores the emotional and moral aspects of communal eating, highlighting the importance of food rituals in strengthening cultural identity and fostering human connections.

McIntosh and Lim (2022) analysed the impact of globalisation and social media on the transformation of food rituals and their symbolic meanings. Research indicates that online food-sharing practices, including the posting of meal photographs and

engagement in digital “food challenges,” have redefined eating as a performative act of identity construction. The authors contend that digital commensality, despite being virtual, preserves numerous social functions associated with physical meals, including belonging, recognition, and symbolic exchange. Their findings demonstrate that food-related rituals are continually evolving, adapting to technological and global changes while maintaining their function as social connectors.

Savini & Joubert (2023) expanded this viewpoint by analysing ‘What I Eat in a Day’ videos on TikTok. Research indicates that social media creators institutionalise eating habits through repetitive formats such as morning routines, calorie tracking, and aesthetically pleasing plates, thereby converting meals into expressions of aspiration, discipline, and self-care. The authors contend that these curated rituals create new moral economies of eating, wherein aesthetics and branding supplant communal sharing as sources of meaning. Their research demonstrates that digital platforms replicate and disseminate symbolic values linked to domestic food rituals, thereby broadening the moral and aesthetic aspects of food into the virtual realm.

Mizdrak et al. (2024) examined the impact of commensality among university students, finding a significant correlation between communal eating, healthier dietary choices, and increased food satisfaction. Shared meals functioned as micro-rituals that reinforced implicit norms regarding portion sizes, timing, and conversational etiquette. The research highlighted that communal eating promotes social connectedness and strengthens collective identity, even in temporary urban environments. Mizdrak et al. concluded that commensality continues to be an essential social institution, even in the context of increasing individualisation in eating practices.

These studies demonstrate that food choice and eating rituals extend beyond mere consumption; they serve as cultural performances through which individuals articulate identity, morality, and belonging. Food serves as a symbolic medium that reflects social values and power relations, whether expressed through traditional family meals, aesthetic food displays, or digital performances. The relationship among ritual, symbolism, and choice illustrates that eating represents an ongoing negotiation between personal agency and cultural framework. Food is fundamental to self-definition and interpersonal relationships in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

2.4.5. Food as fashion

A prominent issue in modern food studies is the idea of “food as fashion” which captures how food is being more and more used as an aesthetic and symbolic indicator of identity rather than just as a source of nourishment. According to Johnston and Baumann (2015), food choices today function as means of cultural expression and differentiation, indicating how people utilize cuisine to communicate taste, lifestyle, and social affiliation. Similarly, Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) suggested that food now contains “culinary capital” allowing consumers to express themselves in ways similar to fashion and other lifestyle goods. Sushi, bubble tea, artisanal coffee, and Korean snacks are examples of food trends that frequently become popular not just for their flavor but also for their visual appeal and aspirational appeal.

According to Abrahams (2020), trendy foods are becoming more important to young people’s eating habits as a means for them to express their global identity. Also, Kim (2021) said that snack foods from Korea and East Asia have become ways to show that one is modern and a part of global youth culture. These findings demonstrate that food trends serve a similar purpose to fashion trends in that they help people identify with particular social groupings and modern fashions. A major factor in this change is the emergence of digital media.

Yue (2022) argues that the dominance of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has transformed food into a visual commodity, with its “Instagrammability” driving its visual appeal. De Solier (2013) stated that individuals employ culinary practices for self-branding, carefully establishing identities through the foods they create, consume, and spread online. According to Featherstone (2007), this fits with the idea that consumer societies are making everyday life more and more beautiful by turning daily activities like eating into expressive styles. According to sociology, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital is the foundation for the concept of food as fashion. Bourdieu (1984) suggested that taste is influenced by social status, so fashionable foods become indications of class, education, and cultural exposure. Consuming fashionable cuisine represents social competency and global orientation, particularly among metropolitan and upwardly mobile people. Han and Yan (2019) noted that global food trends in East Asia are transforming youth identities, enabling them to deal with the interplay between traditional eating customs and contemporary global influences.

Nonetheless, researchers also draw attention to differences rooted in popular culinary traditions. Brewis and Wutich (2020) stated that refined or trend-driven consumption frequently promotes social stratification, as popular meals are typically more available to wealthier metropolitan populations while staying unattainable for rural or lower-income households. These differences show that food as fashion, like fashion itself, can both make it easier to express one's personality and make it harder for some people to fit in. These studies show that food as fashion has changed worldwide food culture by integrating culinary practices with lifestyle display, digital visibility, and social desire. Food is becoming more and more of a way to show how modern and connected you are. Looking into this trend can help us understand how communities, especially young people and people living in cities, manage their identities in a globalised world.

In addition to providing sustenance, food also functions as a symbolic indicator of social status and identity, much like clothing. Scholars such as Johnston, Baumann, Naccarato, and LeBesco observe that food selections reflect individual lifestyle and cultural capital, with trends like sushi and bubble tea attracting interest due to their visual allure and aspirational significance, especially among younger populations. This trend has been enhanced by social media platforms, making food an important aspect of self-branding. Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the consumption of fashionable foods serves as a marker of social class and global awareness, even though access to these trends frequently benefits wealthier urban populations more than their rural or economically disadvantaged counterparts. This phenomenon of "food as fashion" exemplifies the interconnection of symbolism, lifestyle, and digital presence in the construction of identity and sense of inclusion within a globalised setting.

2.4.6. Indian society and food

Srinivas (2011) analysed Indian society by focussing on food, highlighting that cuisine serves as a cultural marker and a mechanism for social differentiation. She contended that the extensive diversity of India's food practices, stemming from regional, caste, religious, and ecological factors has resulted in food being simultaneously central and under-represented in academic discussions. Srinivas documented the symbolic and ritual dimensions of Indian foodways, illustrating how meal structures, purity norms, and everyday eating practices reflect broader social

hierarchies and regional identities. The study established a foundational framework for recognising food as a crucial aspect of understanding Indian culture.

Baviskar (2012) examined the evolution of food habits in post-independence India, associating these changes with urbanisation, industrialisation and globalisation. The commodification of food, along with the growth of processed food markets and the culture of dining out, has obscured the traditional boundaries between domestic and public food environments. Baviskar posited that food in India has increasingly emerged as a domain of class performance and lifestyle differentiation, with consumption choices mirroring aspirations of modernity. The analysis demonstrated the ways in which economic liberalisation transformed both dietary practices and the social significances associated with eating.

Shukla (2015) examined the cultural and ethical underpinnings of vegetarianism in India, noting the role of food taboos, religious doctrines, and regional customs in maintaining vegetarian identity. He observed that vegetarianism transcends dietary practice, functioning as a profound moral and social framework rooted in Hindu philosophy and discourses on purity and pollution. Shukla's research demonstrates that the continuity of vegetarianism in India is influenced by the complex relationships among religion, caste, and ecological ethics within the country's food culture, despite younger generations being exposed to alternative diets through globalisation.

Bourdain (2014) presented a culinary outsider's viewpoint on India depicting the nation as a realm where vegetarian and vegan traditions harmoniously coexist with sensory richness and creativity. He appreciated the variety of textures, spices, and regional flavours, contending that Indian cuisine demonstrates richness independent of meat consumption. His commentary implicitly questioned Western beliefs that associate plant-based diets with deprivation, presenting Indian cuisine as a representation of sustainable enjoyment and cultural richness.

Kikon (2020) examined the politics of food in India, asserting that the definitions of "acceptable" and "forbidden" food are influenced by power dynamics and social hierarchies. Based on ethnographic research in Northeast India, he demonstrated how food taboos, prohibitions, and hierarchies are enforced by casteist and nationalist ideologies. Kikon's analysis highlights how food serves as a platform for political negotiation and cultural expression, particularly for marginalised communities whose culinary practices frequently face stigma. His research emphasised that discussions

regarding food in India are inherently political, reflecting underlying conflicts related to identity and belonging.

Gupta and Singh (2022) analysed the changing food landscape of the urban middle class in India, emphasising the emergence of ‘fusion food’ and café culture in major metropolitan areas. Utilising interviews and restaurant ethnography, the study illustrates how hybrid cuisines embody cosmopolitan aspirations and global exposure, while simultaneously preserving elements of local taste. The research indicated that food serves as a means of articulating contemporary Indian identity, integrating traditional elements with cosmopolitan innovation. Their findings highlight the transformative effects of globalisation on diets, social self-perception, and intergenerational values related to food.

Sarma (2023) examined the regionalisation of food identity in India through an analysis of culinary tourism and media representations. The research indicates that state-sponsored food festivals and digital influencers frequently reinterpret local cuisines as symbols of heritage, resulting in novel expressions of regional pride and commodification. Sarma contended that these emerging narratives selectively honour “authentic” dishes, thereby marginalising every day and subaltern food traditions. The analysis illustrates that food serves as a significant medium for shaping regional identity and economic prospects in modern India.

Ramaswamy and Patel (2024) examined food and sustainability movements in Indian cities, focussing on the revival of organic markets and farm-to-table practices. The ethnographic research demonstrated the ways in which urban consumers interact with traditional concepts of purity, seasonality, and health in the context of emerging ecological awareness. The authors contend that these movements signify a cultural reaffirmation of Indian food values as a reaction to industrial agriculture, illustrating an ethical shift towards localism and sustainability.

Nair (2025) analysed digital narratives of Indian cuisine on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, emphasising the ways in which food bloggers and content creators recontextualise regional dishes for a global audience. The study demonstrated that digital media function as novel platforms for culinary diplomacy, influencing perceptions of “Indian-ness” through aesthetics, storytelling and performative authenticity. Nair’s findings highlight the evolution of Indian food from a domestic activity to a transnational cultural symbol, facilitated by technology and visual culture.

The examination of food within Indian society illustrates a complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and political factors. Food serves as both a reflection and a tool for social change, encompassing the ritual purity associated with vegetarianism, the cosmopolitan nature of café culture, and the activism surrounding sustainable eating. Research indicates that Indian foodways serve as intersections of caste, religion, region, class, and media, thereby playing a crucial role in comprehending the cultural transformations occurring in contemporary India. Food serves as a significant indicator of purity, identity, and contemporary aspirations within Indian social life.

2.4.7. Mizo society and food

Dawar (2019) analysed the relationship between food and ethnic identity within the Mizo community, highlighting how collective eating practices express a sense of belonging. The practice of sharing food from a communal plate known as *Thlangra* that represents equality and unity in Mizo society. Dawar examined the development of food institutions, highlighting the transition from tea stalls and bakeries in the 1950s and 1960s to the emergence of printed menus and fast-food establishments in Aizawl in the 1990s. These developments, although indicative of modernisation, also created a stratified access to dining culture, which was originally limited to the affluent. This study illustrates the Mizo culinary domain as a platform for negotiating tradition and modernity, where communal dining remains a cultural anchor in the context of urban transformation.

Jacob (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of Mizo cuisine in relation to the broader Indian culinary context, emphasising its uniqueness compared to conventional Indian food practices. The observation indicates that although Indian curry prevails across much of the subcontinent, the Mizos have preserved *bai* (a brothly vegetable stew) as their signature dish. Jacob emphasised food as a manifestation of cultural autonomy and local ecology, indicating that the Mizo's rejection of curry reflects not a deficiency in integration but a reaffirmation of indigeneity. His research positions Mizo culinary practices as a form of resistance to homogenisation while affirming local taste hierarchies, with rice and *bai* serving as central elements of identity and continuity.

Lalnunthara & Jyoti Kumar (2020) examined the impact of modernisation and globalisation on fast-food consumption and health awareness among college students in Lunglei, Mizoram. The quantitative analysis indicated that merely 23% of students

were aware of the health risks linked to fast food, despite elevated literacy levels in the state. Research indicated that male students exhibited marginally greater health consciousness compared to female students, while the majority of students infrequently reviewed nutritional information on packaged foods. Despite the 2015 ban on Maggi noodles, a significant portion of the population persisted in their consumption, highlighting a discrepancy between awareness and actual behaviour. The authors concluded that the swift integration of global food markets and convenience eating habits has diminished traditional dietary mindfulness, necessitating targeted health campaigns and educational initiatives to counteract the appeal of contemporary fast foods.

Ralte (2022) provided an ethnographic analysis of the interconnections between Mizo foodways, memory, land and identity. Her study presents food as not only sustenance but also as a repository of history, emotion, and cultural resilience. Her analysis focusses on *bai*, *bawl/sawh*, and *tlak*, which represent indigenous ecological wisdom through methods such as smoking, fermenting, and seasonal preservation. She emphasised the impact of missionary influence on the introduction of new culinary technologies, such as baking, sugar utilisation, and processed ingredients, which transformed domestic labour and created entrepreneurial opportunities. Ralte's narrative illustrates how daily actions such as providing food to guests and engaging in communal cooking during celebrations, uphold moral and social structures. Her work effectively presents Mizo cuisine as a dynamic tradition, evolving with modern influences while preserving its ethical and communal core.

Lianhmingsanga & Shyamkishor (2021) examined the impact of globalisation on Mizo food culture, emphasising the increase in fast-food consumption, food trucks, and the dining-out culture. A significant transition was noted from communal meals served on banana leaves to individualised dining focused on Western and Southeast Asian cuisines. The authors observed that global food chains and local fast-food establishments have transformed social dynamics, generating new opportunities for leisure and employment, while reducing the visibility of traditional cuisine in public dining venues. The study also revealed that trends in "healthy eating" among the urban elite such as dietician-guided routines and fruit-based breakfasts illustrate the development of new class distinctions. The authors contend that the economic advantages of globalisation are accompanied by the cultural marginalisation of

traditional food practices, positioning Mizo cuisine as both a symbol of heritage and a locus of negotiation between local identity and global aspirations.

The thematic analysis of Mizo society and food indicates a continuous transformation from indigenous commensality to globalised consumption. Research indicates that traditional foodways, centred on rice, bai, and communal meals, persist in representing community, identity and memory. However, emerging practices influenced by urbanisation, media, and global markets are transforming the culinary landscape. The rise of fast-food chains, packaged foods and diet awareness illustrates contemporary aspirations alongside cultural dislocation. Studies by Ralte (2022) and Dawar (2019) highlight that food serves as a significant moral and social domain for the Mizo people, facilitating expressions of continuity, belonging, and adaptation. The convergence of memory, globalisation, and health awareness characterises the modern Mizo food narrative, demonstrating how culinary practices navigate the balance between heritage and transformation.

2.4.8. Western impact on food habits

Leite (2011) examined the cultural dynamics of Western development among women in Dehradun, India, revealing a generational disparity in food preferences. The research indicated that urban daughters exhibited an increasing preference for western and packaged foods, whereas rural daughters favoured home-cooked meals based on local traditions. Leite framed this transition as a process of “Americanization,” in which the conveniences of urban living and the influence of global consumerism alter local taste hierarchies. The research highlighted the ways in which urban food preferences serve as symbols of modernity and status, illustrating the influence of Western culture on both taste and the aspirations associated with contemporary womanhood and urban identity. Her work has implications for understanding the emerging foodscapes of urban India’s middle class, where processed foods are associated with upward mobility and a sense of global belonging.

Dehgan (2021) analysed the worldwide spread of Western dietary patterns, highlighting the ongoing influence of colonial ideologies on postcolonial food selections, especially regarding the preference for meat and animal products. The colonial assertion that ‘white is better’ (Dehgan, 2021) led populations in colonised nations to link meat consumption with notions of civilisation, progress, and social status. This cultural imposition established western dietary models in non-western

societies, displacing indigenous vegetarian and plant-based traditions that were previously central to community sustenance. Dehgan's analysis is essential for understanding the ideological foundations of dietary globalisation, illustrating how Western diets have come to represent cultural superiority, while indigenous diets have been pushed to the periphery of modernity. The research emphasised that in postcolonial contexts such as India, the symbolic consumption of meat persists as a representation of modern aspirations, associating food with power and social hierarchy.

Yang (2014) conducted an analysis of the influence of western diets on Chinese culinary practices, demonstrating the evolution of food culture through the integration of fast-food models and nutritional discussions. The introduction of Western dietary forms such as burgers and fries has shifted Chinese eating habits from communal, flavour-focused practices to individualised, time-efficient meals. Yang posited that this transformation signifies an ideological shift i.e. taste, previously central to Chinese culinary aesthetics has been replaced by Western principles of nutritional efficiency and consumer choice. The proliferation of fast-food culture has transformed dining practices and represents China's broader engagement with globalisation. Western food consumption emerged as a symbol of modern cosmopolitanism and a sign of cultural compromise.

Chakraborty (2020) linked broader global processes to the cultural dynamics of Northeast India, positioning Mizoram as a locus of intersection between Western and East Asian influences. The author examined the rise of Korean popular culture, particularly K-pop and Korean cuisine, as a significant factor in shaping contemporary youth identity in the region. The hosting of the North East Round of the K-Pop Contest India (2015) in Mizoram exemplified a significant shift, highlighting the active engagement with Korean aesthetics and culinary practices. The incorporation of kimchi, a fermented vegetable dish emblematic of Korean identity, into Mizo urban households and restaurants exemplifies a distinctive process of cultural translation, wherein global East Asian influences merge with local culinary preferences. Chakraborty posited that these culinary adaptations indicate a process of hybridisation rather than simple imitation, wherein the Mizos actively reinterpret modernity through novel cultural and gastronomic expressions.

Nair (2023) examined the role of youth-oriented urban markets in Northeast India as mediators of cultural globalisation, highlighting how the consumption of Western and Korean foods embodies both cosmopolitan aspirations and regional identity. Kim and Sato (2024) analysed comparable trends in Northeast Asia, highlighting the integration of Western dietary symbols with Asian soft power, especially via media and digital foodscapes.

The western influence on food habits in India and Northeast Asia illustrates a complex interaction among globalisation, colonial history and cultural adaptation. Historically, western diets have represented prestige and modernity. However, contemporary societies in Mizoram and East Asia reinterpret these influences through localisation and hybridisation. In this context, Westernisation is characterised not merely as imitation but as a creative negotiation that reshapes food cultures, identities, and everyday practices throughout the region.

This section examines literature that extends food studies beyond mere nutrients and behaviour, positioning it within a cultural framework where identity, power, and change are actively negotiated. Freeman (2006), Ying (2018), and Fischler (1988) illustrate that cuisine functions as a structured code for the reproduction of belonging, memory, and hierarchy. In contrast, Parveen (2016) and Shah (2018) reveal that culinary practice serves as a means of identity formation influenced by emotion, health, and morality. Douglas (1972), Pollan (2013), and Lupton (2020) analyse the kitchen as a site of morality and communication influenced by convenience culture and digital media. In contrast, Jackson and Viehoff (2016) and De Backer et al. (2021) emphasise the lasting symbolic significance of shared family meals. The sociologies of eating and taste, as discussed by Gronow (1997), Johnston and Baumann (2015), and Naccarato and LeBesco (2012), illustrate the transformation of taste into ‘culinary capital’ through the lenses of class, gender, and markets.

Additionally, recent research by Cairns and Johnston (2023) connects taste with moral and environmental awareness. Research by Jones (2007), Korsmeyer (2019), and McIntosh and Lim (2022) examines the ways in which food choice, ritual, and symbolism contribute to commensality, aesthetic display, and digital performances that moralise eating and reinforce social connections. Research on Indian society, including works by Srinivas (2011), Baviskar (2012), Gupta and Singh (2022), and

Ramaswamy and Patel (2024), positions food within the contexts of caste, religion, liberalisation, and sustainability.

In contrast, studies focused on the Mizo context, such as those by Dawar (2019), Ralte (2022), and Lianhmingsanga and Shyamkishor (2021), examine the enduring nature of rice-and-bai commensality in relation to the adoption of fast food, café culture, and health concerns. Research on Western influence, including the works of Leite (2011), Dehgan (2021), Yang (2014), Chakraborty (2020), and Nair (2023), reconceptualises “Westernisation” as hybridisation. This perspective illustrates how processed foods and status-associated meat ideals are disseminated through media and youth markets while simultaneously being adapted to fit regional tastes and moral frameworks. These themes collectively frame food studies as an interdisciplinary exploration of meaning and infrastructure, enabling the current study to address significant gaps in Northeast India by connecting quantitative patterns with ethnographic perspectives from both urban and rural Mizoram. This review demonstrates that food transcends mere sustenance, serving as a reflection of culture, identity, and social transformation. Collectively, these studies explain the ways in which individuals utilise food as a means of self-expression, adaptation to contemporary life, and the integration of tradition with emerging influences.

In conclusion, this thematic analysis reveals that Western influence on food habits operates through a dynamic interplay of aspiration, adaptation, and identity reconstruction. Rather than a uniform process of imitation, the diffusion of Western dietary models has produced diverse outcomes shaped by local histories, social hierarchies, and cultural negotiations. Across global and regional contexts, Western foods signify modernity, progress, and social mobility, yet their incorporation into local diets reflects creative reinterpretation rather than cultural loss. In the case of Mizoram and Northeast India, these influences intersect with East Asian trends and youth culture, resulting in hybrid foodscapes that blend global consumption patterns with indigenous sensibilities. The section thus underscores that Westernisation in food culture is not merely a matter of taste transformation but a reflection of broader social change, where eating becomes a site for expressing modern identities while retaining local meanings and values.

2.5. Overview

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature to understand the various dimensions explored by previous scholars and the key arguments they have developed. This chapter provided a comprehensive review of literature to situate the study within existing academic discussions, trace methodological traditions, and identify thematic concerns that inform research on food and culture. Classified into theoretical, methodological and thematic segments, the review demonstrates how the study of food has evolved into a multi-disciplinary field that draws from sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and beyond. The review has guided the conceptualisation of the present study by identifying the theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and thematic concerns most relevant to the research objectives. Through this process, the study achieves a deeper understanding of the subject matter and identifies existing gaps that warrant further exploration. Accordingly, the literature in this chapter has been organised into three primary sections: the theoretical review, the methodological review, and the thematic review. Below is a summary of each section presented through three tables. The initial table presents a summary of the theoretical perspectives examined, highlighting their main concepts and significant contributors.

Table 2.1. An overview of Theoretical Perspective

Theory	Theorist	Key Ideas / Applications in Food Studies
Functionalism	Bronislaw Malinowski (1939); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1940s); Audrey Richards (1939); Richards & Widdowson (1939); Hasty et al. (2022); Nagla (2020); Deborah Lupton (1996); Jack Goody (1982)	(1) Every cultural practice, including food, serves a social function that maintains equilibrium. (2) Rituals and sharing strengthen cooperation and solidarity. (3) Food production and consumption link kinship, gender, and social order. (4) Everyday meals and ceremonies reinforce emotional bonds and social stability. (5) Modern food systems continue to reflect hierarchy and cohesion while adapting to change.

Structuralism	Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969); Mary Douglas (1972, 1975); Roland Barthes (1961, 2008); Claude Fischler (1990); Jack Goody (1982)	(1) Food transformations (raw-cooked-rotten) express the nature-culture relationship. (2) Meal rules and taboos communicate social order and purity. (3) Food acts as a system of signs conveying ideology and identity. (4) Cultural classifications and norms shape belonging and adaptation to modernity. (5) Food symbolism and class distinctions reproduce social hierarchy.
Structural Marxism	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Karl Marx (as interpreted by Tucker, 1978)	(1) Taste and consumption reflect and reproduce class distinctions. (2) Food preferences are socially structured by habitus and capital. (3) Control of food production and distribution reproduces inequality. (4) Commodification of food under capitalism alienates both producers and consumers.
Theory of McDonaldization	George Ritzer (1993); Ritzer & Malone (2000); Max Weber (1921)	(1) Fast-food principles—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—dominate modern institutions. (2) Globalization standardizes food production and consumption while encouraging local adaptations. (3) Rationalization shapes contemporary eating habits, convenience culture, and consumer identity.
Theory of the Leisure Class	Thorstein Veblen (1899); Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Johnston & Baumann (2010)	(1) Introduced “conspicuous consumption” to display wealth and refinement through food. (2) Linked culinary taste to class reproduction and social prestige. (3) Modern gourmet and ethical food trends act as moral and cultural markers of distinction.
Bourdieu’s Theory of Habitus	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Ehlert (2021)	(1) Habitus shapes food preferences through internalised class dispositions. (2) “Taste of necessity” and “taste of luxury” reproduce class hierarchy. (3) Food, body, and gender practices express embodied social distinctions in modern contexts.
Food as Gift and Reciprocity	Marcel Mauss (1925); Mary Douglas (1972); Counihan (1999); Wilk (2012); Carolan (2016); Sarmiento (2017); Hawkins & Kuntsman (2021)	(1) Food sharing creates obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate, building social and moral bonds. (2) Meal structures define inclusion and hierarchy within communities. (3) Reciprocity persists through communal and digital food exchanges. (4) Alternative food networks renew social connection and ethical exchange.

Symbolic Interactionism	George H. Mead (1934); Herbert Blumer (1969); Claude Fischler (1988); Deborah Lupton (1996); Alan Warde (2016); Lotte Holm (2023)	(1) Food meanings emerge through interaction and shared symbols. (2) Eating practices express identity, belonging, and moral order. (3) Food labels such as “healthy” or “guilty” are socially constructed. (4) Globalisation and digital media reshape shared understandings of food and identity.

The theories reviewed above offer diverse frameworks for understanding how food functions within social and cultural life. The theoretical review examined a wide range of perspectives that have framed food studies. Functionalism, through the works of Durkheim, Malinowski, and Richards, emphasized food’s role in maintaining social systems and ritual order, though it often overlooked questions of change and conflict. Structuralism, developed by Levi-Strauss, Barthes, and Douglas, shifted attention toward cuisine and the symbolic meanings embedded in cooking and taste, highlighting food as a socially constructed system of signs. Structural-Marxism, particularly in Bourdieu’s analysis, reoriented the discussion to class, taste, and consumption as markers of social distinction. Other important frameworks such as Ritzer’s McDonaldization, Veblen’s leisure class, Bourdieu’s habitus, and theories of gift and reciprocity further illustrated how food is tied to processes of globalization, conspicuous consumption, social conditioning, and cultural exchange. Taken together, these theories underscore the need for multi-theoretical approaches that capture both continuity and transformation in food practices.

Functionalist perspectives, as developed by Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Richards, emphasize that food practices fulfil essential social and emotional roles, fostering solidarity and maintaining social order. Structuralist thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, and Barthes interpret food as a symbolic system through which societies express hierarchy, purity, and identity, while Structural Marxist approaches led by Bourdieu and Marx highlight how food preferences, production, and consumption are embedded in structures of class and inequality. Ritzer’s theory of McDonaldization, rooted in Weber’s notion of rationalization, illustrates how global fast-food systems transform traditional eating habits through efficiency, uniformity, and control. Likewise, Veblen’s and Bourdieu’s analyses of conspicuous consumption reveal how culinary taste and dining practices mark class distinction and cultural

prestige. Bourdieu's concept of habitus further explains how food choices reflect internalised dispositions shaped by social background, while Mauss and Douglas's ideas on food as gift and reciprocity demonstrate that sharing and exchange sustain moral and social bonds across both traditional and modern societies. Finally, the symbolic interactionist view, developed by Mead, Blumer, Fischler, and Lupton, underscores the meanings people attach to food through social interaction and how these meanings evolve with globalisation and digital media. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a holistic understanding of food as both a material necessity and a medium of social communication, identity, and power, forming the conceptual foundation for the present study.

The following table presents a summary of the research methods adopted by various authors in studying food in the field of academia and its key contribution to food studies done.

Table 2.2 An Overview of the Methodological Review

Methods Used	Authors	Focus of Study / Key Contributions
Ethnographies	Audrey Richards (1939); Mintz & Du Bois (2002); Trankell (1995); Counihan (1999); Kemmer (2000); Sutton (2001); De Solier (2013); Long (2010); Wilk (2012)	1) Linked food with kinship, labour, and gender roles. 2) Reviewed ethnographic methods and field immersion in food studies. 3) Showed food practices mirror moral order and hierarchy. 4) Highlighted women's foodwork as identity and power expression. 5) Examined domestic cooking as care and connection. 6) Connected memory, emotion, and food through sensory ethnography. 7) Analysed globalisation and consumer identity in modern food culture.
Oral Histories & Interviewing	Parveen (2016); Raina, Rana & Thakur (2019); Counihan (1999); Lupton (1996)	1) Recorded women's oral recipes and migrant food traditions. 2) Captured changing consumption and convenience food trends. 3) Used life histories to reveal women's identity and memory through food. 4) Explored emotional and moral meanings in personal food narratives.
Participant Observation	Farquhar (2002); Gillette (2000); Berry (2003); Rotenberg (1981)	1) Observed Chinese dietary practices linking food, health, and pleasure. 2) Studied markets and dining to trace food's social meanings. 3) Reviewed ethnographies emphasising sensory and moral dimensions. 4) Linked industrialisation to changing household eating habits.

Survey	Basu et al. (1987); Khan & Nasir (2013); Wandel & Bugge (1997); Grunert (2005); Kearney (2010); Pieniak et al. (2016)	1) Surveyed ethnic food habits in West Bengal. 2) Compared rural-urban food consumption patterns. 3) Assessed gendered awareness of healthy and sustainable diets. 4) Analysed food quality and safety perceptions in Europe. 5) Tracked global food trends using FAO and EU data. 6) Evaluated attitudes toward traditional food in rural contexts.
Analytical Frameworks	Counihan (1999); Warde (1997); Mintz (1985); Fischler (2011); Guthman (2019)	1) Applied feminist anthropology to gender and food. 2) Used sociology to study class and consumption. 3) Traced sugar and trade through historical-materialist analysis. 4) Combined sociology and psychology to explain food identity. 5) Applied political ecology to ethical food and inequality.

Based on the information shown in the table above, it is possible to draw the conclusion that academics and researchers working in the subject of food studies have used a wide variety of methodological techniques in order to get an understanding of food as its social and cultural manifestations. One of the most important aspects of ethnography is that it enables researchers such as Richards, Counihan, and Sutton to investigate eating behaviours within the context of family, gender, and daily life via the use of field immersion and participant observation. The use of oral histories and interviews has been used to record lived experiences, information passed down from generation to generation, and the emotional implications that are associated with food, particularly in settings that are centred on women and migrants. This is further developed via the use of participant observation, which was adopted by Farquhar and Gillette. This method places researchers into food situations in order to capture the sensory, moral, and symbolic components of eating. Quantitative insights into consumption patterns, health perceptions, and socio-economic variables that shape food choices across areas and people may be obtained via surveys, on the other hand. Last but not least, analytical frameworks such as feminist anthropology, sociology, and political ecology provide interpretative complexity by establishing a connection between eating habits and issues of class, power, and ethics. These methodologies, when taken as a whole, are representative of a methodical integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches that elevate academic research in the field of food studies and make it possible to get a comprehensive knowledge of the ways in which food influences and is influenced by social life. The methodological review traced the

research strategies scholars have adopted to explore food culture. Ethnography emerged as a cornerstone, from Richards’ classic studies to later works in Thailand, China, and Austria, offering deep insights into food in its natural setting. Oral histories, interviews, and participant observation provided tools to capture lived experiences, recipes, and symbolic meanings attached to food across generations and cultural contexts. Surveys and mixed-method approaches complemented qualitative insights, revealing broader consumption patterns. These diverse methodologies collectively highlight how food studies demand approaches that are sensitive to both cultural meaning and social structures.

These diverse methodologies collectively highlight how food studies demand approaches that are sensitive to both cultural meaning and social structures. The following table provides an overview of the thematic review, summarising the key areas of scholarship that inform this study and their relevance to the sociocultural analysis of food.

Table 2.3. An overview of the thematic review

Theme	Authors	Themes emphasized
Culturing food, culinary practices and cultural identity	Freeman (2006) Ying (2018) Fischler (1988) Parveen (2016) Shah (2018) Kelly & Morar (2018) Motta (2021)	Food reflects social structure, values, and collective identity through ritualised cultural expression. Cuisine as a structured part of culture Culinary diversity connects and divides communities, showing how food marks cultural boundaries. Culinary differences and alienation. Introduced the “omnivore’s paradox” to explain how eating practices construct personal and collective identity. Food and the eater’s identity Demonstrated how cooking traditional dishes preserves identity and memory among immigrants. Culinary practices in diaspora. Identified how different eating identities reflect health behaviour and cultural values. Eating identity types and dietary behaviour. Explored how changes in eating habits signal shifts in cultural values and social identity. Dining norms and identity change Highlighted cultural inequality in global food systems and its role in shaping identity and social change. Food systems, inequality, and culture.

Culture, Kitchen and Eating pattern of family	Pollan (2013) Douglas (1972) Lee et al. (2014) Jackson & Viehoff (2016) Ochs & Shohet (2020) Lupton (2020) De Backer et al. (2021)	Critiques industrialised food systems and the cultural loss of kitchen-based cooking and togetherness. Decline of home cooking and rise of convenience culture Analysed meals as cultural codes reflecting order, hierarchy, and moral systems. Symbolism and structure of family meals Found that regular family dinners correlate with healthier eating and stronger family bonds. Family meals and adolescent health Explored how modern families negotiate mealtime amidst work and media influences. Re-evaluation of modern family dining. Showed how cooking and eating conversations reproduce gender, care, and intimacy norms. Kitchen talk and domestic socialisation. Examined how technology and social media reshape home cooking and kitchen identity. Digital kitchens and mediated food practices Analysed European household meal patterns, linking cooking to cultural values of care and togetherness. Cross-cultural family meal patterns.
Sociology of food and eating and the role of taste	Ward, Coveney & Henderson (2010) Murcott (2019) Beardsworth et al. (1997) Gronow (1997) Johnston & Baumann (2015) Naccarato & LeBesco (2012) Cairns & Johnston (2023)	Expanded the sociological scope of food to include identity, market dynamics, and cultural meanings. Sociology of food as a field beyond health Advocated for critical, relational, and reflexive approaches to studying food and society. Food as a cultural and relational practice Examined how industrialisation and urban life influence “eating out” and dining habits. Food, urbanisation, and modern eating habits Analysed taste as a social and class-based construct influenced by fashion and consumption. Taste and class distinction Investigated how gourmet and ethical eating practices create new hierarchies of taste. Cultural sociologists focusing on food and inequality. Proposed “culinary capital” as a new form of social distinction in the global foodscape. Analysed how sustainability and ethical diets redefine taste and social responsibility. Taste, morality, and sustainability

Food Choice, Eating Rituals and Symbolism	Jones (2007) Nestle et al. (1998) Beardsworth & Keil (1997) Rozin et al. (2011) Fischler (2011) Korsmeyer (2019) Rokach (2020) McIntosh & Lim (2022) Savini & Joubert (2023) Mizdrak et al. (2024)	1) Eating reflects gendered morality and identity 2) Family, media, and environment shape dietary patterns 3) Urbanization and class reshape taste and food culture 4) Cultural differences in moralising food choices 5) Shared meals foster trust, inclusion, and identity 6) Taste as cultural and ethical expression 7) Shared meals express emotional and cultural continuity 8) Online sharing and food challenges reshape rituals 9) TikTok rituals aestheticize and moralize eating 10) Shared meals promote health and connectedness
Food as fashion	Johnston & Baumann (2015) Naccarato & LeBesco (2012) Abrahams (2020) Kim (2021) Yue (2022) De Solier (2013) Featherstone (2007) Bourdieu (1984) Han & Yan (2019) Brewis & Wutich (2020)	food choices serve as markers of cultural expression and social distinction, allowing people to signal taste, lifestyle, and identity. food contains “culinary capital,” enabling individuals to express identity, status, and style much like fashion commodities. Trend foods & youth identity Korean/East Asian foods & modernity Visual media, aesthetics & food Food, self-branding & lifestyle curation Aestheticization of everyday life taste as an expression of social class and cultural capital; thus, fashionable foods signal class position and worldliness. Youth identity & global food trends Inequality in trend-based food culture

Indian society and food	Srinivas (2011) Baviskar (2012) Shukla (2015) Bourdain (2014) Kikon (2020) Gupta & Singh (2022) Sarma (2023) Ramaswamy & Patel (2024) Nair (2025)	Food reflects regional and caste diversity in India Urbanisation and commodification shape food habits Vegetarianism as moral and religious code India as model for rich vegetarian food culture Food taboos and dominance as instruments of power Politics and power of food Urban middle-class fusion and café culture Globalisation and fusion cuisines Culinary tourism and media in heritage-making Regional identity and media Organic markets and revival of local food systems Sustainability and ethical food movements Social media as platform for culinary diplomacy Digital mediation of Indian cuisine
Mizo society and food	Dawar (2019) Jacob (2020) Lalnunthara & Jyoti Kumar (2020) Ralte (2022) Lianhmingsanga & Shyamkishor (2021)	Shared meals (<i>Thlangra</i>) as expressions of unity; modernization of eating spaces; class stratification in access to restaurants. Mizo cuisine as distinct from Indian curry-based dishes; <i>bai</i> as emblem of cultural autonomy. Youth consumption of fast food; low health awareness; post-Maggi controversy behavior; modernization and health education needs. Food as a cultural archive; ritual, gender, and missionary influence; continuity through adaptation. Global cuisines and food trucks replacing traditional dishes; class and health divides; cultural negotiation through food.

Western impact on food habits	Leite (2011) Dehgan (2021) Yang (2014) Chakraborty (2020) Nair (2023) Kim & Sato (2024)	Urban daughters adopt western and packaged foods; “Americanization” linked to modern identity. Illustrates early patterns of urban preference for western diets. Western meat-based diets as colonial legacy symbolizing status and progress. Explains postcolonial taste hierarchies influencing Asian diets. Western fast-food reorients culinary priorities from flavor to nutrition and convenience. Demonstrates how fast-food culture transforms Asian meal practices. 4)K-pop and Korean food (e.g., kimchi) integrated into urban households; hybridization process. Shows regional adaptation of East Asian-Western cultural influences. Urban youth adopt western/Korean diets as cosmopolitan identity expression.) Connects food choice to modern identity politics.) Western foods integrated via digital and media influence.

This thematic review constitutes the foundational framework of the research, integrating essential literature that highlights the social, cultural, and symbolic aspects of food. This review serves as a solid foundation for the present study, analogous to the biblical metaphor of “*a house built on a bedrock*” (Matthew 7:24). A study grounded in robust scholarship can endure theoretical and empirical challenges, thereby ensuring depth, coherence, and resilience in its academic framework.

The initial theme, Culturing Food, Culinary Practices, and Cultural Identity, serves as the foundation by positioning food as a medium for expressing and preserving identity, belonging, and collective memory. These works demonstrate that cuisine functions as an organised cultural code, conveying heritage and social significance beyond mere nourishment. The second theme, Culture, Kitchen, and Eating Patterns of Family, emphasises the domestic aspect of food studies. This study illustrates how kitchens and mealtime practices reflect moral values, gender roles, and familial relationships, thereby framing the household as a microcosm of wider cultural and social transformations.

The third theme, Sociology of Food, Eating, and the Role of Taste, builds upon this foundation by analysing taste as a social construct and an indicator of class distinction. These studies demonstrate the influence of modernity, consumption, and global food trends on individual identities and social positions. The theme of Food Choice, Eating Rituals, and Symbolism introduces an additional structural dimension, emphasising the moral, emotional, and performative elements of eating. Food rituals function as expressions of individual preference while simultaneously promoting trust, connection, and the continuity of shared culture, even in digital and globalised environments.

The discussion on Indian Society and Food is contextualised within a broader socio-political framework, highlighting the intersections of caste, religion, and urbanisation that influence the politics of purity, identity, and contemporary consumption. This study examines Mizo Society and Food, emphasising Mizoram, where traditional dishes such as bai coexist with global cuisines, illustrating adaptation, resilience, and identity negotiation in a dynamic context. The theme of Western Impact on Food Habits concludes this foundation by illustrating how globalisation, colonial histories, and media cultures reshape regional diets and aspirations. These studies demonstrate the hybridity that characterises contemporary Mizoram, where Western and East Asian influences converge within local culinary contexts.

When taken as a whole, these themes provide not just a backdrop but a bedrock. a strong foundation that backs up the researcher's own investigation.

Overall, the chapter establishes that food is not merely biological sustenance but a dynamic cultural text, shaped by theory, explored through varied methods, and understood across diverse themes. By synthesizing these bodies of literature, the chapter not only maps the terrain of food studies but also identifies the conceptual and empirical gaps that the present research seeks to address.

2.6. Research gap and rationale for the study

- 1) The above studies do not explore the cultural connotations of food and its categories and thus the failure in capturing the cultural symbolism of food provide space for undertaking serious academic research in the field of food studies towards enrichment of sociological literature.
- 2) The common indices of culture such as language, ethnicity, religion, dance, folklore and folk heritage are acknowledged and signified not only by the

nation but also in the field of academia validating place identity and indigeneity. The indices of culture also include cuisine and food related rituals which needed to be acknowledged and validated in the field of serious academic research.

- 3) Most studies found in the domain of food studies talked about food and its relation to more health impacts and less about identity issues in various cultures. This has created the need for putting in grounded thoughts about food and its categories through the lens of sociological approach. Therefore, the proposed study tries to focus on the unfathomed areas.
- 4) In all societies around the world, it is significant to understand the social and cultural aspects of human life so as to acquire conscious living in our everyday life. Understanding culture through food habits is one of the most powerful tools available to the society. The proposed study thus tries to promote the significance of food habits among the Mizo so as to understand one's own culture.
- 5) A number of food studies done is largely seen in western literature both in theory and methodology. The inadequacy of food studies literature in India especially the Northeast India has been witnessed while reviewing the works of scholars working on food and its categories. Mizoram has its own culture and therefore the cultural identity, food habits and culinary practices need to be studied to deliver a well-grounded food study of the Mizos.
- 6) Methodological clarity is essential in food studies, yet such approaches are limited in works related to Mizoram. Although scholars like Counihan and Van Esterik (2013) stress the need to situate food within social and cultural contexts, studies in this region rarely employ frameworks that combine ethnographic sensitivity and interpretive analysis. Given Mizoram's distinct cultural setting, a focused qualitative approach is needed. This study uses an interview schedule to examine the symbolic and social construction of food practices, offering a more grounded methodological contribution to Mizo food studies.
- 7) Most existing studies have documented food habits primarily in terms of nutritional value or regional cuisines, but have not examined the cultural connotations and social symbolism of common food items, cooking styles, or

preservation techniques within Mizo households. The absence of such perspectives limits our understanding of food as a marker of cultural identity. This study fills this gap by exploring everyday Mizo foodways including commonly consumed items, traditional methods, and preservation systems to interpret food as a living cultural text rather than merely sustenance.

- 8) While feminist and anthropological works highlight women's roles in global and Indian food practices, there is little focus on intra-household gender roles and food-related labour among the Mizo, where Christian modernity and traditional norms intersect. Studies rarely link food preparation, decision-making, and emotional labour to broader social structures. The present research aims to understand how gender roles and domestic responsibilities are negotiated through cooking, serving, and eating, revealing how food becomes a medium for care, identity, and authority in Mizo households.
- 9) Most Indian food studies emphasize regional cuisines without addressing intra-state contrasts. In Mizoram, comparative data between urban and rural food practices especially regarding consumption frequency, market exposure, and ecological adaptation are almost absent. By comparing urban and rural households (Aizawl and Kolasib), this study aims to uncover the continuity and transformation of Mizo food culture across spatial and economic settings, highlighting how modernity interacts with indigenous food systems.
- 10) Although globalization, Westernization, and Korean influences are widely discussed, there is little documentation of how these foreign waves are internalized, resisted, or hybridized in Mizo foodways. Existing literature rarely considers media, café culture, or youth food trends as forces shaping cultural identity. The study investigates how foreign foods, fast foods, and digital influences are localized and reinterpreted within Mizo society, contributing to broader discussions on culinary hybridization and cultural negotiation in postcolonial contexts.
- 11) Current studies in Mizoram tend to focus on food culture descriptively, with minimal attention to the link between food habits and rising health awareness, especially amidst changing diets and lifestyles. The intersection of traditional diet, modern health perception, and moral values remains unexplored. The study seeks to examine how health consciousness influences food choices and

how individuals balance traditional diets with new conceptions of health, purity, and modern living.

Table 2.4. Research gap and rationale for the study

Sl No	Research Gap	Rationale
1.	Dearth of studies capturing the cultural symbolism of food.	To enrich sociological literature.
2.	Lack of scholarly attention on cuisine and food rituals as indigenous cultural practice.	Food and cuisine act as cultural indices in affirming cultural indigeneity.
3.	Lack of focus on cultural identity in existing food studies.	There is a need for grounded, identity-focused analysis from a sociological lens.
4.	Limited research on Mizo cultural identity through food.	To establish the significance and nuances of food habits in Mizo society and culture.
5.	West-centric studies both theoretically and methodologically.	Need for study in India, the Northeast, and Mizoram.
6.	Limited methodological clarity in identifying Mizo cultural identity through food culture.	To implement a grounded qualitative approach suitable for exploring Mizo cultural identity through food culture.
7.	Lack of focus on cultural connotations and social symbolism of food.	To interpret food as a living cultural text and a marker of unique Mizo identity.
8.	Little focus on intra-household gender roles, decision-making, and food-related division of labour amidst Christian modernity.	To understand how gender roles and domestic responsibilities get negotiated, revealing, food as a medium for care and authority.
9.	Absence of comparative data between urban and rural food practices within Mizoram. Minimal attention to the link between food habits and rising health awareness.	To uncover the continuity and transformation of food culture across different spatial and economic settings. To examine how health consciousness influences food choices and related practices.
10.	Lack of documentation and analysis on how Globalization, Westernization, and Korean culture influence on Mizo food.	To investigate culinary hybridization and cultural negotiation through the localization of foreign trends.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 The objectives of the study**
- 3.3 The Research Design**
- 3.4 The universe and sample**
- 3.5 Principle of exclusion and inclusion**
- 3.6 Operationalization of concepts**
- 3.7 Sources of Data**
- 3.8 Pilot Study**
- 3.9 Interview Schedule**
- 3.10 Field Experiences**
- 3.11 Analysis of the data**
- 3.12 Research ethics**
- 3.13 Limitations of the study**

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in the present study regarding the emerging Mizo food culture. Methodology defined as the systematic plan for research serves as the blueprint that guides the approach to the research questions as well as the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The purpose of this chapter is to serve as the foundation that ensures the academic precision, coherence and validity of the study. This section goes into more detail about the research questions, design, sampling methods, data collection tools, operational definitions of key concepts and ethical concerns that guide the whole research process. Understanding a study's methodology is crucial to its credibility and replicability. Silverman (2013) asserts that methodology is more than a set of techniques. It is a reflective practice that aligns the research design with the epistemological stance and nature of inquiry. In qualitative research, where context and meaning are important, methodological choices must be planned and connected to the cultural and social characteristics of the population being studied. Creswell & Poth (2018) declare that a well-structured methodology allows researchers to derive meaningful inferences from rich, contextual data while also ensuring that the employed tools and techniques are ethically sound and suitable for the research context.

This chapter encompasses the key methodological components of the study, namely the objectives of the study, research design, universe and sampling method, principle of exclusion and inclusion, sources of data, pilot study, interview schedule, research experience and data collection procedure, operationalization of concepts, classification and tabulation of data, analysis of data, research ethics and limitations of the study.

Since food is a cultural expression as well as a biological necessity, studying it necessitates an immersion in customs, memories and interpersonal relationships. As a result, the methodology that was chosen for this study is not only a useful tool but also a philosophical stance that considers food to be a lens through which one can examine identity, history and social change.

In light of the research gap and rationale outlined in the preceding section, the present study formulates the following objectives to provide a clear direction for investigating the cultural, social, and dietary dimensions of Mizo food practices. These objectives served as the guiding compass throughout the entire process of conducting the research and informed each methodological choice that was made.

3.2 The objectives of the study

This section outlines the specific objectives that the study seeks to achieve in order to provide a focused direction for the research and to guide the inquiry further.

- 1) To prepare a socio-economic profile of the sample respondents.
- 2) To study the urban-rural differentiation in relation to food culture such as their contemporary food norms and rituals regarding food consumption, cooking styles, dietary habits, food choice, eating practices, food preservation techniques and food hygiene in Mizoram.
- 3) To analyze the food related domestic division of labor and gender roles within household structures.
- 4) To examine the shaping and negotiation of Mizo cultural identity through the symbolic meanings of food, culture content of food, fashion substance, external and global influences, cultural exchange, and the ways households reconcile with changing food dynamics.

These objectives serve as the conceptual foundation of the study and directly determine the choices regarding method that are chosen in the next section on Research Design. In the following paragraphs, the overall qualitative approach and the rationale for its adoption are discussed in detail.

3.3 The Research Design

A research design serves as the structural framework or logical blueprint of a study. It systematically outlines the process for data collection, measurement, and analysis, ensuring that the research remains organised and coherent from beginning to end. According to Kothari (2004), a research design refers to the arrangement of conditions for collecting and analysing data in a manner that aims to combine relevance with the research purpose. It therefore helps the researcher make informed decisions about *what, where, when, how much, and by what means* a study will be conducted. A sound research design is essential to ensure that the findings are valid, reliable and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) emphasise that research design involves more than the technical aspects of data collection; it also reflects the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and the nature of the research problem. In qualitative and mixed-method studies, the design is flexible, evolving as the researcher gains deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This flexibility is particularly useful in social research where cultural, symbolic, and behavioural dimensions such as food practices and meanings are being explored.

For the purpose of this investigation, an exploratory-cum-descriptive research design has been employed. The study seeks to investigate the underexplored dimensions of Mizo foodways while also offering a comprehensive description of contemporary household food practices. The exploratory design is appropriate when the research problem lacks clear definition and when the goal is to gain new insights or understanding (Stebbins, 2001). This design was particularly suited for the present study, which aims to explore everyday food habits, cultural meanings, and symbolic associations attached to food among the Mizo community. The descriptive design, on the other hand, is useful for systematically presenting observed practices and social behaviours. It allows the researcher to document in detail how food is prepared, consumed, and symbolically understood in different domestic and cultural settings.

In accordance with the objectives, the study has been adopted largely qualitative and partly simple descriptive quantitative research techniques. While the qualitative component forms the primary orientation of the study, quantitative data have been used to supplement and strengthen the overall analysis. The qualitative aspect employed participant observation, unstructured interviews, and thematic analysis as core research techniques to capture the symbolic meanings, social dynamics, and everyday realities surrounding food in Mizo households. The quantitative data, on the other hand, were used to tabulate demographic information, household structures, and basic consumption patterns using excel sheet.

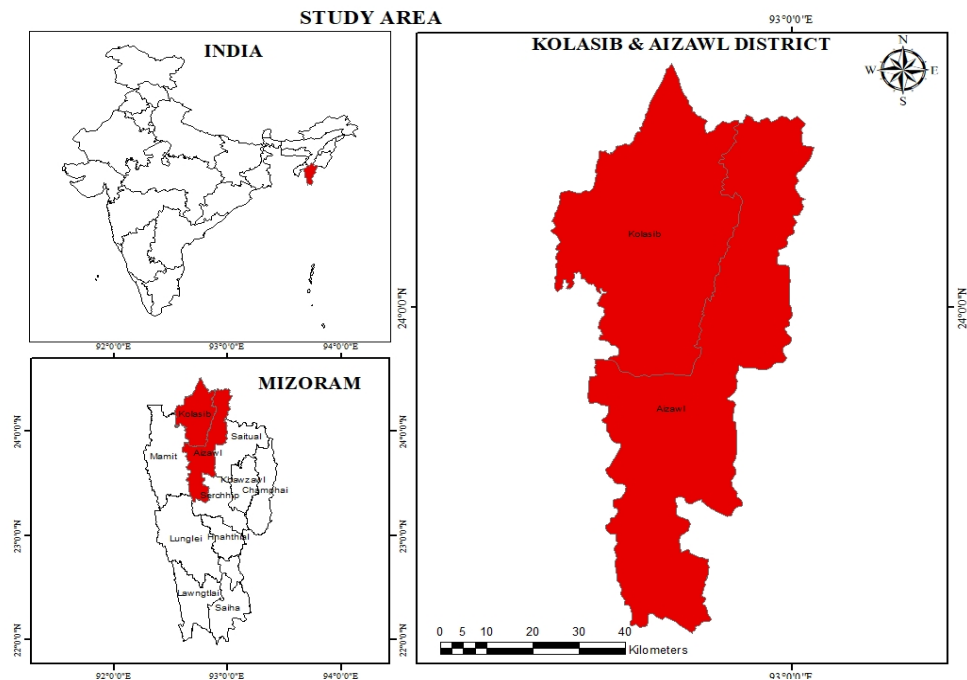
In summary, the exploratory-cum-descriptive design, supported by largely qualitative approach, was most appropriate for examining Mizo food culture in a holistic and context-sensitive manner. It allows the study to integrate empirical detail with cultural interpretation, producing a multifaceted understanding of food both as a material necessity and a symbol identity element within Mizo society.

3.4 The universe and sample

The population or Universe represents the entire group of units which is the focus of the study. Universe consists of all the elements that is qualified for inclusion in the research study. Sample refers to a group of people, objects or items that are taken from a larger population for measurement. Such sample should be representative of the population. The term *universe* refers to the total number of items or elements in any field of inquiry that form the focus of a study, while *sample* refers to a subset of that universe from which information is actually collected. Kothari & Garg (2024) define a universe as the entire population containing all items under consideration in any field of research, whereas a sample is a finite part of the statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole. The purpose of sampling is to obtain a representative portion of the population that can yield reliable and valid results while remaining manageable within available time and resources.

For the present study, the state of Mizoram forms the universe. Mizoram, located in the northeastern part of India, is bordered by Myanmar in the east and south, Bangladesh in the west, and the Indian states of Tripura, Assam, and Manipur in the north. The name *Mizoram* is derived from *Mi* (people), *Zo* (hill or highland), and *Ram* (land), thus meaning “Land of the Hill People.” According to the Census of India (2011), Mizoram has a total population of 1,091,014, making it the second least populous state in India (Government of Mizoram, 2021). The state is predominantly inhabited by the Mizo people, known for their strong sense of community, egalitarian social structure, and distinctive cultural practices.

Fig. 3.1. Map of Mizoram



Source: Author

The sampling frame for this research employed a multi-stage purposive quota sampling technique, chosen to reach a population that is specifically relevant to the research objectives. This method was adopted to capture variations across urban and rural contexts, ensuring the inclusion of diverse socio-economic and cultural settings in the analysis of Mizo food practices.

At the first stage, out of the 11 districts, two districts of Mizoram namely Aizawl and Kolasib districts have been purposively chosen for the proposed study to represent the universe i.e., Mizoram based on their contrasting demographic, spatial, and cultural profiles. Aizawl, being the capital and most urbanised district lies at an altitude of 1,132 metres above sea level and is bounded by the Tlawng and Tuirial river valleys. According to the Census of India (2011), it is the most populous district and represents the urban core of Mizoram. In contrast, Kolasib district is an administrative district of Mizoram and it is located in the northern part of Mizoram. According to 2011 census, the population of Kolasib district constitutes 83,955. Kolasib District is located in the northern part of the state, bordering the districts of Cachar and Hailakandi in Assam and North Tripura in the west. With a population of 83,955 (Census of India, 2011),

it represents a semi-urban, agriculturally rich region and offers a comparative perspective to Aizawl's urban influence.

The selection of Aizawl and Kolasib districts was guided by the need to capture contrasting socio-cultural and geographical settings within Mizoram. Aizawl District, being the largest and most urbanised, was purposively selected because it serves as the capital, administrative centre, 2. Located in the northern part of the state, Kolasib shares borders with Cachar and Hailakandi districts of Assam to the north and northwest and with Tripura to the west. Its proximity to the inter-state borders exposes it to cross-cultural influences from the neighbouring plains of Assam and Tripura, which have impacted local diets and food preferences. Kolasib's mixed socio-economic character combining rural agricultural dependence with emerging urban settlements offers a valuable comparative context to Aizawl's metropolitan food culture.

At the second stage, each district was classified into urban and rural categories following the official classification provided by the Census of India (2011). According to the Census framework, *urban areas* include all statutory towns, those with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board, or notified town area committee and census towns identified by three demographic and occupational parameters: (i) a minimum population of 5,000; (ii) at least 75 percent of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and (iii) a population density of not less than 400 persons per square kilometre (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). In contrast, *rural areas* comprise all settlements that do not meet these criteria and are typically administered by Village Councils under the Rural Development framework (Planning Commission, 2014).

Based on this classification, Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban, both statutory towns were selected as the *urban study sites*, while two villages from each district were chosen as *rural sites*. From Aizawl District, Sihphir and Lungleng were selected, and from Kolasib District, Thingdawl and Pangbalkawn were identified as rural sites. These areas fall under the *rural category* because they do not meet the Census parameters for urban classification. Their populations remain below the 5,000 thresholds, their occupational structure is predominantly agrarian, and they are governed by Village Councils rather than municipal bodies.

The third stage involved the selection of localities and villages within each district. In the urban context, ten localities were chosen from each district capital, five centrally located (more developed) and five peripherals (less developed) to capture socio-economic and infrastructural variation within the urban sphere. For the rural component, one core and one peripheral village were chosen from each district, based on three parameters:

i) distance from the district capital, ii) accessibility and transportation, and iii) availability of basic infrastructure such as health and education facilities.

Accordingly, Sihphir and Lungleng villages were selected from Aizawl District while Thingdawl and Pangbalkawn villages were chosen from Kolasib District for rural sites. All four villages are officially recognised as *rural settlements* under the Census of India (2011) and are administered by respective Village Councils. These areas embody the traditional and agrarian character of rural Mizoram, where food habits are closely linked to agricultural cycles, communal labour, and indigenous culinary practices. The selection of Sihphir, Lungleng, Thingdawl, and Pangbalkawn as rural sites is supported by the Census of India (2011). *Lungleng I*, located in Tlangnuam Block of Aizawl District, is a medium-sized village with 152 households and a population of 791 individuals (402 males and 389 females). *North Lungleng* (N. Lungleng) has 152 households and a population of 686 (358 males and 328 females). *Sihphir* has a total working population of 3,175, of whom 87.06 percent are engaged in main work, with 303 cultivators and 1,684 agricultural labourers. In Kolasib District, *North Thingdawl* comprises 688 households and a population of 3,111 (1,581 males and 1,530 females), while *Pangbalkawn* has 162 households and a population of 792 (427 males and 365 females). These figures affirm their rural character, with economies grounded in agriculture and allied rural activities.

At the final stage, out of the two districts earmarked for the study, samples collection has been done based on convenient sampling. In Aizawl district, the sample taken is 100 households from urban area; 50 households from one core village and 50 households from one peripheral village and thus constituting 200 households from Aizawl in total, the capital of Mizoram. On the other hand, the sample taken in Kolasib district is 100 households from urban area which is the district capital and 50 households from one core village and another 50 households from one peripheral village and thus comprising of 200 households from Kolasib district. Therefore, 400

households were purposively selected across all sites. The households were chosen based on their willingness to participate and representativeness across socio-economic categories, family composition, and gender roles. This four-stage purposive sampling process ensured representativeness of both *urban and rural Mizo households*, enabling a comparative understanding of food consumption, preparation, and cultural practices across spatial contexts. The approach also aligns with Bhagat's (2011) framework of urbanisation patterns in India, which emphasises the importance of studying local variations within smaller states like Mizoram. This multi-stage approach adopted for this study can thus be summarised as follows:

Table 3.1: Multi-stage purposive quota sampling procedure

Stages of Sampling 	MIZORAM (Universe)							
1st stage: Selection of districts	AIZAWL				KOLASIB			
2nd Stage: Urban-Rural Classification (Census 2011)	URBAN -District Capital -Aizawl town		RURAL -Village classified as rural by Census		URBAN -District Capital -Kolasib town		RURAL -Village classified as rural by Census	
3rd Stage: Selection of Localities/ Villages	5 Peripheral localities	5 centrally located localities	Sihphir	Lungleng	5 Peripheral localities	5 centrally located localities	Pangbalkawn	Thingdawl
4th Stage: Selection of households	50 households	50 households	50 households	50 households	50 households	50 households	50 households	50 households
Total Households	400							

3.5 Principle of exclusion and inclusion

For the purpose of the present proposed study, the state of Mizoram constituted the universe. Out of the 11 districts, two districts namely Aizawl and Kolasib have been purposively included in the study. Aizawl served as the state capital and the cultural

hub, while Kolasib had locational advantages and convenience as it was situated in close proximity to the borders of Mizoram. The remaining nine districts were excluded from the study.

Within the included two districts, two urban area and four rural areas from both the districts are included for the study, and the remaining villages will be excluded. The inclusion of villages for the proposed study will be done based on three parameters- distance from the district capital, ease of transportation and availability of health facilities.

The sample inclusion, based on multi-stage purposive convenience sampling, covered 100 households from the urban area, 50 households from one core village, and 50 households from one peripheral village, thereby constituting 200 households from Aizawl District. Similarly, 100 households from one urban area, 50 households from one core village, and 50 households from one peripheral village were included from Kolasib District, thus constituting another 200 households. In total, the study covered two districts, two urban areas, and four villages (two core villages and two peripheral villages). The total sample included for the study comprised 400 households, while the remaining urban and rural areas were excluded from the research.

For the purpose of review of literature, the inclusion of reviewed literatures is done on the basis of availability and accessibility. No literature is excluded intentionally for the proposed study. The exclusion of literature is only possible for either due to non-availability or non-accessibility.

3.6 Operationalization of concepts

For this research, several terminologies are used. The terminologies such as rural-urban, food culture, Food Norms, Rituals, Food Consumption, Cooking styles, Dietary habits, Food Choice, culinary practice, Food hygiene, Gender Roles, Cultural identity, Cultural Content of Food, Fashion Substance, External and Global Influences, Cultural Exchange, Foodways, Domestic division of labour and Food habits are put into use in this research as based concepts and has been operationalized as below:

Rural-urban: The term “rural-urban” describes how rural and urban areas are interconnected with variations in work, settlement and lifestyle rapidly blending together rather than existing as distinct divisions. It emphasises how, despite variations in population and access to resources, communities can share social,

economic and physical characteristics. In this study, the term rural-urban refers to the categorisation of the selected field sites based on their administrative and settlement characteristics. Urban denotes the district capitals of Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban, where population density, infrastructural development, and access to markets are comparatively higher. Rural refers to the selected villages namely Thingdawl, Pangbalkawn, Lungleng, and Sihphir, characterised by smaller settlements, community-based food practices, and relatively limited access to urban food systems. This distinction is used to analyse variations in food habits, culinary practices and cultural expressions across different spatial contexts.

Food-culture: Food culture includes the collective beliefs, behaviours, and traditions related to the production, preparation, and consumption of food within a community. It symbolises group identity through rituals, social norms, ingredients, and culinary techniques influenced by cultural and environmental influences. In this study, food culture refers to an umbrella concept that encompasses all dimensions of food. It includes the collective values, meanings, and everyday practices through which Mizos select, prepare, distribute, and consume food. This involves cooking methods, preferred ingredients, shared cultural beliefs, and the social settings in which food is produced, eaten, celebrated, and used to express group identity and social connections.

Foodways: In social research, the term foodways is often used. The Encyclopedia of Human Nutrition (Third Edition), 2013 described foodways as the eating habits and culinary practices of people, regions, or historical periods. In this research, foodways refers to eating habits, culinary practices including the food items consumed, food preparation method, dietary pattern, preservation technique and cooking styles.

Food Norms: Food norms are culturally influenced expectations around the what, how, when, and with whom of food consumption. They function as implicit guidelines directing food selections, meal routines, and quotidian eating practices. In this study, food norms refer to the socially constructed expectations that guide how, what, when, and with whom food is consumed in Mizo society. These unwritten rules shape everyday meal structures, acceptable ingredients, table manners, portioning, and shared eating practices. They are understood as learned behaviours passed down through families and communities, and are operationalised through respondents' accounts of routine eating patterns, household rules around food, and culturally accepted ways of preparing and sharing meals.

Rituals: A ritual is a customary ceremonial or repeated action carried out by a social group and has symbolic, psychological, and social importance. In this study, rituals refer to the culturally embedded food-related practices observed within Mizo society during significant social, religious, and communal occasions. These include customary dishes, preparation rules, and collective eating behaviours that express belonging, continuity, and shared cultural memory. Rituals are operationalised through respondents' descriptions of festival foods, ceremonial meals, and traditional practices that link food with spiritual meaning, social identity, and community bonding.

Food Consumption: Food consumption is the act of eating and drinking to obtain food and energy, which is influenced by cultural, societal, economic, and individual factors. It reflects both biological demands and broader societal norms. In this study, food consumption refers to the everyday patterns through which individuals and households prepare and eat their meals. It includes the frequency of daily meal preparation, the types of food commonly consumed during morning, lunch, and dinner, and the regularity with which particular food items appear in the diet. Dimensions such as consumption frequency patterns and commonly eaten categories, vegetables, meats, fruits, beverages, and staple combinations are used to understand the pattern, structure, and variety of dietary practices across the rural and urban study areas.

Cooking styles: Cooking styles refer to the methods used to prepare food using heat, which are often classified as dry, moist, or mixed. These techniques influence a dish's flavour, texture, and nutritional content, and they frequently differ among cultures and places. In this study, cooking styles refer to the methods and preferences households use in preparing daily meals. This includes the use of fresh or local ingredients, common cooking techniques such as boiling, frying, grilling, or baking, and the use of seasonings like Ajinomoto. It also covers the household's use of appliances such as rice cookers, microwaves, grills, and blenders and the types of kitchenware and tableware used for cooking and serving food.

Dietary habits: Dietary habits are long-term patterns of what people consume, which include the types, frequency, and quantity of foods, as well as how they are procured and prepared. Cultural, social, economic, and personal variables shape these habits, which have a substantial impact on daily living and overall health. In this study,

dietary habits refer to the patterns and styles of eating practiced within households. This includes whether families follow vegetarian or non-vegetarian diets, the consistency of food practices among family members, and the general routines that shape everyday food choices.

Food Choice: Food choice is the process of determining what to eat based on sensory, psychological, social, and economic considerations such as taste, price, convenience, culture, and health. It entails selecting, purchasing, preparing, and consuming food, and it enhances both health and cultural identity. In this study, food choice refers to the decisions individuals and households make regarding what foods to consume or avoid. This includes dietary restrictions shaped by religious beliefs, perceptions of foods considered unclean, and household practices related to dog-meat consumption such as who eats it, how often it is consumed, and how it is prepared. Food choice also includes the preference or avoidance of certain items among different age groups, as well as the value placed on preparing meals together as a family.

Culinary practice: Culinary practice involves the art, science, and cultural tradition of preparing and eating food. It includes the techniques, skills, and knowledge required to pick ingredients, cook, ensure safety, and present dishes, which vary based on culture and context. In this study, culinary practices refer to the ways households consume food on a daily basis, including styles of eating, how shared meals strengthen family bonds, typical consumption routines and how families plan meals based on preferences.

Food hygiene: Food hygiene refers to the methods and practices required to assure food safety by preventing contamination during the manufacturing, preparation, storage, and handling processes. Although this definition emphasises safety from a technical perspective, its fundamental principle of protecting health also applies to routine household practices. As a result, in this study, food hygiene is viewed through the perspective of health-conscious food preparation and consumption. Among these include the selection of healthier alternatives, the restriction of processed or sugary foods, the modification of diets in response to health problems, the consideration of nutritional information, and the adoption of approaches or recommendations that promote general well-being.

Gender Roles: Gender roles are the social and behavioural norms that people are expected to follow based on their given gender. They tell people how they should act,

dress, and behave. These roles often determine traditional duties, like men being the main breadwinners and women being the care givers. These roles are shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors. In this study, gender roles refer to the way's food-related responsibilities and consumption patterns are divided among family members based on gender. This includes who cooks, sets the table, clears and washes dishes, decides grocery purchases and budgets, and how eating practices such as meat intake, beverage consumption, or preferred foods vary between males and females within the household. These patterns reflect socially shaped expectations about who performs specific food tasks and how food is consumed across gender lines.

Cultural identity: Cultural identity refers to the symbolic sense of claiming oneself as a Mizo by means of a community centric common values, beliefs, and customs, through social class, religion, ethnicity, food habits and culinary practices. In this study, cultural identity refers to the identity created through food. Mizo people give meaning to themselves, express, and sustain their cultural heritage through food. In Mizoram, food and cultural identity are inseparably connected, with traditional meals including substantial cultural substance. It includes the meaning attached to traditional dishes, the use of food in expressing gratitude and hospitality, and the role of ingredients, mealtimes, and shared practices in preserving a sense of belonging.

Culture Content of Food: Culture content of food is regarded as a component of intangible ethnocentric heritage, which is a lifestyle that is handed down from one generation to the next. Traditional cooking methods, dining manners and recipes are all essential components of cultural history and can represent the typical values and beliefs of various groups. The Mizo *dish Bawl*, which is made with *sa-um* (fermented pork), connects to its historical and cultural origins. Mizo cuisine is distinguished by its simplicity, refinement, and precise preparation, with dishes like *bai*, *bawl*, and *um* expressing long values rooted in nature, community, and tradition. Other preparations such as *Sawhchiar*, *Bekang*, *Maian bai*, *Behlawi bai*, *Vawksa rep*, and *Vawksa chhum* also represent the cultural meanings, customs, and memories that influence Mizo daily life. Further a great reverential meaning is attached to specific dishes and eating practices, such as serving meat as a main dish on Sundays, preparing traditional meals during festivals, and using particular foods to mark celebrations and important occasions. Together, these Mizo foods heritage represents not only culinary preferences but also the cultural expressions and identities of the Mizo people.

Fashion Substance: Fashion Substance refers to trendy, need-based, time suited, visually appealing and socially acceptable food preferences. In this study, fashion substance corresponds to the ways certain foods gain popularity as culturally assimilated and nutritionally driven inviting intersectional wider choice.

External and Global Influences: In this study, the global influence refers to the intercultural flow of culinary traditions, ingredients, and knowledge worldwide, driven by trade, migration, and communication networks on food and rising preferences, substantiated through global cuisines being increasingly visible in recent years in Mizoram. This includes changing taste preferences, the use of new cooking methods or tools, the incorporation of dishes from other cultures, shifts in reliance on outside food versus home-cooked meals, raw and cooked and the formation of new family food traditions influenced by global cuisines. The emergence of fast-food outlets has brought products like *pizza*, *burgers*, *fried chicken* and *fries*, foods that were absent in previous decades but are now extensively consumed and rapidly gaining appeal. In addition to fast food, a diverse array of international cuisines has integrated into daily eating habits, Chinese meals such as *chow*, *chop suey*, and *momo*, Korean foods like *ramen*, *kimchi*, *bibimbap* and *kimbap* and Italian classics like *spaghetti* and *cheese*. Likewise, American cuisine including *sandwiches* and *burgers* has integrated into the rising urban culinary landscape. The widespread adoption of coffee culture that is often characterized by cafés, speciality brews and new social practices such as café-based socialising, studying and working in cafés, café hopping, and social media-driven practices surrounds coffee consumption which further illustrates how global trends are transforming the modern Mizo culinary landscape. These developments collectively demonstrate how external and global factors increasingly impact food selections, culinary practices, and the changing symbolic significance associated with food in Mizo households.

Cultural Exchange: In this study, cultural exchange refers to the reciprocal sharing of food products, recipes, culinary techniques, and food traditions between other cultures through processes such as trade, migration, development, communication networks, café-based socialising and café hopping. This interaction results in culinary fusion, wherein cuisines mix to produce new dishes, and fosters mutual understanding and connection by exchanging perspectives, values, and experiences through food.

Domestic division of labor: The domestic division of labour refers to the allocation of household duties such as food preparation, food serving, cleaning and child care among household members. The division has historically been characterised by gender, with males serving as primary earners and women assigned household and caring responsibilities. Modern sociological viewpoints, however, analyse the evolving patterns and the social, economic, and cultural variables that drive the change in role playing and accomplishment of responsibilities. In this study, domestic division of labour refers to the gendered household tasks distribution at the micro-level, focusing on how food-related responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, meal preparation and grocery decisions and its division among family members.

Food habits: Food habits refer to an individual's or group's regular preferences and eating behaviours which include what meals are consumed, how they are cooked and eaten, and why these choices are made. These habits arise from a complex interaction of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors including the behaviours, preferences, and practices related to obtaining, preparing, consuming, and discarding food. Attempt is made to examine food habits by addressing the fundamental concerns of how, what, why, where, when, and with whom food is consumed in consonance with social standards, cultural views and religious practices.

Mizo society: Mizo society is the group of ethnic groups that live together in Mizoram, India having a shared culture of highlanders. The term is employed in this study to highlight the indigeneity of the community, especially with regard to its culinary customs, eating habits and the ways in which they are used to represent cultural identities.

3.7 Sources of Data

In the conduct of research, researchers rely on two sources-Primary sources and Secondary sources and both sources of data collection will be utilized in the proposed research.

Primary sources: Primary data source is an original data source. Data are collected firsthand by the researcher for a specific research purpose or project. For the proposed research study, primary data will be obtained using methods such as questionnaire, interview schedule, survey, observation-both participant and non-participant, case study and field ethnography will be found to be particularly suitable for intensive investigations.

Secondary sources: Secondary sources refers to the data which has already been collected through primary sources and made readily available for researchers to use for their own research. In the proposed research, sources of data to be used include books, journals, documentaries, government reports, articles, podcasts, diaries, newspapers and magazines.

3.8. Pilot Study

Pilot studies are small tests of research methods that are done to see if they work before a bigger study is done. Its main goal is not to answer research questions, but to find and avoid problems that could make a full-scale study expensive in terms of time and money (Polit & Beck, 2017). In this study, the pilot phase began in February 2023 and lasted for five months. It was used to test the research design. 20 carefully chosen people from both Aizawl and Kolasib were the first people to try out the possible interview schedule. Following the principle of including and excluding, the pilot helped the researcher focus on questions that really showed how food culture changes in everyday life. Items that were unnecessary or not important were carefully cut out and new, important themes that came up in face-to-face conversations were added to the schedule.

During these trial interviews, it became clear that some questions were confusing, repeated the same idea, or did not lead to meaningful responses about food culture. A few questions sounded too broad or too technical, and respondents struggled to relate them to their everyday experiences. At the same time, new and unexpected themes came up naturally regarding stories about childhood food memories, tensions between modern and traditional meals, and how family relationships are shaped through cooking and eating together. These were not in the original schedule but clearly belonged in the study.

Based on these insights, unnecessary questions were removed, unclear wording was simplified, and new questions were added to reflect the themes that emerged during the pilot. The trial run also helped the researcher understand how to pace the interview, when to probe further, and how to guide the conversation without interrupting the respondent's natural flow. Overall, the pilot made the interview schedule clearer, more relevant, and more effective in capturing how food culture changes in everyday Mizo life. It showed how the fieldwork would unfold, how long each interview would probably last, what tools and supplies would be needed and the best way to get ready

for the bigger research journey that lay ahead. In this way, the pilot study was not just a practice run. It was an important step that helped shape the main investigation and made sure it moved forward with clarity, efficiency and focus.

3.9 Interview Schedule

An interview schedule is a compilation of carefully designed questions employed by the researcher to facilitate discussions with participants. The interview schedule generated meaningful insights across five interconnected sections. The first section, Contemporary Foodways of the Mizos captured everyday food practices, commonly consumed items, cooking styles, dietary habits, food preservation methods, and the norms and rituals linked to food. The second section, Food Labour and Household Dynamics, examined household food responsibilities, gendered divisions of tasks, decision-making processes, and routine eating patterns. The third section, External Food Influences, focused on how outside cultures shape food preferences, cooking techniques, and the development of new family food traditions. The fourth section, Food and Health Awareness, explored the link between dietary behaviour and health-conscious choices within households. The fifth section, Food and Cultural Identity, documented how food is used to express, preserve, and reinterpret Mizo cultural identity.

The questions were formulated on the basis of insights derived from the literature review. Relevant concepts and keywords that corresponded with the study objectives were identified, and after these concepts were clearly defined, they were translated into specific questions for inclusion in the schedule. The preliminary set of questions was then administered during the pilot study. The pilot exercise revealed items that required refinement, some questions were removed, others were rephrased for precision, and several new questions were incorporated in response to themes that emerged during pilot interactions. Through this iterative process of testing and revision, the interview schedule attained its final structure.

Thus, for systematic organisation, the questions were arranged under broad thematic categories that reflected the socio-economic characteristics of respondents and major dimensions of food practices, household routines, and cultural values. The completed interview schedule comprised 232 questions. Open-ended well as close-ended questions were employed to allow respondents to articulate their thoughts and experiences in detail rather than being confined to predetermined response options.

The schedule, therefore, was not a static instrument but one that evolved through repeated alignment with the study's aims, ensuring clarity, relevance, and methodological rigour.

3.10 Field Experience

This section describes the fieldwork process, challenges encountered and strategies adopted during data gathering. The fieldwork for this study started on 27 March 2023 initiating a comprehensive exploration of both urban and rural areas of Mizoram. The study was carried out in several phases, covering Aizawl Urban, Kolasib Urban and the rural villages of *Pangbalkawn*, *Thingdawl*, *Sihphir* and *Lungleng*, each providing distinct insights into the daily food practices of Mizo households.

Urban Field Research in Aizawl: The initial phase of fieldwork began in Aizawl Urban, including ten localities over a duration of two months, from late March to May 2023. The interactions in these neighbourhoods exhibited warmth, curiosity and openness. In certain households, families expressed a willingness to discuss their daily routines. One participant, for example, presented raw papaya during the interview, elucidating its digestive advantages and economic benefits relative to ripe papayas. Her comment indicated that food choices are influenced by economic factors and health awareness. Some individuals reported that they occasionally bought takeaway meals, not only for convenience but also to prevent their children from feeling deprived of experiences related to external food culture. Numerous interviews occurred during household tasks, with participants engaging in multitasking. Some were cooking, managing shops or caring for ill family members. The meal timing in one household was influenced by the care of an ailing father, illustrating how illness and caregiving alter domestic food practices. In various colonies, communal dinners were prevalent, frequently featuring elaborate dishes or catered food, thereby reinforcing the significance of food in social cohesion and celebration. The practice of *chawhmeh* in *suah*, which involves sharing homecooked dishes with neighbours has persisted as a valued tradition. Culinary modernity and tradition coexisted in Aizawl. Affluent families in areas like Bawngkawn continued to uphold traditional cooking styles, despite the presence of East Asian influences, including packaged ramen. Male respondents frequently articulated a sense of cultural pride when referring to the consumption of "*Mizo takin*" with hands indicating an effort to preserve identity through dietary practices. In regions such as Mualpui, where space

permitted the establishment of home gardens, households cultivated fruits and vegetables, thereby enhancing food self-sufficiency. The hospitality observed during fieldwork including tea, lassi, paratha and informal discussions, exemplified the role of food as a cultural connector and a symbol of welcome.

Urban Field Research in Kolasib: The subsequent phase of fieldwork occurred in Urban Kolasib from June 12 to July 4, 2023, encompassing ten localities. Localities were chosen strategically to encompass both affluent and less progressive regions, thereby ensuring diverse representation. The researcher's hometown facilitated enhanced community access and familiarity. Respondents often saw food-related questions as too simple, with some even suggesting that the researcher could answer them without asking. This shows that because food is such an ordinary part of daily life, people may overlook its deeper social meanings thereby reminding researchers to study and explain these cultural aspects carefully.

Rural Fieldwork-Pangbalkawn village from Kolasib district: The rural phase commenced in Pangbalkawn village (Kolasib District) on 18 September 2023, subsequent to coordination with the Village Council President. Pangbalkawn, a medium-sized settlement comprising approximately 162 families, facilitated an environment conducive to in-depth engagement. The close arrangement of houses in the village made the process of data collection much smoother and more efficient, as it was easy to move from one household to another without wasting much time or energy. The villagers showed remarkable cooperation and hospitality throughout the fieldwork. Many were eager to participate and share their experiences, reflecting a genuine sense of community involvement. One respondent even went a step further by personally accompanying the researcher to neighbouring homes, introducing her to other families and encouraging them to take part in the interviews. This gesture not only eased the process of approaching respondents but also created a warm and trusting environment that enriched the overall research experience. A significant observation was the extensive utilisation of Ajinomoto as a seasoning in various households. Meat consumption decreased due to restricted availability, and the lack of a local market influenced consumption patterns. Residents depended on small shops for necessities such as dal, eggs, and seasonal greens. Tea was generally consumed without milk, while jaggery was regarded as a luxury commodity. The term *Dawr chawhmeh*, meaning "dish available at shops," refers to the simple, ready-to-eat foods

that villagers usually purchase from nearby stores. These items are part of their everyday meals, especially in the absence of local markets. Despite facing infrastructural challenges such as limited transport and basic facilities, the villagers displayed remarkable warmth and willingness to assist. Their openness, generosity, and cooperative spirit not only made the data collection process smoother but also enriched the overall research experience, offering valuable insight into the everyday resilience and hospitality of rural Mizo communities.

Rural Fieldwork-Thingdawl village from Kolasib district: Fieldwork in Thingdawl village, located in the Kolasib District, began in October 2023. Thingdawl, which comprises 688 families, presented several practical challenges for data collection due to the wide spacing of houses and the poor condition of the roads. The scattered settlement pattern made it time-consuming to move from one household to another, often requiring extra effort and planning. These factors, combined with the village's uneven terrain, added to the difficulty of completing interviews within a limited time frame. Despite these obstacles, the experience provided valuable insights into the rural lifestyle and resilience of the community. Notwithstanding these limitations, the fieldwork yielded significant insights. Traditional practices continued, with villagers utilising chingal (a locally prepared alkali) for cooking, a method that has largely been supplanted by modern alternatives in other regions. Although the majority of residents were accommodating, instances of resistance occurred. One participant considered food-related questions to be unimportant, which emphasized the need for researchers to approach such situations with patience, sensitivity and understanding. This encounter also revealed a broader challenge i.e. the limited recognition of food studies as an important field for understanding everyday life and social behaviour.

Rural Fieldwork-Sihphir village from Aizawl district: The subsequent phase was conducted in Sihphir village (Aizawl District), Sihphir is located about one and a half hours' drive from my hostel. Due to the long travel time and unpredictable weather conditions, I decided to stay at my relative's house situated near the village during the fieldwork period. Initially, I had selected Neihbawi as my specific area of study; however, after contacting the residents, I learned that Neihbawi is no longer recognized as a separate village but has become a locality within Sihphir. Consequently, I shifted my focus and began conducting my fieldwork in Sihphir village, starting from the Neihbawi locality, which served as the entry point for my

research in the area. The extensive topography of Sihphir necessitated transportation for movement between residences. The residents engaged in self-sufficient agriculture, cultivating vegetables and primarily depending on their kitchen gardens for daily consumption. Sihphir is recognised for its abundant vegetable production, particularly chayote, which serves as a vital source of livelihood and cultural significance. The villagers' friendliness and openness significantly enhanced meaningful interactions, highlighting the strong connection between agriculture, self-reliance and community identity.

Rural Fieldwork-Lungleng village from Aizawl district: In November, 2023 the researcher began fieldwork in Lungleng village of Aizawl District with the aim of collecting household data. To reach the village, the researcher started early in the morning on a scooty after first contacting the YMA President to inform him about the visit. While travelling towards the area, the first settlement encountered was North Lungleng, clearly indicated by a signboard. Upon further travel, the researcher reached another settlement known as Lungleng I. Conversations with local residents revealed that both areas form part of the same village. Lungleng I being the original settlement and North Lungleng, an extension developed as the community expanded over time. Therefore, the researcher conducted interviews in both sections to gain a comprehensive understanding of the village's food practices and household dynamics. This region is recognised for its jaggery production and the hospitality of its inhabitants, who frequently serve tea made with jaggery and locally sourced tea leaves. The lack of a market resulted in food sources being predominantly self-produced. The community demonstrated caution concerning meat sourced externally, reflecting health concerns and local notions of purity. The data collection process encountered challenges due to recent surveys conducted by multiple academic teams, leading to initial respondent fatigue. Through patient engagement and trust-building, the researcher gathered qualitative insights into rural food practices and social organisation.

In conclusion, the fieldwork tour across both urban and rural settings was an essential component of the research approach, giving a solid empirical foundation for the study. The different experiences, ranging from urban areas both in Aizawl and Kolasib to the rural villages of Pangbalkawn, Thingdawl, Sihphir and Lungleng provided significant insights into the daily lives of Mizo families. These experiences demonstrated that

food is more than just a basic requirement. It is also a social and cultural expression of identity, values and belonging. The technique required patience, adaptation and cultural sensitivity, all of which are necessary for qualitative fieldwork. Each phase of data gathering helped the researcher better grasp the complicated interaction between food, society and change. Thus, the fieldwork experience was more than just a procedural part. It was a critical methodological component that affected the research's interest, interpretation, analysis and narrative. It reinforced the study's methodological framework by integrating lived experiences to broader sociological concepts, resulting in conclusions that are both authentic and contextually grounded. The details are appended in the '*research diary*' at the end of this document.

3.11 Analysis of the data

This section discusses the methods used to analyse qualitative data including coding and thematic analysis. Analysis means breaking phenomena into parts without changing its meaning and interpretation refers to contextualization. Once the collection of data is carried out, collected data will be analyzed and interpreted.

The data gathered for this study were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively to establish a clear and significant comprehension of the research outcomes. The Excel Sheet was utilised to process and analyse the quantitative data. Upon gathering the raw data from respondents, all closed-ended questions have been entered into Microsoft Excel. Each response was assigned a distinct code to facilitate data organisation and analysis. After data entry, a cleansing process was conducted to eliminate irrelevant or incorrect entries. All identified errors were rectified following careful verification to ensure the information's accuracy and reliability. Upon completion of data entry, coding and cleaning, the information was then further analysed.

A percentage frequency distribution was analysed which facilitated the presentation of significant facts and information pertinent to the study and established a basis for qualitative interpretation. The qualitative data were gathered using recordings on a mobile phone recorder and later transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed text was then translated from Mizo to English to ensure clarity and accessibility.

During the study, participants provided insightful quotations and personal reflections, which were systematically analysed and categorised. The statements were categorised into distinct sections and themes based on the primary focus of each chapter. The most

relevant quotations were subsequently organised under the appropriate headings to enhance and support the discussion. The results were ultimately analysed and discussed along with prior studies, enabling a deeper understanding and significant comparison with the existing literature.

3.12 Research ethics

When planning to undergo research, it is necessary to consider ethical issues related to research. Ethical issues are complex in nature but care, sensitivity and respect must guide the researcher when treating participants. The research ethics to provide guidance will be based on the ethical principles used in social science which are as follow:

- 1) The best-known principle in research ethics is informed consent. The researcher will thereby obtain full agreement of the respondent to take part in the research.
- 2) The nature of the proposed research and the role within it will be made fully aware to the respondents and allowing them to decide whether they wish to participate or not.
- 3) An information sheet containing the key aspects of the research will be provided and distributed to the potential respondents in order to provide standard information to all respondents.
- 4) The researcher will ensure that the respondents would remain anonymous.
- 5) The researcher will conduct interview method and ensure that the interview will be conducted in a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere.
- 6) Even if the respondents are happy to be tape-recorded while interviewing, the researcher will describe the system for storing tapes, the time for which they will be kept before being destroyed to reassure the respondents.
- 7) The researcher will ensure that the respondents are treated fairly and equitably.
- 8) The researcher will respect the respondents and will make sure that sufficient boundaries are made not to enter into the privacy of the respondents.
- 9) Research participants will not be subjected to harm in any ways whatsoever.
- 10) The researcher will avoid any type of misleading information as well as any form of deception.
- 11) The researcher ensured the ethical use of artificial intelligence tools such as *Quillbot* and *ChatGPT*, which were employed solely for linguistic refinement, formatting, and data organisation purposes. These tools served only as supportive

aids and did not influence the originality, interpretation, or analytical content of the study. All data collected and analysed remained entirely authentic and unaltered by such tools.

3.13 Limitations of the study

It is normal for research to have some limitations. However, it is critically important to minimize the range of scope of limitations throughout the research process. The proposed research may relate to the following limitations:

- 1) The research aims at representing the state of Mizoram but out of the 11 districts present in Mizoram, only two districts were studied. Therefore, the research did not serve as a total representation of the entire people living in Mizoram.
- 2) The extensive scope of the research framework demanded meticulous planning to ensure accuracy of the results within the available time and resources. The analysis process was labour-intensive and required substantial time for data organisation, transcription, and interpretation.
- 3) Time and resource constraints limited inclusion to two districts; important intra-state variations (e.g., southern border districts) could not be explored.
- 4) Since food studies is largely ethnographic in nature, adopting a rigorous mixed-method approach that combines statistical tabulation with qualitative interpretation posed methodological challenges. Quantitative approach hence is limited in this study. The process of explaining tables and then linking them with respondents' narratives made it difficult at times to fully capture the symbolic meanings, emotions, and social interactions created through food.
- 5) Limited scholarly work on Mizo food culture narrowed the Mizoram specific literature base and posed challenges in contextualising the study with existing research.
- 6) The study was confined to eight theoretical frameworks, the possibility of availability of alternative theories cannot be ruled out.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

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CHAPTER IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter spelt out the objectives and outlined the methodological roadmap of the study. This methodological foundation went on to establish the scope, the procedural details, and the conceptual rigour of the study. Thus, this chapter explores the socio-economic profile of the respondents, an essential component for understanding the broader context in which their daily experiences and choices occur and move.

Studying the socio-economic background of respondents includes personal characteristics, social status, household structures, and economic status influencing individuals' opportunities, limitations, and lived experiences. These factors affect not only quality of life and resource accessibility but also the behavioural patterns, decision-making processes, and orientations. Understanding these socio-economic dimensions is to offer a more detailed basis for interpreting the divergences observed at households. In this chapter, the socio-economic variables are analysed within the context of the chosen study sites such as Aizawl Urban, Aizawl Rural, Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural to properly represent the distinct demographic and economic settings in which the respondents reside. Placing these locations within particular contexts allows an examination of similarities and differences across settings, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the respondents' socio-economic features.

This chapter starts off with personal attributes such as age and gender, followed by social classification, which addresses social category and possession of ration card type. The following sections examine household structure and composition, encompassing family size, household classification, living arrangements, housing conditions, water access, and household infrastructure. Economic factors such as occupation, monthly income, number of breadwinners, and dependents are subsequently analysed next to assess the financial stability of households. Then, religious affiliation and educational backgrounds are analysed, both of which influence social values, opportunities, and lifestyle choices. The chapter terminates with an overview, summarizing the main conclusions and insights acquired from the investigation of various socio-economic elements. This systematic strategy guarantees

a good knowledge of the socio-economic realities encountered by the studied population.

4.2 Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics offer essential insights about the composition of a population by emphasising attributes such as age and gender. Accordingly, this section provides a detailed analysis of the personal characteristics so as to understand variations in dietary behaviours, resource availability, and domestic organisation among households across respondents' age and gender.

4.2.1 Age: Age, which is commonly expressed in years is a key variable in demographic research that indicates the number of years lived between birth and death. As it affects numerous aspects of behavioural trends and human preferences. By integrating age distribution analyses, food studies can provide deeper insights into how dynamics of cultural food practices situate across generations and across various life stages. For example, an article in the International Journal of Consumer Studies investigated the impact of age and gender on food preferences. The study found that older individuals generally prioritize health-related considerations in their food choices, while younger people often focus on convenience and mood enhancement. These results underscore that age-related variations can result in different motivations behind food selections, which are important to take into account when analysing food culture (Konttinen, 2021).

Table 4.1. Age Distribution

Age Group (in years)	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Below 20	42	39	2	22	44 (22)	81 (40.5)	105 (26.25)
21-30	48	27	45	28	93 (46.5)	55 (27.5)	148 (37)
31-40	4	8	19	23	23 (11.5)	31 (15.5)	54 (13.5)
41-50	4	8	10	11	14 (7)	19 (9.5)	33 (8.25)
51-60	2	6	12	7	14 (7)	13 (6.5)	27 (6.75)
Above 60	0	12	12	9	12 (6)	21 (10.5)	33 (8.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table shows the age distribution of respondents from four locations, Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural with a total sample size of 400

participants. Most respondents are below 30 age group representing 253 (63.25%) of the total sample as against those above 31 age group representing 147 (36.75%). This shows that younger adults are the largest demographic in this study. A significant number of them were under 30 years old, especially in Kolasib Urban (90%) and Kolasib Rural (66%) as against Aizawl Urban (47%) and Aizawl Rural (50%) indicating a youth-oriented population. This trend was due to the timing of the fieldwork, which took place during school and college holidays. Many young people were at home and could participate in the study. More so, since this was a study on food, a good majority of them were not only available but also took interest and were found vocal about Mizo food habits and culinary preferences. In rural areas, adult family members often worked in the fields during the day which made them less available for interviews. This situation has affected the age distribution of our respondents. It shows the need to consider extraneous factors while analyzing demographic patterns in research.

Urban areas record their greatest representation in the 21-30 age bracket with 93 respondents (46.5%), significantly higher than rural areas at 55 respondents (27.5%). In contrast, rural areas show their peak participation among those under 20, numbering 81 respondents (40.5%), compared with 44 respondents (22%) in urban locations indicating that urban participation is concentrated among young adults. In the 41-and-above age category, the total urban sample includes 40 respondents (20%), while the total rural sample includes 53 respondents (26.5%) showing that higher age groups are less represented in both regions.

The trend reveals that higher is the age lesser is the representation. Respondents aged above 60 years are not present in Kolasib Urban. However, they are represented in Kolasib Rural (12%), Aizawl Urban (12%) and Aizawl Rural (9%). Looking more closely at the two urban regions, Aizawl Urban has the most adult-heavy profile, with 45% in the 21-30 group as against only 2% below 20. Kolasib Urban, on the other hand, presents a more mixed but still youthful picture, with 42% below 20 as against 48% in the 21-30 group.

A similar pattern emerges in the rural regions, though the contrasts are sharper. Kolasib Rural shows 39% below 20 as against 27% in the 21-30 group, pointing to a predominantly young rural population. Aizawl Rural, meanwhile, has a more even spread across ages, with 22% below 20 as against 28% in the 21-30 category, along

with noticeably higher proportions in the older groups, particularly 23% in 31-40 and 9% above 60, making it the most age-diverse region in the study.

Taken together, these patterns show that urban areas are dominated by young adults, while rural areas especially Kolasib Rural have a much larger share of respondents below 20, and Aizawl Rural stands out for its wider spread across both younger and older age groups.

The distribution of respondents across age groups in the four locations can be better understood in relation to the timing of fieldwork and the daily practices of household life. In Kolasib Urban, the majority of respondents were below 30 years of age which can be explained by the fact that surveys were conducted during school vacations. Younger members of families were therefore present at home and readily available for interviews, while many working-age adults were occupied outside. A similar trend is seen in Kolasib Rural, where younger respondents again formed a substantial share. However, there was also a notable presence of older people in rural households. This is largely because in rural areas, adult men and women leave for the fields during the day, leaving behind children and elderly members who were available for interviews. In contrast, Aizawl Urban shows a strikingly small percentage of respondents below 20 years. This difference reflects the timing of fieldwork, which took place during school days, meaning younger people were at school. As a result, respondents here were largely family members who typically remain at home such as women not employed outside or older members. Finally, Aizawl Rural displayed a more balanced representation across age groups. Fieldwork was conducted even in the early mornings, before breakfast and before adults left for work allowing access to respondents from multiple age brackets. Since this study was based on household surveys, the data naturally reflects those who were present in the domestic sphere at the time of interviews, rather than a cross-section of the entire community. This context clarifies why certain age groups appear overrepresented in the percentages. Analysing age distribution reveals generational differences in food culture, but it is crucial to recognize that these patterns are significantly influenced by gender roles and societal expectations. Examining gender distribution is essential for fully understanding how food-related behaviours vary not only by age but also by the cultural and social roles assigned to different genders.

4.2.2 Gender: Gender distribution refers to the statistical representation of persons classed by gender within a certain population, commonly stated as the ratio or percentage of men, females, and other gender identities. This demographic statistic is vital for understanding society structures and dynamics, as it influences different elements of society. Gender distribution analysis is important in food studies because it offers insight on the various roles, interests, and challenges that different genders experience in terms of food production, distribution, and consumption (Bärebring et al, 2020).

The link between gender and food studies extends beyond personal food choices to bigger issues such as food production and household food consumption. In the field of research, gender influences economic status, cultural roles and responsibilities, all of which influence food and nutrition access. As a result, gender is a crucial factor to consider when studying food systems. The gender distribution of respondents in research reveals how different genders are represented in a study. This is important for understanding group patterns, behaviours and differences as gender impacts ideas and experiences. It contributes in the recognition of gaps and access to resources in areas involving food studies. A balanced gender distribution ensures that the results represent the whole population and prevents discrimination from over or underrepresentation.

Table 4.2. Gender Distribution

Gender	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Male	41	51	27	30	68 (34)	81 (40.5)	149 (37.25%)
Female	59	49	73	70	132 (66)	119 (59.5)	251 (62.75%)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table shows the gender distribution of respondents from Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural with a total sample size of 400. The total sample shows a clear tilt toward female respondents, with 251 (62.75%) females as against 149 (37.25%) males, suggesting that women were far more represented in the study. This trend is even stronger in urban areas, where 132 (66%) are females as against 68 (34%) males, pointing to a sharper gender difference in towns and cities. Looking closer at the two urban regions, Aizawl Urban shows the widest gap, with

73% females as against 27% males, while Kolasib Urban has a milder difference at 59% females as against 41% males. In rural areas, the overall pattern of female dominance continues, with 59.5% females as against 40.5% males. When the rural regions are taken separately, Aizawl Rural reflects the same trend, showing 70% females as against 30% males. Kolasib Rural, however, is different as it is the only rural (and overall) region where males slightly outnumber females, with 49% females as against 51% males. Female representation is thus higher in both urban and rural settings, particularly in Aizawl.

The gender distribution of respondents across the four study locations reveals a clear predominance of female participants, which is both contextually significant and methodologically explainable. In Kolasib Urban, women accounted for 59 percent of respondents compared to 41 percent men. This disparity can be attributed to the timing of the fieldwork which was conducted during the daytime when men were often away for work while women, who typically remain at home were more readily available. Moreover, when informed that the research centred on food practices, men frequently deferred participation to female household members, reinforcing the association between women and food-related responsibilities. In Kolasib Rural, however, the distribution was more balanced, with male respondents at 51 percent and female respondents at 49 percent reflecting a relatively equal representation of both genders. By contrast, in Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural, the dominance of female respondents is especially pronounced with women comprising 73 percent in both areas leaving men at only 27 percent and 30 percent respectively. Taken together, these findings suggest that women were more prominently represented in the study, not only due to their greater availability at home during fieldwork hours but also because of the deeply ingrained cultural understanding that matters of cooking, food preparation and household food practices fall within the domain of women. Thus, the higher female representation underscores both the gendered nature of domestic food work and the way in which cultural expectations shaped participation in this research.

Overview

Taken together, the analysis of personal characteristics shows how age and gender shaped who participated in the study and how these demographic patterns influence household food practices in Mizoram. The age distribution reveals a strong presence of younger respondents especially in Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural since the study

dealt with food, many young respondents showed keen interest and spoke openly about their Mizo food habits and culinary preferences. Aizawl Rural displays a more even spread across age groups because interviews reached households at flexible hours. This indicates that generational perspectives on food, convenience, and tradition vary across regions and are reflected in who was available for the survey. Gender patterns further highlight the cultural organisation of domestic life as women formed the majority of respondents in nearly all locations because they were more likely to be at home during fieldwork and were culturally regarded as the appropriate informants for questions related to cooking, eating, and household routines. Even in households where men were present, they often directed the researcher to the female member, reinforcing women's central role in food-related decision-making. These demographic characteristics i.e. youthful participation, female predominance, and region-specific availability provide an essential foundation for understanding the social and cultural contexts that shape food habits. With this demographic picture in place, the next section turns to social classification, exploring how socio-economic categories further structure access to resources and everyday food practices across Mizo households.

4.3 Social Classification

Studying social classification in this research enables us to situate food practices within broader structures of inequality, distinction and access. In sociology, classification systems are not merely descriptive but also constitutive of social life, shaping identities, opportunities and cultural practices (Douglas, 1966; Bourdieu, 1984). By examining categories such as recognized social groups and possession of ration cards, we can trace how socio-economic positioning mediates the ways in which food is produced, distributed and consumed. For instance, social categories whether based on caste, tribe or community remain significant for interpreting cultural belonging and material inequality, both of which influence culinary practices. Similarly, ration cards function as state-regulated markers of economic status reflecting eligibility for welfare and thus providing an entry point into understanding food security at the household level. For the purpose of this section social category includes Government of India classification of notice such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) and the type of ration card in possession.

Social categories are classifications of persons based on shared qualities which help in understanding social structures and relationships. In the context of social categories in India, social stratification has led to the classification of certain communities into categories such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Social class schemes are very widely used in sociological research and can generally be regarded as socio-economic measures that divide the population into unequally rewarded categories (Crompton, 2008). Individuals within a social class are considered to share similar levels of income, economic security and chances for economic advancement and authority and control. Accordingly, those individuals within a social class are thought to hold similar life chances and often lifestyles.

Examining social groups reveals both economic and social aspects that contribute to food issues. According to research, underprivileged groups like Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) often encounter higher levels of malnutrition and food insecurity than other groups. In rural India, for instance, SC and ST households represented more than 25 percent of all households living in poverty in 1999-2000 (Xaxa,2016).

According to the study, all respondents across four regions are Scheduled Tribes (ST). No responders belong to any social group including the Scheduled Castes (SC). This outcome is consistent with the demographic profile of Mizoram, where tribal communities constitute the majority of the population. With more than 94 percent of the population classified as Scheduled Tribes, Mizoram is primarily a tribal state according to the 2011 Census of India. In several parts of Mizoram, SC populations are either very small or non-existent, which is reflected in the total lack of SC respondents. Because scheduled castes are not represented, the findings cannot be applied to caste-based differences in food availability or poverty in the larger Indian context. Instead, they offer specialized insights into indigenous communities.

Considering the respondents' social classification, all 400 respondents fall under the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, according to their social classification. One of the most certain reflections of this intersection is the ration card, a document that not only facilitates access to subsidized food but also reflects, in many cases, the socio-economic positioning of a household. This leads us to an exploration of the different types of ration cards used in the following section.

With regard to the Types of Ration Card in possession, a ration card is an official document issued by the relevant state governments. This card enables eligible households to purchase food grains at subsidized prices in accordance with the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 (Acharya, 2025). India offers five distinct categories of ration cards under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), which are 1) The Priority Household (PHH) Blue ration card is issued to households that satisfy the government's eligibility requirements. Every household is allocated 5 kg of food grains per individual per month. 2) The Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Pink ration card is allocated to homes designated as Antyodaya families by the government. Every household is allocated 35 kg of food grains monthly per family. 3) APL (Above Poverty level) white ration card was distributed to households living above the poverty level. 4) BPL (Below Poverty level) yellow ration card was distributed to households living below the poverty level. 5) AY (Annapurna Yojna) ration card was given to older individuals who are poor and above 65 years. In this study, Types of ration card such as PHH, AAY, APL and BPL have been given as options.

Analysing the various forms of ration cards is crucial for socioeconomic studies in India. These cards show a household's economic condition and access to subsidized food through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Ration cards enable the delivery of essential supplies while also reflecting the country's inequality in socioeconomic status (paytm.com, 2024). Ration cards in India serve as an official instrument of social classification, linking households to their entitlement of subsidized food grains under state and national food security schemes. In the context of this study, ration cards were taken as an important indicator of socio-economic positioning, as they directly reflect a family's level of access to state welfare and food distribution systems. During the period of fieldwork, the types of ration cards available in Mizoram included Priority Household (PHH) ration cards (Blue), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration cards (Pink), Above Poverty Line (APL) ration cards (White), and Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards (Yellow). These categories were thus used in classifying respondents, as they represented the official framework of entitlement in operation at the time of data collection.

It is, however, important to note that the ration card system in Mizoram has undergone changes over the years. The government has revised both the nomenclature and the

colour coding in line with the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA). Under the present system, ration cards are colour coded as Blue for PHH, Yellow for AAY, and White for Non-NFSA households. Additionally, Annapurna ration cards have been introduced, specifically targeting citizens above 65 years of age who are not beneficiaries under the National Social Assistance Programme and who lack other forms of dignified sustenance. More recently, the Mizoram government has also announced the introduction of special ration cards for low-income families not covered under NFSA, reflecting the dynamic nature of welfare policy and the ongoing attempt to expand social protection.

By situating respondents within these ration card categories, this study is able to link household food practices with broader state mechanisms of welfare distribution. Ration card classification, therefore, not only indicates levels of poverty and vulnerability but also provides insight into how families negotiate their food security within the institutional structures available to them.

Table 4.3. Types of Ration Card

Types of Ration Card	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Blue card	27	27	26	53	53 (26.5)	80 (40)	133 (66.5%)
Pink card	1	-	-	1	1 (0.5)	1(0.5)	2 (1%)
White card	57	57	72	43	129 (64.5)	100 (50)	229 (114.5)
Yellow card	15	15	2	3	17 (8.5)	18 (9)	35 (17.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

This provides information about the socioeconomic status of households in different regions. In the total sample, the APL (white) ration card is the most common which is held by 229 households (57.25%) followed by the PHH (blue) card holding 133 households (33.25%). The BPL (yellow) card makes up 35 households (8.75%), while the AAY (pink) card is the least common, found in only 2 households (0.5%). This shows that more than half of all surveyed households fall under the Above Poverty Line category.

In the total urban sample, we have seen stronger pattern with 129 households (64.5%) holding APL followed by 53 households (26.5%) holding PHH, indicating that urban

households are predominantly APL card-holders. In the total urban, the BPL card accounts for 17 households (8.5%) and the AAY card remains minimal at just one household (0.5%) showing very limited presence of the lowest-income category in urban areas.

In the total rural sample, shifts in the distribution has shown with a light increase in households holding PHH which accounts to 80 households (40%) indicating that rural areas have a higher proportion of households relying on subsidised food grains but the highest possession of ration card belongs to APL holders with 100 households (50%). The BPL card makes up 9%, slightly higher than in urban areas, and the AAY card appears at 0.5%, similar to urban regions but still very limited.

Looking closer at the two urban districts, Aizawl Urban has the highest APL share at 72% as against 26% PHH, showing a largely APL-dominated profile. Kolasib Urban, however, shows a more moderate distribution, with 57% APL as against 27% PHH. This makes Aizawl Urban the more economically advantaged urban region in terms of ration-card classification.

A similar contrast can be seen in the rural regions. Aizawl Rural records 53% PHH as against 43% APL, making it the only region where PHH surpasses APL. Kolasib Rural, while also showing a strong PHH presence, has 27% PHH as against 57% APL, presenting a more mixed profile with a relatively higher APL share compared to Aizawl Rural. Taken together, this shows that rural Aizawl is more dependent on subsidised ration cards, whereas rural Kolasib leans closer to the urban pattern of higher APL presence.

Thus, we can say that the APL (Above Poverty Line) white card is the most frequent ration card type across all areas of all surveyed households. This shows that many families are no longer fully dependent on subsidised grains and can afford to buy food from the market. This growth is especially noticeable in Aizawl Urban, where 72% of the population has APL cards, showing a higher standard of life in the area reflecting better job opportunities, stable salaries and generally higher standard of living in the capital. The percentage of APL cardholders in Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural is 57%, which is the same and represents an even distribution in that district suggesting that while many families manage reasonably well, they are not as economically strong as Aizawl Urban as APL families rely more on markets, they tend to have more varied food choices and depend less on ration rice.

The second largest group of the total is Priority Household (PHH) blue cards holders. Interestingly, the distribution of these cards differs by area. Aizawl Rural is at the top of the list with 53% of residents possessing PHH cards, implying that many more individuals are eligible for subsidized food grains which can be inferred that many families in Rural Aizawl still depend on subsidised grains for their everyday meals. This is expected in rural areas where farming is the main source of income and earnings are not always steady. Aizawl Urban, on the other hand has the lowest percentage at only 26%, suggesting that the city's economy is somewhat more stable than that of the countryside. Both Kolasib Urban and Rural have 27% cardholders which suggests that the district's living standards are comparable. PHH households usually rely more on ration rice, which shapes their food culture toward simple, staple-based meals.

BPL (Below Poverty Line) yellow cards are however rather uncommon in all the regions. In Kolasib, both urban and rural areas, 15% of households hold BPL cards. However, the numbers drastically decline in Aizawl with only 2% in the urban and 3% in the rural areas. BPL families depend heavily on ration shops, which affects their food habits since they often plan meals around subsidised staples rather than market-bought items. AAY (Antyodaya Anna Yojana) pink cards designed for the underprivileged are exceedingly rare everywhere. Just two households, one in Kolasib Urban and one in Aizawl Rural own these cards which represents a mere percentage of all households interviewed. This could mean that extreme poverty is limited in the study areas, or there is lack of understanding and access to the program. Families under this category rely almost completely on subsidised grains, which could strongly shape their food choices and limits dietary diversity.

Aizawl Urban has a large number of Above Poverty Line (APL) households also further indicated a higher-income community. Aizawl Rural, in comparison has a more evenly distributed population with a sizable portion of homes classified as Priority homes (PHH). Kolasib shows a fair distribution between rural and urban areas in every category indicating either equal policy impact in both settings or balanced demographics.

Thus, the distribution of ration card types across the four regions underscores the patterned stratification of economic security and food access within Mizo society. The predominance of APL cards most notably in Aizawl Urban signals a concentration of

households whose livelihood conditions enable partial or full detachment from state-subsidised grain systems, thereby allowing greater engagement with market-based food economies and more diversified dietary practices. Conversely, the substantial presence of PHH cards in rural areas, particularly Aizawl Rural, points to the continued embeddedness of many households within welfare-mediated food structures, reflecting the precarity of agrarian incomes, seasonal instability, and reduced purchasing power. The marginal representation of BPL and AAY cards indicates limited visibility of extreme deprivation within the sample, although these categories remain significant markers of structural vulnerability. Collectively, these patterns reveal how socio-economic positioning articulated through state classifications intersects with geography to shape the material organisation of household food provisioning. The ration card system thus functions not merely as an administrative tool but as a sociological lens through which the differentiated experiences of food security, market dependence, and subsistence strategies within contemporary Mizo food culture can be understood.

Overview

Overall, the analysis of social classification reveals that food access, welfare reliance and cultural belonging in Mizoram are shaped far more by tribal identity and ration-card entitlements than by caste-based hierarchies. With all 400 respondents belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category, a reflection of Mizoram's demographic composition, the study captures a socially homogenous population whose food practices are rooted in shared indigenous traditions rather than caste distinctions. Within this shared identity, ration-card categories become the primary marker of socio-economic variation, signalling differences in household vulnerability, purchasing power and dependence on subsidised grains. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, show a strong concentration of APL households, indicating greater financial stability and reduced reliance on state welfare, while rural regions, especially Aizawl Rural, display higher proportions of PHH holders who depend more heavily on subsidised food systems. These patterns illustrate how welfare entitlements intersect with geographic and economic realities to shape everyday food security, dietary choices and household provisioning strategies. Taken together, social classification in Mizoram reflects a unique blend of cultural homogeneity and economic diversity, offering crucial insight into how identity, welfare, and livelihood structures frame the material conditions of

food practices. This understanding provides the foundation for the next section, which examines how these socio-economic distinctions manifest in household characteristics and the physical environments in which food is produced, stored and consumed.

4.4 Household Structure and Composition

Household structure and composition form the foundation of social organization, shaping patterns of co-residence, resource sharing and everyday interactions within domestic spaces. They provide an important lens through which cultural norms, economic conditions and demographic realities can be understood. In sociological terms, the household functions not only as a residential unit but also as a site of social reproduction, where roles, responsibilities and relationships are negotiated (Laslett, 1972; Netting, Wilk & Arnould, 1984). Examining household arrangements thus offers insight into how families adapt to both cultural expectations and material circumstances.

For this study, attention to household structure is crucial as it directly influences food-related practices, access to resources and decision-making dynamics. Households may be categorized in terms of their internal relationships whether nuclear, joint or extended and their size, composition and gendered leadership. In addition, the physical and material dimensions of households such as type of household, number of family members, source of water, living ambience and infrastructural resources play a vital role in shaping domestic routines and food practices. This section, therefore examines not only the types of households and number of members but also the role of household heads, living arrangements and the material infrastructures that sustain everyday life with particular emphasis on how these factors intersect with food preparation, storage and consumption.

4.4.1 Types of Household: Households are the basic units of society influenced by cultural traditions, economic conditions and social standards. They vary in structure, from individuals living alone to extended families sharing a common space. Understanding various types of households helps in analysing demographic trends, social relationships and economic dependencies. Below are the main types of households.

Single-Person Household: A single-person home consists of an individual living alone. This arrangement has become increasingly prevalent due to factors such as

urbanization, career choices and personal preferences. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit and a person living alone is considered as a single-person household (Waldock, 2023).

Single-Parent Household: Single-parent households are defined as families with children under age 18 monitored by a parent who is widowed or divorced and not remarried or by a parent who has never married. These families often face unique challenges including economic vulnerabilities and balancing work and childcare responsibilities (Waldock, 2023).

Nuclear Family Household: A nuclear family, also known as an elementary or traditional family, consists of two parents (typically married or common-law) and their offspring. This family structure is historically considered the idealized image of family, stressing a household centred around two parents and their progeny (Waldock, 2023).

Joint Family Household: A joint family also referred to as an extended family contains many generations living together in the same household. This arrangement often comprises grandparents, parents, children and sometimes other relatives representing a family support system that incorporates two married persons providing care and security for their biological offspring along with additional family members (Waldock, 2023).

These household structures show the diversity of living arrangements influenced by cultural, economic and social factors. Understanding these variations is crucial to comprehend the evolving dynamics of family life.

Table 4.4. Types of Household

Types of Household	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Single Person	3	5	-	1	3 (1.5)	6 (3)	9 (2.25)
Single Parent	20	11	5	9	25 (12.5)	20 (10)	45 (11.25)
Nuclear Family	52	53	66	74	118 (59)	127 (63.5)	245 (61.25)
Joint Family	25	31	29	16	54 (27)	47 (23.5)	101 (25.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the total sample, nuclear families form the majority, accounting for 245 (61.25%), as against 101 (25.25%) joint families, 45 (11.25%) single-parent households, and 9 (2.25%) single-person households. This shows that most households in the study follow a nuclear structure, with joint families continuing to have a notable presence, while single-person households remain very few.

In the total urban sample, nuclear families again dominate, making up 118 families (59%) as against 54 (27%) joint families. Single-parent households account for 25 families (12.5%), and single-person households are minimal at 3 (1.5%). In the total rural sample, this pattern becomes even more pronounced, with 127 (63.5%) nuclear families as against 47 (23.5%) joint families. Single-parent households form 20 (10%), and single-person households rise slightly to 6 (3%). A comparison between urban and rural areas therefore shows that nuclear families are more common in rural areas, while urban areas have a slightly higher share of joint families and single-parent households.

Looking closer at the two urban districts, Aizawl Urban has the highest share of nuclear families at 66%, as against 29% joint families, making it the most strongly nuclear of the urban regions. This pattern fits the lifestyle of the capital city, where people often live in smaller flats, have salaried jobs, and prefer compact households to manage expenses. Nuclear families here tend to buy most of their food from markets and vendors since they have less time and space for shared cooking or extended-family meals. Because of this, everyday food practices lean toward quicker cooking, fewer large communal meals and more dependence on purchased ingredients. Kolasib Urban, in contrast, shows 52% nuclear families as against 25% joint families, with a much higher presence of single-parent households at 20% and single-person households at 3%. The greater mix of household types here suggests a different social pattern. As a smaller town with fewer formal jobs, families often experience migration, separation or temporary work arrangements, creating more single-parent and single-person households. These households often adjust their food habits accordingly as single parents rely more on ready-to-cook items or small, frequent purchases, while single-person households tend to cook simple meals or eat outside more often. Joint-family households in Kolasib Urban share cooking duties, which makes food preparation more communal and less rushed than in Aizawl Urban.

This indicates that the urban household structure in Aizawl is more consistently nuclear, while Kolasib Urban displays greater diversity, with more single-parent and single-person households.

A similar pattern emerges in the rural districts but with clearer contrasts. Aizawl Rural has the highest proportion of nuclear families overall, at 74% as against 16% joint families, making it the most nuclear-heavy region in the entire study. Food culture here reflects this mix: families grow some vegetables or keep small kitchen gardens, but they still rely heavily on purchased rice, oil, and everyday groceries. Meals are usually shared within the nuclear unit, and big joint-family feasts are less common.

Kolasib Rural, however, shows 53% nuclear families as against 31% joint families, indicating that joint-family arrangements are more common here than in Aizawl Rural. This shows that rural Kolasib maintains stronger extended-family structures than Aizawl Rural. Since many households here depend on agriculture and wage labour, larger family units help share work in the fields, childcare, and daily chores. This directly influences food practices as joint households cook larger meals, store more grains, and prepare dishes like *bai*, meat stews, and vegetables in bigger quantities. Collective eating is more regular and food preparation remains a shared responsibility, which keeps traditional food habits stronger in this region. Single-parent households are also slightly more visible in Kolasib Rural (11%) compared to Aizawl Rural (9%) which in turn affects meal patterns, often leading to simpler or quicker meal preparation. This shows that rural Aizawl is characterised by a dominant nuclear structure, while rural Kolasib maintains a stronger presence of joint-family households, reflecting differing household patterns across districts.

The distribution of household types across the four study locations revealed both continuities and variations between urban and rural contexts. Overall, the nuclear family emerges as the dominant household type particularly in Aizawl Rural (74%) and Aizawl Urban (66%) followed closely by Kolasib Urban (52%) and Kolasib Rural (53%). This prevalence reflects broader demographic shifts in Mizo society where the nuclear family structure has become the normative household form especially in urban settings where modern housing patterns, economic pressures and occupational mobility favour smaller family units. Joint families, although less common still hold significance with Kolasib Rural (31%) and Aizawl Urban (29%) showing relatively higher proportions compared to Aizawl Rural (16%). This indicates that joint

households continue to persist more in rural and semi-urban areas where agricultural lifestyles and shared economic responsibilities sustain extended kinship living arrangements.

Single-parent households are noteworthy in Kolasib Urban (20%) compared to other areas possibly reflecting urban migration, marital separation or widowed family situations that result in single-parent-led homes. Rural areas such as Kolasib Rural (11%) and Aizawl Rural (9%) display smaller but still notable shares while Aizawl Urban records the lowest (5%) suggesting that single-parent households are more visible in transitional urban contexts like Kolasib. Single-person households remain minimal across all locations with a slightly higher proportion in Kolasib Rural (5%) possibly linked to elderly individuals living alone or younger migrants who have not yet established families.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while nuclear families dominate across Mizoram, household structure varies by location in ways that reflect broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Urbanization appears to reinforce nuclear family living while rural settings maintain a stronger presence of joint families. At the same time, the emergence of single-parent and single-person households though smaller in proportion points to subtle but important transformations in household composition that mirror changing social realities such as migration, widowhood and shifting family responsibilities. This naturally leads us to the next area of analysis, the number of family members within each household which offers a clearer picture of how these household structures translate into actual family size and composition across different settings.

4.4.2 Number of Family Members in the House: This refers to the total number of individuals residing in a single household unit. The size of households varies significantly across various cultures and time periods. The number of family members within a household serves as an important indicator of both demographic realities and cultural organization. Household size not only reflects patterns of fertility, mortality and migration but also provides insights into economic strategies, kinship ties and social support systems. In sociological terms, the size of the household represents the extent of co-residence and resource sharing which in turn influences consumption patterns, division of labour and everyday domestic practices. Smaller households are often associated with urbanization, mobility and the predominance of nuclear family

structures while larger households typically indicate the persistence of joint or extended family arrangements that rely on shared labour and collective resource management.

For this study, examining the number of family members is particularly significant as it helps to contextualize the household structures discussed earlier and sheds light on how family size affects food-related practices. The size of the household determines not only the quantity of food required but also the ways in which meals are prepared, shared and valued within the family. By analysing household size across urban and rural contexts, we can better understand the relationship between demographic composition and the organization of domestic food practices in Mizoram.

Table 4.5. Number of Family Members

Family Members	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
1-3	7	11	23	11	30 (15)	22 (11)	52 (13)
4-6	54	62	55	63	109 (54.5)	125 (62.5)	234 (58.5)
7-9	24	25	22	18	46 (23)	43 (21.5)	89 (22.25)
10-12	11	2	-	1	11 (5.5)	3 (1.5)	14 (3.5)
13+	4	-	-	7	4 (2)	7 (3.5)	11 (2.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural; *Note: 13+ = here, upper limit is 16*

In the total sample, households with 4-6 members form the majority, accounting for 234 (58.5%), as against 89 (22.25%) of households with 7-9 members and 52 (13%) with 1-3 members. Very large households remain uncommon, with 14 (3.5%) falling in the 10-12 group and only 5 (1.25%) having 13 or more members. When grouped broadly, 93.75% of all households have fewer than 10 members, as against 6.25% with 10 or more, showing that most families fall within a small-to-medium size range. In the total urban sample, 109 (54.5%) of households fall within the 4-6-member category as against 46 (23%) in the 7-9 range and 30 (15%) in the 1-3 range. Only 7.5% of urban households have 10 or more members (5.5% in 10-12 and 2% in 13+). In the total rural sample, the concentration of medium-sized households becomes stronger, with 125 (62.5%) in the 4-6 group as against 43 (21.5%) in the 7-9 group and 22 (11%) in the 1-3 range. Urban areas also show slightly higher numbers of very large households, with 5.5% in 10-12 and 2% in 13+, bringing rural households with

10 or more members to 7.5%, compared with 5% in urban areas. This indicates that large families are more common in urban areas, while rural areas have more small-sized households.

Looking at the urban districts separately, Aizawl Urban has the highest share of small households, with 23% in the 1-3-member category as against 55% in the 4-6 category. This pattern fits the lifestyle of the capital city, where many young couples, working individuals and small nuclear families live in flats or compact homes. Smaller households also mean simpler eating routines, people cook quicker meals, eat lighter dinners, and rely more on purchased vegetables and ready condiments because there are fewer people to cook for. Smaller families also tend to avoid elaborate dishes that require long preparation, such as smoked meats or large pots of bai, because these foods are usually prepared in larger quantities.

Kolasib Urban, however, has only 7% small households but a similar share of medium-sized households (54%). The lower number of small families in Urban Kolasib is due to more people staying with parents or extended relatives, which reduces living costs in a smaller town. Meals are often prepared for large family members which demands more quantity of rice, curries and more frequent cooking of staple dishes. Since food is prepared for more people, households tend to cook in the morning and reheat meals later, a common pattern in semi-urban areas.

Both urban districts have comparable proportions in the 7-9 range (22% in Aizawl Urban and 24% in Kolasib Urban), indicating that extended families still exist in towns, especially where elderly parents live with adult children. In such homes, eating practices remain more traditional morning tea is shared, rice is cooked in large pots, and vegetables/meat dishes are prepared in bulk so everyone can eat from the same serving. Kolasib Urban however shows a greater presence of large families, with a combined 11% in the 10-12 and 13+ groups as against 4% in Aizawl Urban. Larger households in Kolasib Urban often arise from joint or semi-joint family structures. These families follow more traditional food habits, cooking is shared, meals are taken together and are prepared in bigger quantities.

A similar contrast appears in the rural districts. Aizawl Rural records 63% in the 4-6-member bracket as against 18% in the 7-9 range and 11% in the 1-3 range. Large households are rare here, with only 1% in the 10-12 and 13+ categories combined. This means rural Aizawl is largely made up of medium-sized nuclear families, cook smaller

meals, rely on their own gardens for greens, and eat simple homegrown dishes like bai or boiled vegetables regularly. Kolasib Rural, meanwhile, shows 62% in the 4-6 category as against 25% in the 7-9 group and 11% below 3 members, but with a noticeably higher presence of larger families, including 2% in the 10-12 group. This makes Kolasib Rural the district with the largest number of big households, even though both rural regions are dominated by medium-sized families. Larger families here are linked to agriculture-based living.

These patterns show that households with fewer than nine members account for 93.25% of the total sample (373 out of 400 households), making them the dominant household type across every region. In contrast, households with 10 or more members make up only 6.75% (27 households), but their presence is more noticeable in rural areas particularly Kolasib Rural, which records 3% in the 10-12 range and 0% in the 13+ group, giving it the highest share of large families among all districts. Urban areas, especially Aizawl Urban, show the opposite pattern, with 23% of households having only 1-3 members across regions, making it the region with the highest concentration of small households.

Thus, the distribution of household sizes across the four study locations highlighting distinct patterns in family composition between urban and rural contexts. The data indicates that mid-sized families are the most common unit across these regions. Households comprising ten or more members are observed, though only in very small proportions. The highest share is found in Kolasib Urban (15%), followed by minimal occurrences in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural (2% each). Such households are completely absent in Aizawl Urban, reflecting the tendency of urban spaces to have smaller family units.

Overall, the analysis shows that household size in Mizoram is marked by a balance between nuclear families of four to five members and the persistence of larger households in rural areas, especially in Kolasib. Urban centres, particularly Aizawl tend toward smaller households that reflect demographic transition, urban housing constraints, and socio-economic change. Rural households, by contrast, sustain larger family units that support traditional kinship patterns and agricultural work systems.

4.4.3 Head of the Household: The concept of the 'head of the household' is central to understanding authority, decision-making and the allocation of resources within families. Traditionally, this designation has been linked to the principal income earner

often assumed to be male and is closely tied to social norms around patriarchy, inheritance and responsibility. However, contemporary studies highlight that these dynamics are shifting with variations influenced by socio-economic changes, gender roles and household composition. The designation of household headship not only reflects authority in financial matters but also has implications for cultural practices, food distribution and intergenerational responsibilities within domestic life.

Recent studies have emphasized the increasing visibility of women in household leadership roles particularly in contexts where they serve as primary or co-breadwinners. Carelock et al. (2022), note how the growing presence of female breadwinners reshapes household financial planning and challenges traditional gendered divisions of responsibility. Similarly, Kowalewska and Vitali (2020) observe that while women are increasingly recognized as household heads, disparities persist in terms of income levels and economic security when compared to their male counterparts. These findings underline the importance of examining household headship not simply as a static role but as a dynamic category shaped by cultural norms, economic realities and evolving gender relations.

In the context of Mizoram, analysing who is identified as the head of the household allows us to situate food practices within wider structures of authority and responsibility. It provides insight into how decisions regarding food budgeting, meal preparation, and distribution are made, and whether these processes reflect continuity with traditional gendered roles or indicate shifts toward more flexible arrangements.

Table 4.6. Head of Household

Head of Household	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	13	10	13	10	26 (13)	20 (10)	46 (11.5)
Grandmother	6	4	8	3	14 (7)	7 (3.5)	21 (5.25)
Father	61	73	58	76	119 (59.5)	149 (74.5)	268 (67)
Mother	20	13	17	11	37 (18.5)	24 (12)	61 (15.25)
Others	-	-	4	-	4 (2)	-	4 (1)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the total sample, fathers make up the largest share of household heads, accounting for 268 (67%), as against 61 (15.25%) of households headed by mothers and 46

(11.5%) headed by grandfathers. Grandmothers head 21 (5.25%) of households, while the “others” (siblings or other relatives taking responsibility in the absence of parents or grandparents) category is minimal at 1% found in Urban Aizawl only i.e. 4 (2%). This distribution indicates that despite shifts in family patterns, households in the study areas remain largely father-led, with multigenerational leadership persisting through grandparents in a smaller but notable proportion of families.

In the total urban sample, 119 (59.5%) of households are headed by fathers as against 37 (18.5%) headed by mothers. Grandfathers head 26 (13%), and grandmothers head 14 (7%) showing a moderate presence of elderly leadership in urban settings. In the total rural sample, however, the dominance of father-led households becomes much stronger, with 149 (74.5%) as against 24 (12%) mother-led households. Grandfather-headed households account for 20 (10%) and grandmother-headed households for 7 (3.5%). This comparison shows that rural households rely more heavily on father-led household structures, whereas urban areas show slightly more diversity, including higher shares of mother-led and grandmother-led households.

Looking closely at the two urban districts, Aizawl Urban records 58% father-headed households as against 17% mother-headed households, with grandparents heading 21% combined (13% grandfathers, 8% grandmothers). Kolasib Urban, in contrast, reports 61% father-headed as against 20% mother-headed households, and 19% grandparent-headed households (13% grandfathers, 6% grandmothers). The two urban regions therefore show similar patterns, though Aizawl Urban has a slightly higher presence of grandmother-led households, while Kolasib Urban shows a marginally stronger father-led profile.

A similar but more pronounced pattern appears in the rural districts. Aizawl Rural has the highest share of father-led households in the dataset, with 76% as against 11% mother-led households, accompanied by 10% grandfather-led and 3% grandmother-led arrangements. Kolasib Rural, while also dominated by father-led households at 73%, shows 13% mother-headed households as against 10% grandfather-led and 4% grandmother-led households. This makes Aizawl Rural the most strongly father-led region, while Kolasib Rural shows a slightly broader spread, with a comparatively higher share of mother-led families.

Together, these patterns show that while father-headed households dominate across all regions, urban areas display greater variation, including higher proportions of

mother-led and grandmother-led households, whereas rural areas particularly Aizawl Rural follow a more traditional pattern with strong male leadership at the household level. Thus, we have seen the persistence of traditional patterns while also showing variations that reflect changing family dynamics. Fathers dominate as household heads in all regions with particularly high proportions in Aizawl Rural (76%) and Kolasib Rural (73%) followed by Aizawl Urban (58%) and Kolasib Urban (61%). This strong presence of male headship underscores the enduring cultural norm in Mizo society that associates authority, responsibility and economic provision with men particularly in rural areas where patriarchal household structures remain prominent.

Mothers as household heads, though significantly fewer than fathers still constitute a notable proportion, 20% in Kolasib Urban, 17% in Aizawl Urban, 13% in Kolasib Rural and 11% in Aizawl Rural. The relatively higher figures in urban contexts especially Kolasib Urban may reflect circumstances such as widowhood, marital separation, male outmigration or women assuming responsibility due to employment or economic contribution. This points to a gradual shift in the recognition of female household leadership, aligning with broader sociological discussions on the growing visibility of women as breadwinners and decision-makers.

Grandparents also feature as household heads, though less prominently. Grandfathers account for 13% in both Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban and 10% each in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural, while grandmothers are identified at lower percentages ranging from 3% in Aizawl Rural to 8% in Aizawl Urban. Their presence highlights intergenerational household structures where authority may be vested in elders especially in extended or joint families. The identification of “Others” (4%) in Aizawl Urban suggests atypical arrangements possibly siblings or other relatives taking responsibility in the absence of parents or grandparents.

Overall, the data reflect a predominantly patriarchal pattern of headship yet with visible contributions from mothers and grandparents that indicate the complexity of household authority in Mizoram. Urban contexts appear slightly more open to female leadership while rural households maintain stronger adherence to male-dominated headship. These patterns are significant for understanding how decisions regarding food, resources, and domestic organization are made, since the designation of household headship directly influences budgeting, meal planning and the division of household responsibilities. Building on this understanding of authority within the

household, the next section turns to the material and spatial dimension i.e. Living Rooms and Ambience to examine how domestic environments reflect not only socio-economic standing but also the lived experience of family life.

4.4.4 Living rooms and ambience: Living conditions are central to understanding everyday quality of life, as they shape not only health outcomes but also patterns of domestic practice. Scholars note that housing quality, access to safe water, and the organization of household spaces significantly influence both physical and mental well-being (Sheel et al., 2024). Within this framework, the condition and ambience of living rooms become important indicators of household socio-economic status, cultural values and lifestyle. Poor housing conditions such as overcrowding, inadequate ventilation or restricted space have been linked to adverse health outcomes, unsafe cooking practices and limited possibilities for food storage and preparation (Kher, 2002). Congested or poorly structured environments can heighten risks of contamination while also shaping how meals are prepared, shared and experienced within the family.

For this study, examining living rooms and ambience is especially significant because these spaces are not merely physical structures but cultural arenas where family members gather, interact and host guests. The design, cleanliness and resources available within these spaces reflect both economic capacity and social identity while also influencing comfort, safety and overall household atmosphere. Analysing these aspects helps illuminate how material arrangements intersect with domestic practices including cooking, eating and food-related routines thereby linking spatial layout to broader questions of household well-being.

Aizawl Urban: In Aizawl Urban, the living rooms and ambience varied noticeably across the ten localities visited. Some households displayed modest, functional arrangements with only essential items, while others showed distinct Western-influenced designs with clearly separated cooking, dining and living areas even featuring modern kitchens with island tables. Gas stoves, stainless-steel sinks and the culturally significant *fairelbel* (traditional rice storage container) were common elements across kitchens. The kitchens were often spacious, sometimes as large as or larger than the living rooms, suggesting a cultural preference for ample cooking areas. Many kitchens included seating so that guests could converse with the cook during meal preparation, reinforcing the kitchen as both a social and functional space.

One respondent explained this spatial logic clearly,

“In Mizo households, it is most feasible to have the kitchen near the entrance, because even if guests arrive while we are cooking, we can still attend to them.”

Another notable feature in Aizawl Urban was the clear separation of rooms with cemented walls, a contrast to the fluid layouts in rural homes. Urban households displayed considerable variation in decor, blending modern influences with a taste for refinement. Sofas upholstered in patterned or floral fabrics, coordinated cushions, decorative coffee tables and curated books or flower arrangements were common. Dining areas were more elaborate, with large tables covered in floral cloths, showcase cupboards displaying crockery and glassware, and walls adorned with framed photographs, wall hangings or mounted animal horns. These decorative choices reflected not just aesthetics, but also family pride, heritage and social identity.

Across Aizawl’s urban households, the warmth of togetherness was a recurring theme. Family photographs around dining tables and well-equipped kitchens emphasized that meals remain central to social life. The polished and layered look of these homes signalled urban prosperity, wider access to materials and a lifestyle that values both functionality and aesthetics.

Aizawl Rural (Sihphir and Lungleng): In Aizawl Rural, particularly in Sihphir and Lungleng, living arrangements differed markedly from urban patterns. Rooms were less compartmentalized, with gentle demarcations rather than rigid walls between cooking and living spaces. Seating arrangements reflected rural sensibilities, wooden sofas with thin cushions replaced the upholstered furniture common in cities. Most homes featured a large hall serving multiple functions depending on household needs. In Lungleng, living spaces revealed a simple yet warm way of life. Homes typically had one big hall functioning as both a living room and a gathering place. Decorations were minimal, often just calendars, family photos or religious images that gave rooms a personal touch.

As one respondent said,

“We don’t decorate much. Just calendars, some family photos, and sometimes a picture of Jesus or a cross... that is enough to make the room feel like ours.”

Room arrangements were open and flexible. Sofas, shelves or curtains informally marked the transitions between living, dining and kitchen spaces. A distinctive cultural feature in Lungleng was the daily presence of large thermos flasks filled with unsweetened red tea, always ready to be offered to visitors, as one villager said,

“We always keep a big thermos of red tea ready... it has no sugar. Whenever guests arrive, we offer them a cup.”

Outdoor spaces were just as important, used for drying produce, socializing or carrying out daily tasks. Kitchens blended old and new, firewood stoves stood beside freezers or plastic shelves. While modest, these spaces radiated warmth and openness. Guests were welcomed effortlessly into their household, whether seated inside or in the courtyard. These arrangements demonstrated how rural Mizo households balance practicality with hospitality, preserving strong family and community ties.

Sihphir Village: Sihphir households carried a blend of simplicity, modern aspiration and communal living. Large halls dominated the layout, often merging seamlessly with dining and kitchen areas. Modern upholstered sofas in bold colours stood out against tiled floors and plain walls, arranged to maintain wide central spaces for movement and interaction.

Kitchens in Sihphir were semi-open and neatly fitted with modern cabinets, chimneys and sinks. Even with modern fixtures, the cultural heart of the kitchen remained unchanged, it was the place where rice, vegetables and meat were prepared daily. Respondents emphasized the continuity of tradition despite modern furnishings,

“We may have nice cupboards or sofas, but life here is still the same... we talk in the kitchen while cooking, the children run around the hall, and whenever someone visits, we always offer them tea.”

Kolasib Urban: Kolasib’s urban households presented a different atmosphere. Living rooms were modest but orderly, without the polished decor of Aizawl. A typical layout placed the kitchen and living room side by side, allowing easy communication between those cooking and those seated. As one respondent said,

“We like it this way... while we cook, we can still talk to family or guests sitting nearby.”

The architecture, mostly concrete homes reflected stability and aspiration. Tiled or cement floors, light-coloured walls and simple ceiling fans contributed to clean and

airy spaces. Many homes had open-plan halls where cooking, chatting and family gatherings happened in the same area. Modern appliances like refrigerators, gas stoves and water filters were common, as stated by one respondent from this region,

“Almost every home now has a fridge and gas stove. We cannot imagine going back to firewood.”

Furniture arrangements were deliberate, wooden sofa sets with patterned cushions were placed neatly around central tables used throughout the day. Decorative curtains, photos, glass-top tables and potted plants added warmth. Although material choices differed from rural homes, family functioning remained constant, sharing meals, offering tea and spending evenings in conversation. As one older man summarized,

“The walls may be different, but our way of living is the same... family and guests are always at the center.”

Kolasib Rural (Thingdawl and Pangbalkawn): In Kolasib Rural, living conditions were more modest, reflecting economic constraints. Houses were built from bamboo, wood and tin sheets, with outdoor spaces used for storing firewood, tools and small vegetable gardens. As one villager explained while pointing to stacked firewood,

“All our cooking depends on firewood... without it we cannot manage our daily meals.”

Homes typically had multipurpose halls serving as living, sitting and dining spaces. Wooden benches and thinly cushioned sofas created a humble but welcoming environment. Curtains and makeshift partitions separated rooms, while mud or cement floors kept interiors cool. Many respondents preferred sitting on the floor, emphasising comfort and informality,

“We are happier sitting on the floor... it feels freer than on a chair.”

Kitchens were basic but functional, with bamboo shelves holding utensils and dried ingredients. Traditional wood-fired stoves were central, leaving smoke-stained walls that testified to daily cooking practices. As one cook said while stirring a pot,

“The smell of firewood makes the food taste better.”

Outdoor spaces played a key role, used for drying vegetables, washing, gardening or preparing food. These areas were bustling with everyday activity. Social interactions were warm and informal, with guests welcomed into living spaces or seated on benches or floors. One host expressed this ethos simply,

“We don’t mind if guests sit on the floor... what matters is that they feel at home with us.”

Thingdawl households shared similar qualities, with weathered but sturdy wooden-plank houses designed for large families. Verandas doubled as storage and workspaces, reinforcing the close relationship between domestic life and livelihood activities. As one villager said,

“The veranda is like another room for us... we keep our firewood here, our tools, everything close by.”

Inside, living rooms were sparsely furnished but warm. Calendars, family photos and simple fabric curtains provided decoration, and multifunctional layouts supported everyday tasks. Kitchens featured traditional stoves, neatly arranged pots and utensils and the familiar scent of firewood cooking. Outdoor patches of land were used for drying chillies, rice and vegetables, creating a lively domestic landscape. Households consistently demonstrated hospitality, simplicity and warmth, welcoming guests with tea and conversation in keeping with Mizo cultural values.

Taken together, the living conditions observed across Aizawl and Kolasib both urban and rural show that household ambience is deeply intertwined with the daily practices of Mizo food culture. The organisation of space, whether through spacious modern kitchens in Aizawl Urban or multipurpose halls in rural villages, directly shapes how food is prepared, shared and experienced. Kitchens function not only as sites of cooking but as social arenas where conversations unfold, hospitality is enacted and cultural values are reinforced. The presence of items like the *fairelbel*, the constant readiness of red tea, the open flow between cooking and living spaces and the communal seating arrangements all point to a food culture that prioritises togetherness, accessibility and warmth. Even differences in architectural form, cemented partitions in cities versus flexible, open layouts in villages mirror broader variations in lifestyle, aspiration and economic capacity, yet the centrality of food and hospitality remains constant. Ultimately, the physical ambience of Mizo households reflects a cultural ethos in which food is not merely a necessity but a medium of connection, identity and care, linking spatial arrangements to the everyday social life of families.

4.4.5 Type of House: The type of house in which a family resides serves as an important indicator of both socio-economic status and everyday living conditions.

Broadly, houses are often classified as *kutcha* (constructed from temporary or perishable materials such as bamboo, thatch, or mud), *semi-pucca* (a combination of temporary and permanent materials) and *pucca* (built entirely with permanent materials such as cement, brick, or stone). This classification reflects not only structural stability but also levels of long-term economic investment (Dreze & Sen, 2013). Housing conditions are closely tied to food security and nutrition, as more durable and permanent housing typically ensures better sanitation, storage and kitchen infrastructure, thereby influencing both food preparation practices and dietary quality (Haddad, Ruel, & Garrett, 1999).

In the Indian context, the diversity of housing types emerges from the interplay of cultural traditions, environmental adaptations and socio-economic hierarchies. Categories such as *Kutcha*, *Pucca* and Assam-type houses illustrate this diversity, each carrying its own historical and regional significance (Ramamirtham, 2025). Kutcha houses are made with temporary materials like bamboo, wood, mud, or thatch. They are less durable, needing frequent repairs, but reflect local traditions and resource use. Pucca houses are built with permanent materials such as brick, cement, and stone. They are strong, durable, and signify economic stability and long-term investment. Assam-type houses are built from timber with tin roofs and short windows adapted to the structure of their walls. They are common in the Northeast, designed to withstand heavy rainfall and earthquakes. Within Mizoram, too, housing types reflect this mix of continuity and change offering insight into broader patterns of social aspiration, economic capacity and cultural identity.

Table 4.7. Type of House

Type of House	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Kutcha	-	4	-	-	-	4 (2)	4 (1)
Pucca	70	30	84	99	154 (77)	129 (64.5)	283(70.75)
Assam-type	30	66	16	1	46 (23)	67(33.5)	113 (28.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the total sample, pucca houses form the overwhelming majority, accounting for 283 (70.75%) of all households. Assam-type houses constitute 113 (28.25%), while kutcha

houses are extremely rare at only 4 (1%). This pattern indicates that most households across the study regions live in permanent, durable structures, reflecting improvements in housing conditions and access to more stable building materials. The small share of kutchha houses suggests that fully temporary or unstable structures are now uncommon in the areas surveyed.

In the total urban sample, the dominance of pucca houses becomes more apparent, with 154 (77%) living in pucca structures as against 46 (23%) in Assam-type houses, and no kutchha houses reported. In contrast, the total rural sample shows a slightly different distribution, while pucca houses continue to lead at 129 (64.5%), Assam-type houses constitute a much larger share at 67 (33.5%), and kutchha houses, though still minimal, appear only in rural areas at 4 (2%). This comparison indicates that urban households tend to live in more permanent and concrete structures, whereas rural households display more variation, relying more heavily on Assam-type homes and, to a small extent, kutchha houses.

Looking more closely at the two urban districts, Aizawl Urban shows the strongest reliance on pucca construction, with 84% living in pucca houses as against 16% in Assam-type houses. This makes it the most structurally stable and modernised housing profile among all four regions. Kolasib Urban, while still dominated by pucca houses at 70%, has a larger share of Assam-type houses (30%) than Aizawl Urban, indicating slightly more mixed construction patterns. Neither district reports kutchha houses, reflecting the overall higher standard of housing in urban areas.

A similar pattern of contrast appears in the rural regions. Aizawl Rural has the highest percentage of pucca houses in the entire rural sample, with 99% of households living in pucca structures and only 1% in Assam-type houses. No kutchha houses were reported, suggesting significant infrastructural development and housing stability in this region. Kolasib Rural, on the other hand, presents a very different picture. Pucca houses make up only 30%, while Assam-type houses constitute a substantial 66%, and kutchha houses appear at 4%, the highest in the dataset. This highlights greater economic and structural variability in Kolasib Rural, where reliance on semi-permanent or traditional materials remains more common.

In Aizawl Urban, pucca housing dominates overwhelmingly with 84% of households living in permanent structures. Only 16% reside in Assam-type houses showing that while some households continue to build with timber, the city's rapid urbanization has

made pucca the norm. The absence of kutchra houses underscores the higher economic status of the capital city and the emphasis on long-term investment in housing. The data from Aizawl Urban points to a strong aspiration toward permanence, stability, and urban modernity.

In Kolasib Urban, 70% of households live in pucca houses which reflects the permanence and stability associated with urban life. Another 30% reside in Assam-type houses, a significant proportion compared to Aizawl suggesting that while modernization has made inroads, traditional timber-based housing still holds practical and cultural value in smaller urban centers. The complete absence of kutchra houses underlines that even the most modest homes in Kolasib Urban are at least semi-permanent, pointing to a general upward shift in housing quality.

Aizawl Rural stands out most distinctly, with 99% of households living in pucca houses. This is a striking contrast to Kolasib Rural and indicates that rural areas closer to the capital city are far more urbanized and stable in their housing patterns. Only 1% of households have Assam-type houses, and kutchra houses are completely absent. This shows that rural Aizawl has almost fully transitioned into modern housing, reflecting both higher economic integration with the city and easier access to construction materials and infrastructure.

Kolasib Rural presents a more diverse picture. Here, only 30% of houses are pucca, while the majority, 66%, are Assam-type. This reliance on Assam-type construction indicates that rural households continue to depend on locally available timber and bamboo, balancing affordability with durability. A small minority (4%) still live in kutchra houses, showing that vulnerable households persist in temporary structures. This mix of housing types highlights how economic differences and reliance on traditional resources shape rural living conditions in Kolasib.

Taken together, these patterns show that pucca houses are still the main type of housing across all regions, but how strongly they dominate differs quite a lot. Urban areas especially Aizawl Urban are heavily pucca-based because families here have better access to concrete construction, more stable incomes, and stronger infrastructure. These stronger and more permanent houses also make it easier to set up modern kitchens with LPG, electric stoves and separate cooking spaces. In contrast, rural areas particularly Kolasib Rural depend much more on Assam-type houses. These semi-permanent structures are cheaper to build and suit agricultural

lifestyles where families spend a lot of time outside in the fields. They also explain why many rural kitchens still rely on firewood or multi-fuel stoves, since Assam-type houses provide more open ventilation suitable for traditional cooking methods.

The fact that kutchas are almost absent across the whole sample shows that housing conditions in Mizoram have generally improved. Only a few households still live in such structures, pointing to limited pockets of vulnerability. Overall, the types of houses people live in reflect not just economic differences but also how families cook, store food and organise their everyday routines.

4.4.6 Source of water: The source of water is a crucial factor in understanding household well-being, as it determines the availability, quality, and reliability of water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic needs. Common sources include piped water connections, wells, hand pumps, and surface water such as streams or ponds, with the choice often shaped by geography and infrastructure. The distance of these sources from the household also influences the daily rhythm of domestic work, particularly for women who traditionally manage water collection. Scholars note that safe and sufficient water supply is closely linked to nutritional health, sanitation, and food preparation practices (Checkley et al., 2004). Conversely, limited or unsafe water access may increase the risk of contamination and disease, particularly among children (Black et al., 2013).

The findings reveal that in all four locations, Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural, households reported 100% reliance on piped water supply from the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department. This uniform pattern shows how state infrastructure has reached deep into both urban centres and rural villages ensuring that households no longer depend on traditional wells, hand pumps or streams. Because every household in all four regions now depends entirely on PHE piped water, cooking and food preparation have become more hygienic, consistent and less labour-intensive, replacing older practices where families relied on wells or streams that required extra effort to clean, boil or carry water before meals.

Respondents frequently emphasized this shift. As one woman in Kolasib Urban remarked,

“We only use PHE water for cooking and drinking....it is the cleanest and safest.”

A villager in Aizawl Rural echoed the same, noting,

“We don’t have wells anymore. All our water comes from PHE, and we store it for the whole day.”

While access is universal, families also described the adjustments they make to cope with irregular timings of supply. In Sihphir village, one respondent explained,

“The water comes in the morning, so we fill our buckets and tanks. If we don’t, it becomes difficult later in the day.”

Similarly, a Kolasib Rural household mentioned,

“Sometimes the supply is weak, and we have to plan our cooking around it.”

From the perspective of domestic food practices, this universal reliance on tap water has far-reaching implications. It ensures a dependable and hygienic base for cooking rice, preparing tea, washing vegetables and maintaining cleanliness in the kitchen. The reliance on PHE also reduces the health risks that often accompany traditional sources like ponds or rivers.

Thus, this indicates infrastructural success but also reflects how modern water provision shapes everyday routines of cooking, cleaning and family care, tying households into the larger network of state-managed utilities while still requiring flexible adaptation at the domestic level.

4.4.7 Household Resources and Infrastructure for Food: Household resources and infrastructure form the foundation of daily food practices and reflect broader patterns of economic status, cultural preference and adaptation. Assets such as mobile phones, televisions, vehicles, refrigerators and kitchen appliances not only indicate levels of wealth but also shape access to food-related knowledge, purchasing power and the capacity to cope with food shortages (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001; Deaton, 1997). The physical condition of a household like its cooking fuels, storage facilities and kitchen equipment directly affect how food is prepared, preserved and shared. These material arrangements are more than signs of comfort. They are tightly interwoven with cultural values, dietary norms of everyday life

In the Mizo context, household infrastructure reveals both continuity and change. Traditional reliance on firewood and bamboo kitchenware still persists in many rural homes while urban households increasingly use gas stoves, rice cookers, refrigerators and other modern utilities. Such contrasts highlight the importance of how household

resources also act as a lens to understand how families navigate modern influences while sustaining Mizo food traditions

Under this section, two key aspects will be examined in detail. First, Fuel and Cooking Equipment to explore the kinds of energy sources and tools households use to prepare food, and secondly, Food Sources and Kitchen Practices to understand how ingredients are procured, stored and cooked in everyday life. Together, these dimensions illustrate how domestic resources shape not only the material conditions of cooking but also the cultural continuities of Mizo households across rural and urban settings.

a) Fuel and Cooking Equipment

This section examines Mizo household cooking fuel and equipment. When it comes to the preparation of particular dishes, the choice of fuel whether it be LPG, firewood, electricity or a combination of these has an effect on the speed, style and practicability of the preparation process. There is a correlation between the number of stoves in a household and the frequency of cooking, the variety of foods that are prepared and the availability of resources. These infrastructure components, in particular, provide a glimpse into the practical realities that shape daily practises regarding food consumption. This is especially true when comparing rural and urban households.

Table 4.8. Main cooking fuel used in your household

Main cooking fuel	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
LPG	69	13	59	3	128 (64)	16 (8)	144 (36)
Combination	4	13	4	3	8 (4)	16 (8)	24 (6)
Wood or Crop residue, LPG	1	57	2	66	3 (1.5)	123(61.5)	126 (31.5)
LPG, Electric	25	6	32	5	57 (28.5)	11 (5.5)	68 (17)
Wood or crop residue, LPG, Electric	1	11	3	23	4 (2)	34 (17)	38 (9.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the total sample, LPG emerges as the single most common cooking fuel, used by 144 households (36%). This indicates a broad shift toward modern energy sources

across Mizoram. The second-largest group consists of households using LPG in combination with electric appliances, representing 68 households (17%), followed by those combining wood or crop residue with LPG at 126 households (31.5%). A smaller proportion (9.5%) use a mixed system comprising wood or crop residue, LPG and electric appliances, while only 6% fall under the category of inconsistent fuel combinations. Together, these patterns show that although modern fuels have become widespread, a significant portion of households continue to rely on multiple sources often blending convenience with cultural preference and cost considerations.

When comparing the total urban and rural samples, sharp contrasts emerge. In urban areas, LPG use is dominant, with 128 households (64%) relying primarily on it. Another 57 households (28.5%) use LPG alongside electricity, reflecting strong access to modern infrastructures. Wood-based fuel use in urban areas is minimal, only 3 households (1.5%) combine wood or crop residue with LPG, and just 4 households (2%) use all three fuel types. In contrast, rural households display a markedly different profile. Although 72 households (36%) rely on LPG alone, a much larger share 123 households (61.5%) use wood or crop residue combined with LPG. Another 34 households (17%) use all three fuels, and 11 households (5.5%) combine LPG with electricity. This comparison clearly highlights that while urban households have transitioned significantly toward modern energy sources, rural households maintain a stronger dependence on firewood, shaped by availability, affordability and deeply rooted culinary traditions.

A district-wise comparison further illustrates these contrasts. In Kolasib Urban, reliance on modern fuels is almost universal. A substantial 69% of households cook exclusively with LPG, and an additional 25% combine LPG with electricity. Only 1% incorporate biomass alongside modern fuels.

“We use only gas now, it is faster and cleaner. Firewood is hardly used unless there is some emergency.” (Respondent 41, Kolasib Urban)

“With electricity and gas, we can finish cooking quickly, especially in the morning before work.” (Respondent 58, Kolasib Urban)

These voices reflect a strong embrace of modern cooking systems driven by convenience, efficiency and the desire to reduce the labour associated with firewood.

Aizawl Urban presents a more varied energy profile. While 59% of households rely solely on LPG, a notable 32% combine LPG with electric appliances. Traditional fuel use persists but at a much lower scale: only 2% combine wood or crop residue with LPG, and 3% use all three fuel types.

“We use firewood for smoked meat and vegetables, because the taste is better. Gas is only for quick cooking.”
(Respondent 102, Aizawl Urban)

“In our house, we have both gas and electricity, but elders still prefer firewood for certain dishes.” (Respondent 117, Aizawl Urban)

These statements illustrate how Aizawl Urban kitchens have become spaces where efficiency and heritage coexist, with households selecting fuels based not just on practicality but also on taste, tradition and the sensory qualities of food.

The pattern in Kolasib Rural differs sharply from its urban counterpart. Here, firewood remains central to daily cooking. Only 13% of households depend solely on LPG, while 57% combine LPG with wood or crop residue. An additional 11% use all three fuels, wood, LPG and electricity indicating a highly flexible and need-driven approach.

“We still cook most meals on firewood. Gas is expensive, so we use it sparingly.” (Respondent 212, Kolasib Rural)

“The smoke is a problem, but the food tastes different. We cannot leave firewood cooking.” (Respondent 225, Kolasib Rural)

These perspectives underscore both the cultural value placed on firewood-based cooking and the economic considerations shaping fuel choices in rural areas.

Aizawl Rural shows a different fuel-use profile among rural regions. Here, 59% of households rely primarily on LPG, making it the rural region with the highest modern-fuel adoption. Alongside this, 32% use a combination of LPG and electric appliances, while only 3% use wood-based combinations 2% combining wood or crop residue with LPG and 1% adopting all three fuels.

“We use electricity for the rice cooker, gas for quick curries, and wood for big meals when everyone gathers.”
(Respondent 311, Aizawl Rural)

“Gas is useful, but we keep using firewood. It is what we grew up with.” (Respondent 298, Aizawl Rural)

These remarks show that while modern fuel options dominate, traditional cooking methods remain valued and continue to coexist with modern appliances.

Across all four regions, fuel choices emerge not solely as economic decisions but as reflections of cultural identity, taste preferences and household routines.

“Even with gas and electric stoves, sometimes we go back to firewood because it feels like real Mizo food.” (Respondent 145, Aizawl Urban)

Cooking fuel thus shapes not only the efficiency of meal preparation but also how families sustain traditional flavours, maintain culinary identity and reproduce cultural meanings through everyday domestic practice. These fuel-use patterns show that even as many Mizo households shift toward LPG and electric stoves for speed and convenience, firewood continues to be used especially in rural areas because it produces the smoky flavour, texture and aroma that people associate with “real Mizo food.”

Overall, the patterns of cooking fuel use across Mizoram reveal a landscape where modernisation and tradition coexist in meaningful ways. While urban areas especially Kolasib Urban show a strong shift toward LPG and electric appliances, rural regions continue to rely heavily on firewood, not only because it is accessible and economical but because it carries cultural value and shapes the sensory qualities of traditional dishes. Even in urban centres like Aizawl, many households retain mixed-fuel practices to preserve flavour, maintain familiar routines and honour inherited cooking methods. These differences highlight how fuel choices are not simply technical or economic decisions but expressions of identity and continuity within the household. In this sense, the everyday act of cooking becomes a site where modern convenience intersects with cultural memory, reflecting the diverse ways in which Mizo families adapt to changing resources while sustaining the tastes and traditions that define their food culture.

Table 4.9. Number of Stove/Burner Units in the Household

No of Burner	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
One stove	0	4	4	0	4 (2)	4 (2)	8 (2)
Two Stoves	47	85	85	70	132 (66)	155 (77.5)	287 (71.75)
Three stoves	42	10	10	27	52 (26)	37 (18.5)	89 (22.25)
Four stoves	11	1	0	2	11 (2.5)	3 (1.5)	14 (3.5)
Five stoves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5+ stoves	0	0	1	1	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the total sample, households owning two burner units overwhelmingly dominate, with 287 households (71.75%) depending on this setup. This is followed by three-burner households, comprising 89 (22.25%), indicating that a significant number of families maintain multiple cooking options, often linked to diverse dishes or mixed fuel use. Households with four stoves are limited to 14 (3.5%), while one-stove households appear rarely at 8 (2%). Only 2 households (0.5%) report having more than five stoves, showing that elaborate cooking setups are extremely uncommon. Overall, the total pattern suggests that Mizo households rely on more than one cooking unit, reflecting functional needs, family size, and the coexistence of modern and traditional cooking methods.

In the total urban sample, the preference for multiple burners remains strong. 132 households (66%) use two stoves, making it the dominant urban pattern. This is followed by three-stove households, accounting for 52 (26%), suggesting urban families also value flexibility and multiple cooking points. Four-stove households appear modestly at 11 (2.5%), and only 4 households (2%) use a single stove. A very small number, 1 household (0.5%), maintains more than five burners. The urban distribution reflects the convenience and accessibility of modern fuels, allowing most households to maintain efficient multi-unit cooking setups.

In the total rural sample, the reliance on two stoves becomes even more pronounced. 155 households (77.5%) use two burners, making rural areas slightly more dependent on this configuration than urban ones. Three-stove use is recorded in 37 households (18.5%), lower than urban levels, but still significant. A small share, 3 households

(1.5%), use four burners, while 4 households (2%) remain single-stove users mirroring the urban rate. Households with more than five stoves appear only once (0.5%). The rural pattern suggests that maintaining at least two stoves often an LPG unit and a firewood-based unit is essential for daily cooking routines.

A comparison between the total urban and total rural samples shows a shared preference for two-stove households, though rural areas show a slightly stronger concentration (77.5% compared to 66% in urban areas). Urban households demonstrate more diversity, with a higher proportion using three stoves (26% compared to 18.5% in rural areas) and a slightly larger share using four stoves. Rural households, by contrast, show a more stable reliance on two-burner setups, shaped by cooking styles that involve both LPG and biomass stoves. Despite these differences, both settings show minimal reliance on single-stove units, pointing to a widespread expectation of maintaining multiple cooking points within the household.

When comparing the total urban pattern with the two urban districts, the contrasts become clearer. Aizawl Urban displays the strongest concentration of two-stove households at 85%, making it the most uniform urban cooking pattern. Only 10% of Aizawl Urban households use three stoves, and four-stove setups are absent. Kolasib Urban, however, reveals a more mixed distribution: 47% of households use two stoves, while a much higher 42% rely on three stoves. Additionally, 11% maintain four burners something not seen in Aizawl Urban. This comparison shows that while the total urban trend leans toward two stoves, Aizawl Urban reinforces this pattern more strongly, whereas Kolasib Urban contributes to the urban variation by keeping a larger share of households with three or four stoves.

The comparison between the total rural pattern and the two rural districts also highlights sharp differences. Kolasib Rural shows the highest dependence on two stoves at 85%, aligning closely with the total rural picture but in a more concentrated way. Only 10% use three stoves, and 4% rely on a single stove, suggesting a cooking system anchored in dual-stove routines, a mix of LPG and firewood. Aizawl Rural, on the other hand, exhibits greater diversity: 70% use two stoves, but a notable 27% maintain three stoves, one of the highest proportions across all regions. Four-stove households appear at 2%, and 1% report more than five stoves. This indicates that Aizawl Rural households often adopt more complex cooking setups, combining LPG, electric appliances, and firewood depending on need.

Across Mizoram, most households own more than one stove, revealing the importance of cooking flexibility in both rural and urban kitchens. The table shows that having two stoves is the norm, with 47% in Kolasib Urban, 85% in Aizawl Urban, 85% in Kolasib Rural and 70% in Aizawl Rural reporting this arrangement. For many families, this allows them to cook rice and side dishes simultaneously, or to balance modern appliances with traditional methods. As one respondent in Kolasib Rural explained,

“We need two stoves at least. One for rice, and the other for vegetables or meat. Otherwise cooking takes too long”
(Respondent 202).

Another from Aizawl Urban said,

“We keep both a gas stove and a rice cooker. It makes life easier, especially when everyone is busy” (Respondent 87).

Kolasib Urban stands out with a higher proportion of households (42%) reporting three stoves, compared to only 10% in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Urban, and 27% in Aizawl Rural. This may indicate larger families or more diverse cooking requirements. Respondents often framed this in terms of efficiency and variety. One Kolasib Urban householder explained,

“We have three stoves: gas, electric rice cooker, and sometimes firewood outside for smoked dishes” (Respondent 56).

A woman in Aizawl Rural echoed this mixed use,

“We cannot leave firewood cooking, but gas is fast, and we also need the electric kettle for tea” (Respondent 309).

These voices show how rural and semi-urban kitchens juggle efficiency with cultural continuity.

Households with four stoves are rare, recorded in Kolasib Urban (11%) and Aizawl Rural (2%). Such families usually belong to wealthier or extended households. As one Kolasib Urban respondent remarked with a laugh,

“We use whichever stove is free. With many people at home, sometimes all are in use at once” (Respondent 72).

By contrast, households with only one stove are few 4% in Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Rural. These families are more resource-constrained, as one villager admitted,

“We only have one gas stove, so we cook one dish at a time. Meals take longer, but we manage” (Respondent 214, Kolasib Rural).

Interestingly, a very small number of households (1% in Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural) reported more than five stoves, suggesting high-income or multi-generational families where multiple appliances such as gas, electric cookers, kettles, and firewood coexist.

“We have many stoves because our family is large, and everyone cooks at different times,” said one Aizawl Urban respondent (Respondent 112).

Taken together, the analysis of stove/burner units shows that while two-stove households form the backbone of cooking practices across Mizoram, significant variations appear between districts. Urban areas especially Aizawl Urban tend toward streamlined two-unit setups, while Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Rural introduce greater diversity with higher shares of three- and four-stove households. Rural areas show deep reliance on dual burners but differ in complexity, with Kolasib Rural emphasizing traditional dual-use systems and Aizawl Rural adopting more multi-stove configurations. Overall, the number of stove units reflects a balance of fuel availability, kitchen design, cultural cooking traditions and household size.

The data and voices together show that the number of stoves in a household is not just a measure of wealth, but also of cultural practice, household size, and adaptability. Because a typical Mizo meal usually includes several dishes such as *kan* (fried items), *bai* (stew), *tlak* (boiled vegetables), and *rawt* (chutney) families often need to cook many components at the same time, so the number of burners used in a household reflects not only convenience but also the cultural expectation of preparing a full Mizo meal. However, while most households would prefer multiple burners to make this easier, their ability to own more stoves is limited by economic constraints. Therefore, the number of burners a household uses not only reflects their cooking needs but also becomes an indicator of their economic status, because those who can afford more burners are better able to match the demands of everyday Mizo food preparation.

b) Food Sources and Kitchen Practices

Food sources and kitchen practices form an essential part of household food culture shaping what is eaten, how it is prepared and the balance between tradition and

modernity. While rural households often depend on kitchen gardens nearby forests and local vendors for fresh produce, urban families increasingly rely on markets, shops and even online platforms. This mix of self-sufficiency and market dependence reflects broader social and economic changes, as well as the adaptability of Mizo households in maintaining cultural foodways while responding to the demands of modern life.

Table 4.10. Kitchen garden

Kitchen garden	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	70	51	75	93	145 (72.5)	144 (72)	289 (72.25)
No	30	49	25	7	55 (27.5)	56 (28)	111 (27.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the overall total, the presence of kitchen gardens is strikingly high across the sample. Out of 400 households, 289 (72.25%) report having a kitchen garden, while 111 (27.75%) do not. This shows that despite growing urbanisation and changing access to food markets, kitchen gardening remains a strong practice in Mizo households. The data indicates that home-grown produce continues to be a central part of everyday cooking, supporting both cultural food preferences and household self-sufficiency.

In the total urban sample, kitchen garden ownership remains significant. Among 200 urban households, 145 (72.5%) maintain a kitchen garden, while 55 (27.5%) do not. This suggests that even in town settings where space, time, and modern lifestyles may limit home cultivation, a large majority continue to grow vegetables, herbs, and other essentials. Urban households appear to integrate gardening into compact spaces such as balconies, terraces, and small yards, supporting fresh and culturally preferred ingredients.

In the total rural sample, a similar pattern is observed. 144 (72%) rural households report having a kitchen garden, while 56 (28%) do not. Although the percentage is nearly identical to the urban figure, kitchen gardens in rural settings tend to be larger and more functional, often supplying daily vegetables and occasionally surplus

produce that is shared with neighbours or sold locally. This continuity reflects rural households' stronger access to land and reliance on self-grown produce.

A comparison between total urban and total rural households reveals remarkably similar proportions. 72.5% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas maintain kitchen gardens. The closeness of these figures suggests that gardening is not simply a rural practice but a culturally rooted habit that spans geographical locations. When comparing total urban households with the two urban districts, clearer distinctions emerge. Aizawl Urban shows the highest reliance on kitchen gardens, with 75% of households maintaining one. This indicates that despite dense settlement patterns, urban families in the capital continue to prioritise growing their own fresh produce. Kolasib Urban follows closely, with 70% reporting kitchen gardens. Although slightly lower than Aizawl Urban, the figure still reflects strong adherence to gardening practices. Both districts contribute to the high urban total, but Aizawl Urban reinforces the trend more strongly, suggesting greater emphasis on home-grown ingredients.

A similar comparison within the rural districts shows sharper contrasts. Aizawl Rural has the highest kitchen garden prevalence across all regions at 93%, indicating the centrality of land-based food production in these communities. Gardens here are often extensive, supporting leafy greens, herbs, roots, seasonal vegetables, and occasionally fruit-bearing plants. In contrast, Kolasib Rural reports a lower figure at 51%, making it the only region where households without kitchen gardens (49%) nearly equal those with one. This disparity may reflect differences in land availability, local livelihoods, and settlement patterns between the two rural districts.

The data on kitchen gardens provides important insight into how households in Mizoram balance self-sufficiency and market reliance. In rural areas, gardening remains a core part of household food practices. In Kolasib Rural, 75% of households reported maintaining kitchen gardens while in Aizawl Rural the figure was even higher at 93%. Respondents often emphasized that these gardens were indispensable for daily meals. As one elderly woman in Aizawl Rural explained,

“We always keep a garden because it gives us fresh vegetables every day...mustard leaves, beans and chillies are always growing. Without it, we would have to buy everything, which is costly and not as fresh.”

Another respondent in Kolasib Rural added,

“Our garden is small but it gives us what we need. We dry chillies and collect herbs from here; it saves us from going to the market often.”

Such testimonies highlight how rural households continue to rely on their own cultivation for both economic and cultural reasons.

Urban households show a different pattern, though kitchen gardens remain significant. In Kolasib Urban, 70% of families still maintain gardens reflecting a continued attachment to homegrown produce despite the convenience of markets. One middle-aged respondent from Kolasib Urban explained,

“We don’t have much land, but we plant coriander and chillies in pots. Even a little makes a difference in cooking.”

By contrast, in Aizawl Urban only 51% of households reported having a kitchen garden. Here, constraints of space and time seem to play a larger role. As one young mother in Aizawl remarked,

“We live in a rented house, there is no space for a proper garden. We depend mostly on markets for vegetables, but sometimes I miss the taste of what we used to grow at home in the village.”

This shift illustrates the gradual move toward market dependency in the most urbanized part of the state.

Across both urban and rural contexts, kitchen gardens carry symbolic weight beyond food supply. They embody continuity with tradition, a way of sustaining culinary identity amidst modern pressures. In times of price hikes or when certain vegetables are scarce, gardens act as a safety net. One Kolasib Rural respondent summed it up clearly,

“The garden gives us security. Even if prices rise in the market, we still have something to eat from our land.”

Taken together, the analysis reveals that kitchen gardening remains a deeply embedded practice across Mizoram, cutting across both urban and rural contexts. While urban households maintain smaller, space-adapted versions of kitchen gardens, rural households especially in Aizawl Rural sustain larger and more productive plots that are closely tied to everyday cooking. The variations between districts highlight

how local ecology, land accessibility, and settlement style shape gardening practices, yet the widespread presence of kitchen gardens overall demonstrates their enduring role in maintaining Mizo food culture, freshness, and self-reliance.

Thus, kitchen gardens in Mizoram are not only a source of sustenance but also a marker of cultural memory. The strong presence of kitchen gardens across both urban and rural households shows how closely Mizo food practices remain tied to fresh, home-grown ingredients. Since daily meals typically include dishes like *bai* (stew), *tlak* (boiled vegetables), *kan* (fried items), and *rawt* (chutney), families prefer to grow essential vegetables, herbs, chillies, and greens themselves to ensure freshness, flavour, and cultural authenticity. Even when markets are easily accessible, households continue to maintain kitchen gardens because the taste and quality of home-grown produce fit better with traditional cooking, making gardening not just a practical choice but an important part of sustaining everyday Mizo food culture.

Table 4.11. Sources of groceries in your household

Sources	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Local market	79	12	75	23	154 (77)	35 (17.5)	189 (47.25)
Online	0	0	8	0	8 (4)	0	8 (2)
House vendors	16	0	13	2	29 (14.5)	2 (1)	31 (7.75)
Kitchen garden	5	8	4	32	9 (4.5)	40 (20)	94 (23.5)
From the Fields	0	80	0	43	0	123 (61.5)	123 (30.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the overall total, the most dominant source of groceries is the local market, relied upon by 189 households (47.25%). This shows that everyday food procurement is still strongly centred on physical market spaces, where fresh produce and daily essentials are readily available. The next major sources are from the fields, which account for 123 households (30.75%), and kitchen gardens, used by 94 households (23.5%), indicating the continuing importance of self-grown or self-harvested food in Mizo households. Smaller proportions depend on house vendors (7.75%) and online

purchasing (2%), showing that while market dependence remains strong, some households diversify through both traditional and modern channels.

In the total urban sample, the dominance of the local market becomes even more evident. 154 households (77%) in urban areas depend on local markets as their primary grocery source, highlighting easy geographic access and the convenience of urban market systems. Other sources remain much smaller: house vendors account for 14.5%, kitchen gardens for 4.5%, and online shopping for 4%, indicating some degree of diversification. Notably, none of the urban households rely on fields, reflecting the absence of cultivable land in towns. Urban grocery sourcing is thus structured around accessibility, convenience, and market infrastructure.

In contrast, the total rural sample shows a profoundly different pattern. The strongest reliance here is on fields, with 123 households (61.5%) sourcing their groceries directly from agricultural or forest lands. Kitchen gardens make up another 20%, reflecting the central role of home-grown produce in rural diets. Only 17.5% of rural households depend on local markets, and house vendors account for a minimal 1%. There is no online shopping usage in any rural area. Rural households therefore depend overwhelmingly on self-produced, foraged, or field-grown ingredients, signalling strong continuity of traditional food systems.

Comparing the total urban and total rural samples reveals an unmistakable divide. Urban households overwhelmingly rely on local markets (77%), whereas rural households rely primarily on fields (61.5%) and kitchen gardens (20%). The urban dependence on markets contrasts sharply with the rural emphasis on self-grown or locally harvested food. Where urban homes engage with small-scale modern alternatives like house vendors and online platforms, rural households rely on land-based and community-based sources. This contrast highlights the interplay between geography, livelihoods, and food culture, where market access shapes urban food sourcing while agricultural dependence continues to define rural life.

Within the urban districts, the patterns vary slightly. Aizawl Urban shows strong dependence on the local market, with 75% sourcing groceries from there, supported by smaller contributions from house vendors (13%) and kitchen gardens (4%). Kolasib Urban displays a similar pattern, with 79% relying on the market and 16% on house vendors. In both regions, markets form the backbone of food sourcing, but Aizawl Urban uniquely shows a small online purchasing share (8%), reflecting deeper

integration with digital platforms. Overall, the two urban regions reinforce the urban total, with Kolasib Urban showing slightly stronger market dependence and Aizawl Urban displaying slightly more diversification.

The rural districts, however, reveal much sharper contrasts. Kolasib Rural shows an overwhelming dependence on the fields, with 80% of households sourcing groceries this way, and only 12% relying on local markets. Kitchen gardens account for 8%. This pattern reflects a lifestyle deeply embedded in agriculture and forest-based gathering. In comparison, Aizawl Rural also relies significantly on the fields (43%) but shows much greater dependence on kitchen gardens (32%) and the local market (23%). Aizawl Rural therefore displays a more balanced mix of self-produced and market-purchased food sources, likely reflecting closer proximity to the city and better access to vendors and markets. Kolasib Rural remains the most field-dependent region, while Aizawl Rural combines land-based resources with more accessible market networks.

The data on grocery sources reveal a sharp contrast between urban and rural Mizoram, where market dependency and land-based self-sufficiency intersect in different ways. In urban areas such as Kolasib and Aizawl, households rely heavily on local markets with 79% and 75% respectively sourcing their groceries there. Respondents often described this practice as a matter of convenience. One participant from Kolasib explained,

“We buy most of our vegetables and meat from the bazaar. It is close by and we can get everything in one trip.”

Similarly, an Aizawl resident reflected,

“With work and school, there is no time for gardening. The market provides what we need every day.”

A smaller share of households also depends on house vendors (16% in Kolasib Urban and 13% in Aizawl Urban) pointing to the popularity of door-to-door services, particularly for busy families and the elderly. Online platforms are also emerging in Aizawl (8%) where one respondent noted,

“Sometimes we order through apps, mostly packaged food or snacks. It is easier when we don’t have time to go out.”

These urban patterns clearly reflect both infrastructural availability and changing consumption habits shaped by modern convenience.

By contrast, in rural Kolasib and Aizawl, households remain closely tied to their land and subsistence farming. An overwhelming 80% of Kolasib Rural households and 43% of Aizawl Rural households draw their groceries directly from fields, while kitchen gardens supplement these with 8% and 32% respectively. As one farmer in Kolasib explained,

“We grow it ourselves, and we sell it as well” (Respondent 182).

Another emphasized,

“We cultivate our own crops” (Respondent 328),

and in Aizawl Rural, respondents highlighted the absence of markets altogether,

“We don’t have a market here. We just eat what we produce ourselves” (Respondent 369).

This absence is striking given that rural producers supply bulk produce to urban markets in Kolasib and Aizawl city. Respondents repeatedly underlined this paradox, with one from Kolasib Rural stating,

“There is no market here. We buy groceries when we visit Bairabi market or Kolasib” (Respondent 183),

while another said,

“Unless it’s bought on the way to Kolasib, it’s just from the shop here” (Respondent 184).

In Aizawl Rural, one household explained,

“Ever since the Swine Flu outbreak, they don’t allow selling pork locally, and bringing in meat from outside has been banned. So, unless local people butcher it, we don’t eat meat” (Respondent 369).

Such testimonies highlight the uneven infrastructure in rural areas, where households produce food for city supply but remain without regular access to local bazaars themselves.

Even when markets are absent, rural families improvise through small village shops or kin networks. One respondent remarked,

“Potatoes and lentils at the shop” (Respondent 196),

while another explained,

“My children usually buy them on their way back”

(Respondent 240).

Others rely on relatives, as one woman stated,

“My family members buy groceries for me occasionally”

(Respondent 205)

Trips to urban markets are still made when necessary, with mentions of “*Kolasib market*” (Respondent 186) or “*Aizawl market*” (Respondents 375, 379). However, such journeys require time and mobility, underscoring the dependence of rural households on both self-production and occasional external purchasing.

Overall, these findings show that while urban households are oriented toward markets, vendors and even online sources, rural households remain embedded in self-sufficiency, cultivating most of what they consume and only supplementing through occasional purchases. Importantly, the absence of bazar spaces in rural Kolasib and Aizawl despite their role as key suppliers to urban centres highlights the spatial inequalities of food access. This urban-rural contrast underscores not just differences in infrastructure but also the persistence of cultural practices of cultivation, sharing, and resilience in the rural food system.

Taken together, the patterns demonstrate that grocery sourcing in Mizoram is shaped by geography, livelihood structures and access to markets. Urban areas are market-driven, with emerging use of digital platforms and house vendors. Rural areas, particularly Kolasib Rural, rely heavily on agricultural fields and home-grown produce, reflecting a deeper connection to land-based food systems. Aizawl Rural occupies an intermediate space, maintaining strong agricultural ties while also engaging with market sources. Overall, these findings show how food procurement practices mirror broader socio-economic conditions, balancing tradition, accessibility, and modernity across different regions of Mizoram. Since Mizo cooking depends heavily on fresh, natural ingredients that are prepared daily, the way households source their groceries whether from markets in urban areas or from fields and kitchen gardens in rural areas directly reflects how they sustain their food practices and ensure the freshness that their meals require.

Overview

This section has examined household structure and composition in Mizoram by tracing how types of household, family size, headship, housing form, living ambience, water access, fuels, stoves, kitchen gardens and grocery sources come together to organise everyday life. Across the four sites, nuclear families in small-to-medium sized households predominate, with joint and extended units persisting mainly in Kolasib Rural, and headship remaining largely father-centred but with a visible minority of mother- and grandparent-led homes that signal gradual shifts in authority and care. Materially, most households now occupy pucca houses with universal PHE tap water, while Assam-type and a few kutchra dwellings in Kolasib Rural point to continued reliance on local materials and more precarious living conditions. Kitchens and living rooms operate as key social spaces. Urban homes favour compartmentalised layouts and LPG/electric fuel, whereas rural households retain multipurpose halls, firewood use and more flexible, multi-stove setups that support labour-sharing and traditional cooking. Food sourcing patterns further differentiate these settings, with urban families relying on markets and, in Aizawl, some online and house-vendor purchases and rural households drawing heavily on fields and kitchen gardens, even where formal bazaars are absent. Taken together, these intersecting arrangements of people, space, and infrastructure constitute the practical ecology within which Mizo food is grown, cooked, served and shared and provide the social groundwork for the next section's analysis of economic aspects such as occupation, income, breadwinners and dependents.

4.5 Economic Aspects

The economic profile of households provides crucial insight into their standard of living, social positioning, and capacity to meet every day needs. Income and employment not only shape material well-being but also influence food choices, access to resources and long-term security. The number of earning members, monthly income and the distribution of financial responsibilities within the household determine how resources are allocated for essentials such as food, education and healthcare. At the same time, the role of the household head and the balance between earners and dependents reflect broader socio-economic dynamics including generational responsibilities and gendered divisions of labour.

In this section, we focus on four key indicators that highlight the economic realities of Mizo households namely occupation, monthly income of the family, the number of breadwinners and the number of dependents. Together, these elements help to illustrate not only the financial resilience of households but also the vulnerabilities that shape their everyday lives and decision-making.

4.5.1 Occupation: Occupation refers to the primary means through which households earn a living ranging from subsistence farming and daily wage labour to salaried work, petty trade and small-scale entrepreneurship. These occupational choices shape not only economic stability but also everyday routines, food access, and the social identity of households. Across Mizoram, the occupational landscape shows a clear divide between urban opportunities and rural livelihoods, with emerging hybrid forms in semi-rural settlements.

In Aizawl Urban, the occupational profile reflects the city's status as the administrative and commercial centre of the state. Respondents commonly reported working in government offices, private institutions, schools and retail shops. This points to a workforce increasingly anchored in salaried jobs and semi-formal employment. Households also diversify income through teaching, clerical work, and shop-keeping. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the security attached to government service, regular salaries, pensions and predictable working hours. Shopkeepers benefit from dense neighbourhoods and high consumer flow, allowing for small but steady entrepreneurial income. These occupational patterns directly influence food practices: with limited time and space for cultivation, families rely heavily on markets and vendors, reinforcing a market-driven food culture shaped by convenience and urban lifestyles.

By contrast, Aizawl Rural remains strongly rooted in farming as both a source of income and the backbone of everyday subsistence. Respondents described farming/agriculture, cultivating rice, vegetables, and seasonal crops as the primary occupation, with surplus produce occasionally sold in nearby markets. While some households supplement income through local school jobs or wage work, these roles remain secondary. The phrase "*what we grow is what we eat*" was frequently echoed, showing the centrality of cultivation to household survival. Farming provides food sovereignty but also exposes households to vulnerabilities such as fluctuating yields, erratic rainfall and limited market access. Lungleng, village in Aizawl, though rural,

presents a more blended occupational profile. Most households continue to farm, growing staples for home consumption. Yet diversification is emerging as some respondents work as teachers in nearby schools, while others run tea stalls or engage in petty trade to supplement income. Tea stalls in particular are more than income sources, they are social spaces where neighbours gather, exchange news and sustain community interactions. This blend of farming with small-scale entrepreneurship shows the flexibility of rural households in navigating economic uncertainty. Lungleng thus represents an evolving rural livelihood structure where agricultural identity persists but adapts alongside modern influences.

In Kolasib Urban, the occupational landscape straddles both rural and urban characteristics. Respondents mentioned farming, grocery vending, shop-keeping, government service and daily wage labour as common sources of livelihood. Unlike Aizawl Urban where salaried employment dominates, Kolasib Urban presents a hybrid structure in which agriculture still plays a visible role. Shops and local vending form key economic activities, catering to the town's semi-urban consumer base. Daily wage work indicates economic fragility for many households, often involving construction, carrying materials, or other manual jobs. Government employment, though limited, is a highly valued route to stability. Occupational diversity here reflects Kolasib's transitional character, neither fully urban nor fully rural, but an adaptive livelihood blend responding to both.

Kolasib Rural shows the strongest reliance on agriculture and wage labour. Farming provides the primary source of food and partial income, with surplus crops sold informally. Daily wage labour, often seasonal or irregular supplements farm-based subsistence. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) plays a critical role in stabilising rural income. Many respondents stressed that MGNREGS wages help them meet non-farm expenses or survive periods when farming yields are low. Small local shops contribute secondary income in a limited number of households. This occupational structure reflects a delicate balance between land-based subsistence and wage dependence, with rural livelihoods shaped by agricultural rhythms, labour availability and state interventions.

Across all four regions, the patterns show that occupation is not merely a source of income; it is a window into the social and economic fabric of Mizoram. Urban households are moving steadily toward salaried work, retail activity, and market

dependency, while rural households remain tied to agriculture and wage schemes. Semi-rural communities demonstrate hybrid strategies that mix subsistence farming with teaching or petty trade. These occupational arrangements illuminate broader shifts in identity and livelihood, revealing a landscape shaped by continuity in farming traditions and change driven by urbanisation, education and emerging economic pressures. The analysis shows that occupation is more than a means of livelihood. It is a lens into the economic, cultural and social life of Mizoram. While urban households are shifting toward salaried work, trade, and market dependency, rural households continue to rely on agriculture, supplemented by schemes like MGNREGS. Villages like Lungleng demonstrate the hybrid strategies that emerge when subsistence farming is combined with teaching or petty trade. Ultimately, occupational patterns reflect both continuity and change, continuity in the persistence of farming as cultural and economic identity and change in the growing diversification of income sources in response to urbanisation and modern pressures.

These occupational patterns also shape how households' access, prepare, and think about food. Families engaged in salaried work or business in urban areas depend more on markets and quick-to-prepare items because their schedules leave less time for slow, home-grown cooking. In contrast, rural households whose livelihoods centre on farming and wage labour rely heavily on their fields, gardens, and seasonal produce, making their everyday meals closely tied to what they cultivate. Semi-rural communities that mix farming with small jobs also show hybrid food habits using their gardens for daily ingredients while depending on shops for items they cannot grow. In this way, the kind of work people do directly influence whether their food comes from markets or land, how much time they spend cooking, and the extent to which traditional food practices are maintained in everyday life.

4.5.2 Monthly Income of the Family: Monthly family income is a crucial indicator of household well-being, directly shaping access to food, healthcare, education, housing, and other basic needs. It serves not only as a marker of financial stability but also as a determinant of social and nutritional security. Studies have shown that income has a strong influence on health and life expectancy. For instance, Finkelstein et al. (2022) note that higher income levels are associated with lower prevalence of chronic diseases and increased longevity, while Lee et al. (2021) found that greater monthly disposable income contributes positively to physical health and overall

quality of life. In the context of Mizoram, variations in income levels across urban and rural households affect purchasing power, dietary diversity, and the ability to cope with emergencies. This section explores these dynamics by examining reported monthly incomes across the four study regions, highlighting how economic disparities influence household practices and food security.

Table 4.12. Monthly Income of the Family

Monthly Income	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Below 5,000	12	14	26	-	38 (19)	14 (7)	52 (13)
5,000 - 10,000	25	48	26	25	51 (25.5)	73 (36.5)	124 (31)
10,000 - 50,000	41	35	19	68	60 (30)	103 (51.5)	163 (40.75)
50,000 above	22	3	29	7	51 (25.5)	10 (5)	61 (15.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the overall distribution, the majority of households fall within the ₹10,000-50,000 income bracket, accounting for 163 households (40.75%) making it the most dominant category in the total sample indicating that most families fall within a moderate-income range. This level of income allows households to afford basic staples such as rice, vegetables, oil, meat occasionally, and market-bought ingredients when needed. However, it still limits frequent consumption of costlier items like imported snacks, packaged foods or pork during price hikes.

This is followed by ₹5,000-10,000, reported by 124 households (31%) reflects lower-middle-income households that tend to rely more on home-grown vegetables, kitchen gardens, and cheaper market produce, keeping meals simple and seasonal. Higher-income households earning ₹50,000 and above constitute 61 households (15.25%) have greater food flexibility, including regular meat intake, purchased convenience foods, and access to diverse ingredients, while the lowest income group earning below ₹5,000 per month accounts for 52 households (13%) face tighter constraints, often depending on subsidised rice, foraged greens, and minimal meat consumption. Taken together, the data suggest that while a significant portion of families fall within the moderate-income range, a considerable share continues to live within lower-income categories, highlighting economic diversity across the state.

In the total urban sample, income distribution is more evenly spread across three major brackets. Households earning ₹10,000-50,000 make up 60 households (30%), closely followed by those earning ₹5,000-10,000 and ₹50,000 and above, each contributing 51 households (25.5%). The lowest-income group (<₹5,000) is comparatively smaller, with 38 households (19%). This shows that urban areas have a relatively balanced economic structure, with sizeable representation in both lower- and higher-income groups, and a strong presence of middle-income families.

The total rural sample reveals a markedly different pattern. Here, ₹10,000-50,000 is even more dominant, accounting for 103 households (51.5%), making it the clear majority. The second-largest group is ₹5,000-10,000, with 73 households (36.5%), while only 10 households (5%) earn ₹50,000 and above, indicating fewer high-income families in rural areas. The lowest-income group contributes 14 households (7%), showing that extreme low-income prevalence is somewhat lower than one might assume, though the overall economic structure remains heavily concentrated in the mid-low brackets. Despite lower cash income, rural households may still consume diverse home-grown foods, reflecting a food culture tied to land and self-production rather than purchasing power.

Comparing the total urban and total rural samples highlights an evident economic divide. Urban areas exhibit a higher proportion of households in the upper-income category (25.5% earning above ₹50,000), while rural areas show only 5% in this bracket. Conversely, middle-income families earning ₹10,000-50,000 dominate rural areas far more strongly (51.5%) compared to urban areas (30%). The lower-income groups (<₹10,000) account for a higher share in rural areas (43.5% combined) than in urban areas (44.5% combined), but urban areas display greater income spread and upward mobility. This rural-urban contrast illustrates how economic opportunities, employment types and access to steady income sources shape household financial stability. Lower-income households in rural areas often use land, fields and community sharing to ensure food security, whereas urban low-income households have fewer alternatives and must manage with small purchases. Thus, income differences translate into differences in dietary diversity, meat frequency, cooking methods and reliance on markets versus land.

Comparing the two urban regions brings out interesting contrasts. In Aizawl Urban, the income distribution peaks at ₹50,000 and above, accounting for 29%, making it

the highest high-income share among all areas. The next largest groups are the below-₹5,000 and ₹5,000-10,000 categories, each at 26%, suggesting significant economic variation within the city. Meanwhile, Kolasib Urban shows a very different pattern, with the dominant income group being ₹10,000-50,000 (41%), followed by ₹5,000-10,000 (25%). Only 22% fall into the highest-income category. These differences indicate that Aizawl Urban has a stronger concentration of higher-income households, while Kolasib Urban is more middle-income-oriented.

The rural regions show even sharper differences. Aizawl Rural presents the highest concentration of middle-income families across all regions, with 68% earning between ₹10,000-50,000, and a further 25% in the ₹5,000-10,000 bracket. Only 7% fall into the highest-income group. Conversely, Kolasib Rural shows a more compressed income profile, while 35% fall in the ₹10,000-50,000 bracket, a striking 48% are in the much lower ₹5,000-10,000 range, and 14% remain below ₹5,000. High-income households are nearly absent at only 3%. These contrasts show that Aizawl Rural has significantly higher income levels and greater economic diversification than Kolasib Rural, where lower-income households form the overwhelming majority.

The data on monthly income highlights sharp contrasts between urban and rural households revealing how economic conditions shape household stability and food practices. In Kolasib Urban, the income distribution is relatively balanced with a significant 41% of households earning between ₹10,000 and ₹50,000 and 22% earning above ₹50,000. This reflects the presence of salaried jobs, business opportunities and a more diversified economy. At the same time, 12% of households still earn below ₹5,000 pointing to persistent income disparities within the town.

In Kolasib Rural, nearly half of the households (48%) earn between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000, while 35% fall in the ₹10,000-₹50,000 range. Only 3% cross the ₹50,000 threshold underlining limited high-income opportunities in rural settings where agriculture and daily wage labour dominate. The 14% of households surviving on less than ₹5,000 a month highlights Economic insecurity, which results in families being heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture.

In Aizawl Urban, the picture is more polarized. While 29% of households earn above ₹50,000, indicating the presence of a strong middle and upper-income group linked to salaried government and private sector jobs, 26% remain at the lowest income bracket

(below ₹5,000). This coexistence of affluence and poverty within the city demonstrates how urbanization creates opportunities but also sharp income inequalities. Notably, only 19% fall in the mid-range of ₹10,000-₹50,000 reflecting a squeeze of the middle-income households compared to Kolasib.

In Aizawl Rural, the majority (68%) of households lie in the ₹10,000-₹50,000 bracket suggesting greater economic stability than Kolasib Rural, likely tied to better market access and diversified livelihoods despite the rural setting. However, 25% earn only between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 and a small proportion (7%) earn above ₹50,000, showing that while extreme poverty is less visible here (with no households reporting income below ₹5,000), high-income opportunities remain scarce.

Taken together, the income patterns across Mizoram reveal a layered economic structure shaped by geography, livelihood opportunities and market access. Urban areas offer more diversified and higher-income opportunities, while rural areas particularly Kolasib Rural are marked by narrower economic ranges and stronger dependence on lower and middle-income brackets. Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural stand out for their relatively stronger economic footing, whereas Kolasib Urban and especially Kolasib Rural reflect more modest income structures. These variations underscore how economic conditions intersect with household food practices, consumption patterns and the broader cultural landscape explored in the subsequent sections.

Overall, the table reflects a clear urban–rural divide. Urban areas, especially Aizawl show both higher proportions of wealthy households and significant numbers of low-income earners, illustrating stark inequalities. Rural households, by contrast are concentrated in the low to mid-income ranges, depending heavily on agricultural labour and small-scale activities. These variations have direct implications for food access, dietary diversity with urban households experiencing inequality-driven differences and rural households relying more on subsistence and community-based support systems.

4.5.3 Number of Bread Earners in the House: The number of bread earners in a household is an important determinant of its financial security and overall standard of living. Families with multiple earners often enjoy greater economic resilience, as the burden of income generation is shared across members enabling them to better withstand unforeseen circumstances. In contrast, household's dependent on a single

earner may face heightened vulnerability, particularly during illness, job loss or economic downturns. The presence of multiple breadwinners also reflects broader dynamics of gender roles, generational participation and the mix between agricultural labor, wage employment and informal work. As Rehkopf (2025) notes, household income and the distribution of earning responsibilities significantly shape long-term well-being linking economic security to both health and quality of life. Studying the number of bread earners therefore provides valuable insights into how Mizo households organize livelihood strategies and balance traditional practices with modern wage-based systems.

Table 4.13. Number of Bread Earners in the House

No. of Bread Earners	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
1 Bread earner	80	79	79	58	159 (79.5)	137 (68.5)	296 (74)
2 Bread earners	15	14	18	32	33 (16.5)	46 (23)	79 (19.75)
3 Bread earners	5	7	3	9	8 (4)	16 (8)	24 (6)
4 Bread earners	0	0	0	1	0	1 (0.5)	1 (0.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the overall total, households with one bread earner form an overwhelming majority, accounting for 296 households (74%), showing that most families depend on a single income source. Households with two bread earners follow at 79 households (19.75%), while only a small proportion 24 households (6%) have three earning members. Households with four bread earners are extremely rare, appearing only once in the entire sample (0.25%). These figures collectively indicate that although multiple earners do exist, the economic responsibility in most family's rests primarily on a single individual. The dominance of single-breadwinner households (74%) means that most families manage their food budget carefully, often prioritising essential staples like rice, vegetables, lentils, and cheaper cuts of meat. With only one income, households tend to avoid expensive or frequent meat consumption and rely more on seasonal produce or home-grown vegetables to stretch their budget. In contrast,

households with two or three earners have comparatively better food security, allowing them to purchase a wider variety of ingredients, meat more frequently, and maintain a more diverse diet.

In the total urban sample, the pattern remains strong. 159 households (79.5%) rely on a single bread earner, making it the dominant arrangement. Another 33 households (16.5%) have two bread earners, and only 8 households (4%) report three earners. No urban households have four earners. This suggests that urban households largely mirror the overall trend, with a heavy reliance on one primary income contributor. Urban households relying on a single bread earner (79.5%) often face higher living expenses, meaning food spending becomes more restrained. These families typically buy vegetables daily in small quantities, reduce meat consumption during price hikes, and depend on affordable ingredients such as potatoes, cabbage, and dal. Urban households with two earners, however, can buy more convenience foods, use LPG more regularly, and maintain more varied diets because the food budget is less restricted.

In the total rural sample, the trend remains similar but slightly more diverse. While 137 households (68.5%) still depend on a single bread earner, this share is lower than in urban areas. The proportion of households with two bread earners rises to 46 households (23%), and those with three earners increase to 16 households (8%). Only one rural household (0.5%) reports four bread earners. This suggests that rural families may distribute earning responsibilities more broadly, possibly due to agricultural work patterns requiring multiple contributors. In rural areas, although 68.5% depend on one breadwinner, the presence of more multi-earner households (23% with two earners, 8% with three) reflects a shared livelihood system where agricultural and wage activities involve the whole household. This directly supports food practices, as families with more earners can invest in livestock, buy meat or packaged goods more regularly, and maintain larger kitchen gardens. Rural households with only one earner rely heavily on self-grown vegetables, foraged greens, and rice from their fields to maintain daily meals.

Comparing the total urban and total rural samples shows the divide more clearly. Urban households are more likely to rely on just one bread earner (79.5% compared to 68.5%), whereas rural households show greater reliance on two or more earners (31.5% combined, compared to 20.5% in urban areas). This indicates that rural

economic life often involves multiple contributors, likely reflecting varied livelihood sources, informal labour and agricultural work shared across family members. Urban families depending heavily on one income often buy what they can afford, adjusting meals based on prices and availability. Rural households, however, compensate for lower cash income through land-based food sources, meaning that even with fewer earners, their diet can remain stable because much of their food does not need to be purchased. Rural households with two or more earners experience even greater food stability, with the ability to buy additional ingredients that enhance daily meals such as oil, spices, packaged foods, eggs, etc.

Within the urban districts, the trend is almost identical across Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban. Aizawl Urban reports 79% single earners and 18% with two earners, with only 3% reporting three. Similarly, Kolasib Urban records 80% single earners and 15% with two earners, and 5% with three. Both regions therefore show the same strong dependence on a single breadwinner, reflecting similar employment structures in urban areas. In both Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban, the strong reliance on a single breadwinner means food habits are shaped by budgeting and careful planning. Families often prioritise rice and simple dishes, reserving meat for Sundays or special occasions. Two-earner households can afford to buy more variety like fruits, noodles, snacks for children, and better-quality vegetables reflecting how income affects dietary flexibility in cities.

Across the rural districts, however, the differences are more distinct. Kolasib Rural reports 79% single earners much closer to urban patterns while Aizawl Rural shows only 58% single earners, making it the region with the lowest reliance on one income source. Aizawl Rural also records the highest proportion of households with two earners (32%) and three earners (9%). This suggests that Aizawl Rural has a more diversified earning structure, where multiple family members contribute to household income, possibly due to varied labour opportunities and closer links to urban employment. Kolasib Rural, with 79% dependent on one earner, often relies on subsistence crops and limited market purchases, resulting in meals built around what is available from fields. Aizawl Rural, with the lowest reliance on a single earner (58%) and the highest share of multi-earner households (32% two earners; 9% three earners), shows greater dietary flexibility. More earners mean more frequent market visits, ability to buy meat more often, and greater variety in daily meals. Because more

household members contribute financially, Aizawl Rural families are better able to balance self-grown produce with purchased food, leading to more diverse and stable eating patterns.

The data on the number of bread earners in Mizo households thus reveals significant differences between urban and rural contexts while also highlighting a common reliance on single-income households. Taken together, these findings show that although single-income households dominate across all regions, rural areas particularly Aizawl Rural demonstrate a wider spread of earning contributors. Urban households remain more dependent on one primary earner, while rural economic life allows or requires broader participation in income generation, highlighting differences in livelihood patterns, work availability and household economic strategies across Mizoram. The number of bread earners in a household directly shapes food security, dietary diversity, and the ability to maintain culturally significant meals. Single-earner families often prepare simpler, cost-managed meals, while households with multiple earners enjoy more flexibility buying a wider range of ingredients, consuming meat more often, and sustaining food practices that require additional cost or effort. Across Mizoram, more earners mean more stable access to food and greater freedom to maintain traditional eating patterns.

4.5.4 Dependents: Dependents in a household, like kids, elderly parents or adults who do not work have a big impact on how families handle their financial and social duties. The number of earners compared to dependents has a direct effect on how much a family can save, invest and eat. Having a lot of dependents can put a strain on resources, reducing disposable income and making people more vulnerable during emergencies. On the other hand, families with fewer dependents and more than one income may be more stable and have better living conditions. In Mizoram, the number of dependents also shows how generations live together and how much people in both rural and urban areas depend on family support systems. Looking at the differences between regions helps us figure out how family size and household income affect how people eat and their health.

Dependents in a household, children, elderly parents, non-earning adults, students, and individuals unable to work shape how families distribute labour, allocate resources, and maintain daily functioning. The relationship of “who depends on whom” is central. In most Mizo households, the primary earner (or earners) supports

school-age children, ageing parents, unemployed youth, and sometimes extended kin. As the number of dependents increases, household vulnerability also rises, especially when income streams are limited. Urban and rural differences further influence how these dependency patterns play out, revealing distinct family structures and economic realities across regions.

In Kolasib Urban, a traditional dependency structure is prominent. The majority of households rely on one breadwinner, and a large segment of dependents consists of young children, elderly parents and, increasingly, unemployed young adults. Working fathers often serve as the sole earners, supporting stay-at-home mothers, school-going children, and older parents who require medical care and assistance. Several respondents noted that even young adults who have completed their studies remain dependent on the main earner until they find employment. This creates a vertical chain of dependence where three generations rely on a single income, intensifying economic strain.

In Kolasib Rural, dependence is even more layered due to agricultural livelihoods. Most households have a single male earner, often the father whose income must support a large number of dependents, numerous children, elderly parents, siblings who remain in the household, and sometimes widowed or single female relatives. Agricultural work involves contributions from younger adults and older children, but they are still considered dependents because they do not bring in steady income. A respondent explained,

“We work in the fields, but most of the money goes towards feeding the children and elders,”

highlighting how the primary earner must support both labouring dependents (those who contribute physically) and non-labouring dependents (young children and the elderly). This multi-layered dependency makes rural households particularly vulnerable during lean agricultural seasons.

In Aizawl Urban, who depends on whom is shaped by a more complex mix of salaried work, education and high living costs. Typically, working parents either one or both support young children, elderly parents, and sometimes siblings or relatives pursuing studies in the city. Many respondents noted that adult children preparing for competitive exams or higher education continue to depend on parental income. Urban households also often support elderly parents who have migrated from villages for

better healthcare access. This creates a dual burden i.e. urban earners support both upward (their parents) and downward (their children). One respondent described the pressure of balancing financial needs for *“children’s school fees, rent, and looking after parents,”* illustrating the layered responsibilities that urban earners carry.

In Aizawl Rural, dependency is highest due to large, extended family households. The main earners often one or two adults support children, elderly parents, grandparents, and young adults who contribute labour to farming but do not have independent income. Multi-generational living is common, grandparents, parents, adult children and grandchildren may reside together. A respondent mentioned,

“Most of our food comes from our fields, but we are always short of money because there are many people to provide for,”

capturing how the household works as a collective but remains financially dependent on one or two earners. Here, dependence flows in multiple directions, elderly depend on adults for care, children depend on parents for all needs, and younger adults depend on the household until they find paid work.

Across Mizoram, these patterns reflect strong family support systems but also significant economic pressure. Urban households face high expenses but have more chances for diversified income, while rural households rely on agriculture and shared labour but depend heavily on one breadwinner. The number of dependents influences everything from food budgeting to dietary choices, determining whether families grow their own produce, buy from the market, or restrict consumption during difficult months.

Overview

Taken together, the economic profile of respondents reveals clear contrasts between urban and rural livelihoods in Mizoram. Taken together, the economic profile of respondents reveals a stratified yet interdependent livelihood landscape in Mizoram, shaped by the interplay of occupation, income levels, earning capacity, and household dependency structures. Urban households, particularly in Aizawl, display greater engagement in salaried employment and higher-income brackets, reflecting expanding access to stable wages and diversified livelihoods, whereas rural households remain deeply anchored in agriculture, wage labour, and seasonal work, resulting in narrower income ranges and stronger reliance on land-based subsistence.

The predominance of single-earner households across all regions highlights a structural vulnerability that becomes more pronounced where large numbers of dependents rely on one income stream, compressing household budgets and heightening sensitivity to price fluctuations. In contrast, households with multiple earners more common in Aizawl Rural enjoy greater economic resilience, enabling more diverse diets and flexible food purchasing. These economic dynamics shape everyday food practices in direct and profound ways where lower-income and single-earner families prioritise inexpensive staples and home-grown produce, while higher-income and multi-earner households access a wider range of ingredients, convenience foods, and more frequent protein consumption. Overall, the economic characteristics of households illuminate how livelihood structures, labour participation, and dependency ratios collectively determine food security, dietary diversity, and the capacity to sustain both traditional and modern food practices within Mizo society.

4.6 Religious Affiliation

Religious affiliation refers to an individual's identification with a particular faith tradition shaping not only spiritual beliefs but also everyday practices including food and dietary choices. Around the world, religion often defines what is considered permissible or forbidden to eat, sets norms for food preparation and provides meaning to communal meals and rituals. For instance, taboos, fasting practices and the use of food in religious offerings highlight the deep connection between belief systems and dietary culture.

In Mizoram, religious affiliation holds a special significance because almost the entire population identifies as Christian. Since the arrival of Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century, Christianity has become the dominant faith. Christianity not only provided a spiritual framework but also influenced domestic food habits, hospitality and cultural celebrations. Within this broader faith identity, there are also multiple denominations such as Presbyterian, Baptist, Salvation Army, Roman Catholic and Pentecostal each shaping community life in distinct ways. Thus, in Mizoram, religious affiliation is not merely a marker of faith. It actively intersects with food practices, reinforcing social values of sharing, moderation, and community cohesion. Examining this aspect helps us understand how Christianity and its denominational diversity influence both household dietary choices and the collective cultural meanings attached to food.

In this study, all 100% of the surveyed households in both urban and rural areas of Kolasib and Aizawl identify as Christian. This absolute uniformity reflects the broader demographic reality of Mizoram where Christianity is not only the dominant faith but also a cornerstone of cultural, social and moral life. The introduction of Christianity by missionaries in the late nineteenth century reshaped Mizo society, embedding church-centred values into everyday practices including food habits.

The absence of other religions in the survey such as Hinduism which is present in very small pockets of Mizoram indicates that alternative dietary frameworks (like vegetarianism or avoidance of certain meats) have virtually no influence on local food systems in the studied areas. Instead, Christianity provides the dominant cultural frame through which food choices, hospitality norms and communal meals are organized.

4.6.1 Denomination: Denominations are organised groups within a larger religious tradition. Each one has its own set of rules, beliefs and ways of doing things. In Mizoram, where almost everyone is Christian, denominational identity has become a big part of how people feel like they belong in society. Even though all Christian denominations follow basic Christian beliefs, there are small differences in how they worship, get together with others and help others. Belonging to a certain denomination also might affect how you eat. Understanding denominational affiliation in Mizoram gives us more than just a picture of how religion is grouped. It also shows us how faith communities affect daily life, eating habits and cultural identity in a society that is mostly Christian but has a lot of different kinds of people living in it.

Table 4.14. Denomination

Denomination	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Presbyterian	67	66	74	80	70 (35)	146 (73)	216 (54)
Roman Catholic	2	1	3	6	5 (2.5)	7 (3.5)	12 (3)
Baptist	4	2	14	5	18 (9)	7 (3.5)	25 (6.25)
Salvation Army	-	7	1	-	1 (0.5)	7 (3.5)	8 (2)
UPC (NEI)	8	10	4	5	12 (6)	15 (7.5)	27 (6.75)
UPC (MZ)	-	2	1	-	1 (0.5)	2 (1)	3 (0.75)
Seventh Day Adventist	-	4	4	2	4 (2)	6 (3)	10 (2.5)
Mizo Kohhran	-	1	1	-	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.5)
Kohhran Thianglim	1	-	-	1	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.5)

IKK	-	-	-	3	-	3 (1.5)	3 (0.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

In the overall total, the Presbyterian Church clearly dominates, with 216 households (54%), making it the largest denominational group in the study. This is followed at a distance by Baptist households, which make up 25 households (6.25%), and UPC-NEI with 27 households (6.75%). Other denominations such as Roman Catholic (3%), Seventh Day Adventist (2.5%), Salvation Army (2%), and UPC-MZ (0.75%) appear in much smaller proportions. Very small denominations including Mizo Kohhran, Kohhran Thianghlum and IKK, each account for only 0.5–0.75%, indicating a minimal presence. Taken together, the data reflect the well-established religious profile of Mizoram, where Presbyterianism remains the most influential denomination.

In the total urban sample, the Presbyterian denomination remains highly prominent, accounting for 70 households (35%) but its dominance is much less pronounced than in rural areas. Urban regions also show greater denominational diversity. Baptist households form 18 households (9%), while UPC-NEI accounts for 12 households (6%) and Roman Catholic households for 5 households (2.5%). Smaller groups such as Seventh Day Adventist (2%) and UPC-MZ (0.5%) are present, reflecting the more mixed religious landscape typically found in urban spaces.

In the total rural sample, the dominance of Presbyterian households becomes far stronger, rising to 146 households (73%), making rural Mizoram significantly more homogenous in religious affiliation. Other denominations appear only in small numbers: Roman Catholic and Baptist households account for 3.5% each, UPC-NEI for 7.5%, and Salvation Army for 3.5%. Very small denominations such as Seventh Day Adventist, Mizo Kohhran, Kohhran Thianghlum and IKK together make up only a marginal share. This shows a clear pattern where rural areas reflect a far more consolidated Presbyterian presence compared to urban areas.

Comparing the total urban and total rural samples underscores this difference sharply. While urban areas show a broader spread of denominations with Baptists, UPC groups, Catholics and smaller churches appearing in noticeable proportions rural areas are overwhelmingly Presbyterian. Urban spaces host more religious variety and

denominational branching, whereas rural areas remain strongly aligned with the long-established Presbyterian tradition. This contrast suggests that religious diversity increases with urbanisation, migration and exposure to varied church networks.

Within the two urban districts, Aizawl Urban shows a particularly strong Presbyterian presence at 74%, though still accompanied by meaningful representation from other groups: Baptists (14%), Roman Catholics (3%) and UPC-NEI (4%). Kolasib Urban mirrors the same denominational structure but with slightly narrower spreads, showing 67% Presbyterian and smaller percentages for UPC-NEI (8%) and Baptists (4%). Aizawl Urban therefore displays the widest spread of denominations among urban areas, likely shaped by its role as the state's administrative and social hub, whereas Kolasib Urban remains more aligned with the dominant Presbyterian identity. The rural districts, however, present an even clearer picture of denominational consolidation. Aizawl Rural records the highest Presbyterian share at 80%, with only small pockets of Baptist (5%), Catholic (6%) and UPC-NEI (5%) households. Kolasib Rural displays a similar pattern, with 66% Presbyterian and a small presence of Salvation Army (7%) and UPC-NEI (10%). Notably, Aizawl Rural also includes IKK (3%), marking one of the few regions where this denomination appears. Despite these smaller variations, both rural districts remain overwhelmingly Presbyterian, with very limited denominational diversification.

Thus, we have seen the breakdown of the respondents' religious affiliations. It gives an idea of how Christianity is practiced in Mizoram where it is almost universally followed but in different ways by different groups. The Presbyterian Church is the largest denomination among the households surveyed. It has the highest percentage in Aizawl Rural at 80%. Its percentages are slightly lower but still high in Aizawl Urban at 74%, Kolasib Urban at 67% and Kolasib Rural at 66%. The answers show a lot of different denominations, not just Presbyterianism. In Aizawl Urban, where 14% of respondents said they were affiliated with the Baptist Church, this is especially clear. This is a lot more than in Aizawl Rural (5%) and Kolasib (2-4%). This suggests that Baptist congregations are more common in urban Aizawl where people have more access to other churches and denominational choices. Also, there were more Roman Catholic respondents in Aizawl Rural (6%) than in any other area. This is in line with the Catholic Church's influence in some villages through schools and health centres. There are also respondents belonging to the United Pentecostal Church (UPC). 10%

of people in Kolasib's rural areas and 8% of people in Kolasib's urban areas say they belong to UPC (NEI). In Aizawl, the percentages are lower, at 4% to 5%. Other smaller groups like the UPC (MZ), Seventh Day Adventists, Mizo Kohhran, Kohhran Thianghlim and IKK were only mentioned a few times in 1-4% of the responses. Even though these numbers are small, they show that there is denominational diversity even at the household level in the areas that were surveyed.

It is thus important to note that these denominational identities do not just affect religious beliefs. They also affect social norms, family ties and food-related traditions. Respondents' religious affiliation shapes the patterns of family life and their denominational information not only breaks down religious identity but it also helps us start to understand how different kinds of Christianity are lived out and practiced in homes and communities. The analysis of religious affiliation among respondents highlights both homogeneity and diversity in Mizo society.

Although religion may not dictate strict food rules in Mizoram, denominational affiliation still influences everyday food practices in subtle but meaningful ways. In Presbyterian-dominant areas especially in rural Aizawl and Kolasib church life is deeply woven into community routines, and this shape when people cook, what they prepare for Sunday meals, how they contribute money for church feasts, and how hospitality is practiced within the neighbourhood. Church often organised gatherings, Christmas feasts, New Year feasts, and fellowship events where food is cooked collectively, reinforcing shared tastes and uniform meal patterns. In more diverse urban settings, where Baptist, Catholic, UPC and other denominations are present, food practices reflect this variation. Some churches organise youth fellowships with modern snacks, some observe fasting special prayer days where meals are reduced or avoided, and others host community lunches that introduce different styles of preparation or influence household preferences. Because church events form an important part of social life, the mix of denominations also creates differences in how often families cook and how community meals shape their weekly food routines. In this way, denominational identity quietly shapes Mizo food culture not through religious restrictions, but through the practice of church gatherings, sharing, celebration and communal eating that continue to anchor everyday life. However, religious affiliations not only provide moral and cultural frameworks but also intersect with broader aspects of social identity such as education, occupation, and household

values. Since missionary activity was not only about conversion but also about establishing schools and promoting literacy, religion and education in Mizoram remain closely intertwined. It is therefore fitting to turn next to the educational background of respondents, which offers further insight.

4.7 Educational Background

A person's educational background has a big impact on their opportunities, worldview and place in society. It not only improves knowledge and cognitive skills but it also helps people move up in society, make good decisions and feel financially secure. Bouchrika (2025) says that education shapes people's goals, makes them more culturally aware and gives them the tools they need to adapt to changing social and economic situations. At the household level, the education of household members has a direct effect on how people make a living, how healthy they are and how they handle food. This shows that learning has a bigger effect on people's quality of life.

In Mizoram, where literacy rates are some of the highest in India, the number of people who have finished school shows both the effects of missionary work and the current focus on schooling as a way to get ahead in society. This part looks at the educational background of the respondents and their families, looking at how schooling levels differ between urban and rural areas and how these differences affect culinary practices among the Mizos.

4.7.1 Education of Respondent

The educational level of the respondents is a direct reflection of their abilities, goals and potential to affect the lives of their families and communities helping them make informed choices and take meaningful part in social, economic and cultural activities. People with higher education tend to be more aware of their choices regarding health and have more job opportunities and be more open to new ideas, such as different foods and cultural practices. On the other hand, people with less education may not have as many of these chances. Looking at the education of the respondents will give us an idea of how education affects both cultural continuity and adaptation in everyday life.

Table 4.15. Educational Level of the Respondent

Education Level	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Lower than Matric	3	60	19	9	22 (11)	69 (34.5)	91 (22.75)
Matric	19	29	6	16	45 (22.5)	45 (22.5)	90 (22.5)
Higher Secondary	40	10	26	45	66 (33)	55 (27.5)	121 (30.25)
Graduate	37	1	31	29	68 (34)	30 (15)	98 (24.5)
Post-Graduate	-	-	17	1	17 (8.5)	1 (0.5)	18 (4.5)
Others (Certificate/ Diploma)	-	-	1	-	1 (0.5)	-	1 (0.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table highlights significant differences in educational attainment across the four regions reflecting variations in the availability of schools, the opportunities available in urban versus rural areas, economic prospects and social priorities.

In the overall total, respondents with Higher Secondary education form the largest group, accounting for 121 individuals (30.25%), followed closely by Graduates, who make up 98 respondents (24.5%). Another significant share comes from those who have completed Matric (22.5%). Respondents with education lower than Matric constitute 91 households (22.75%), while those with Post-Graduate qualifications make up 18 respondents (4.5%). Only one respondent (0.25%) falls under the “Others” category, which includes certificates or diploma-level training found in Urban Aizawl only. Overall, the data show a population with a strong presence of secondary and tertiary-level education, yet with a notable proportion still concentrated below Matric, indicating varied educational attainment across the sample.

In the total urban sample, the educational profile is leaning toward higher qualifications. Graduates make up the largest share at 68 respondents (34%), followed closely by Higher Secondary at 66 respondents (33%). Matric-level education accounts for 22.5%, while those below Matric form only 11% of the urban sample. Post-Graduate respondents constitute 8.5%, a comparatively higher share than in rural

areas. This shows that urban centres offer greater access to higher education and reflect educational advancement influenced by proximity to institutions, better schooling infrastructure and wider academic opportunities.

In the total rural sample, a different pattern emerges. The proportion of respondents with Lower than Matric education rises sharply to 69 respondents (34.5%), making it the single largest group. Higher Secondary follows at 55 respondents (27.5%), while Matric remains constant at 22.5%. Graduates account for only 30 respondents (15%), and Post-Graduates drop to a mere 0.5%. This demonstrates that rural areas lag behind in higher educational attainment, with a significant share of respondents not progressing beyond lower secondary schooling.

Comparing total urban and total rural samples reveals a pronounced educational divide. Urban respondents show much higher levels of tertiary education, with 34% graduates and 8.5% post-graduates, compared to only 15% graduates and 0.5% post-graduates in rural areas. Rural areas, on the other hand, have far higher shares of respondents below Matric (34.5% compared to 11% in urban regions). While both regions show meaningful representation in the Higher Secondary category, the gap widens at the tertiary level, suggesting that access, exposure and academic pathways are strongly shaped by geographic location.

Comparing the two urban districts highlights these trends further. Aizawl Urban shows the highest educational attainment, with 31% graduates, 26% Higher Secondary, and a significant 17% post-graduates, signalling strong access to higher education institutions in the capital. Kolasib Urban, though still relatively well-educated, presents a different profile, 40% Higher Secondary, 37% graduates, and 19% matric, with almost no post-graduate respondents. This shows that while both urban regions perform well educationally, Aizawl Urban leads in advanced academic qualifications.

The rural districts show the sharpest contrasts. Kolasib Rural has the highest share of respondents below Matric, at 60%, and only 1% graduates, indicating limited educational attainment. In contrast, Aizawl Rural is substantially better in comparison, with 45% Higher Secondary, 29% graduates, and only 9% below Matric. These figures show that Aizawl Rural, because of its proximity to the city, better schooling networks and easier access to academic institutions has significantly higher

educational attainment compared to Kolasib Rural, where limited resources and distance from educational centres hinder progression.

The majority of respondents in Kolasib Urban have attained higher secondary (40%) and graduate levels (37%) indicating that the area has a very educated population. The fact that only 3% of people have an education level below matriculation indicates that there are more opportunities and greater access to formal education in urban environments. This demonstrates the role that parents' aspirations for their children's upward mobility play in the promotion of education as well as the role of awareness and infrastructure.

On the other hand, there is a contrast between Kolasib Rural and the other areas. In this study, 60% of respondents reported educational attainment levels below the matric, 29% reported matric-level attainment, 10% reported attainment at the higher secondary level and only 1% reported attainment at the graduate level. The educational divide between the rural and urban regions of Kolasib is highlighted by the lack of post-graduate and diploma degrees. This is indicative of limited access to institutions of higher learning, a lower capacity to generate economic wealth and possibly a greater reliance on agricultural labour, all of which reduce the importance placed on pursuing higher education.

Educational attainment in Aizawl Urban is distributed more evenly and across a wider range of levels. A total of 19% of the population does not have a matric certificate and 6% only has a matric certificate. A remarkable 26% of the population has completed higher secondary education, 31% have graduated and 17% have post-graduate degrees. This makes Aizawl Urban the area with the highest concentration of respondents who have received advanced education reflecting its status as the state capital that contains numerous institutions of higher learning and a stronger exposure to academic aspirations. The existence of individuals who hold diplomas or certificates (1%) serves to highlight the broader range of educational opportunities that are available in urban areas.

The Aizawl Rural area exhibits characteristics that are intermediate in nature. Almost half accounting to 45% of respondents reached higher secondary which indicates a strong trend towards continuing education at least up to this level. In addition, 9% of respondents fell below matric and 16% matriculated. Additionally, 29% of the participants earned their undergraduate degree and 1% earned their postgraduate

degree. This demonstrates that even in the rural areas close to Aizawl, improved access to education and the adverse effects from the capital city have contributed to increased participation in education.

This section highlights the role of education as a key factor shaping social mobility, livelihood strategies, and cultural adaptation among Mizo households. Education is framed not only as a means of literacy and employment but also as a driver of health awareness, informed decision-making, and openness to cultural change. The data show sharp contrasts between urban and rural contexts, revealing both progress and persistent inequalities in educational attainment.

In Kolasib Urban, the majority of respondents have achieved higher secondary (40%) or graduate (37%) education, with very few (3%) below matric. This pattern reflects better infrastructure, greater access to schools, and parental aspirations for upward mobility. By contrast, Kolasib Rural presents a starkly different profile, 60% of respondents fall below matric and only 1% have graduated. The absence of post-graduate or diploma holders underscores limited access to advanced education, likely tied to reliance on agriculture and restricted institutional presence.

Aizawl Urban shows the highest levels of educational advancement reflecting the city's role as an educational hub. This concentration demonstrates the impact of institutional availability, urban exposure, and higher aspirations among city dwellers. Meanwhile, Aizawl Rural reveals an intermediate profile suggesting that proximity to the capital facilitates stronger educational participation compared to more remote rural areas. The educational landscape across regions reflects the broader socio-economic and infrastructural context of Mizoram. Urban regions, especially Aizawl Urban, exhibit strong academic mobility and higher educational achievements. Rural regions, particularly Kolasib Rural, continue to face disadvantages due to infrastructural gaps and limited access to secondary and tertiary institutions. These educational differences have implications for employment opportunities, food practices, household decision-making and cultural adaptation explored in the next sections.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that while urban centres especially Aizawl are marked by advanced education and diversified opportunities, rural areas, particularly Kolasib Rural, continue to face structural barriers to higher learning. This educational divide has direct implications for employment, income generation, and household

practices, linking educational access to both economic stability and cultural adaptation.

The differences in educational attainment across the four regions help explain why Mizo households engage with food in different ways. In urban areas, where a higher proportion of respondents are graduates and post-graduates, families tend to show greater awareness of nutrition, cleanliness, food safety and balanced meals. This often translates into more frequent use of modern appliances such as rice cookers, electric kettles and gas stoves, quicker meal routines, and openness to trying new ingredients or global food trends. Educated households are also more likely to read labels, compare prices and make deliberate choices about oil, salt or packaged foods. In contrast, rural areas especially Kolasib Rural, where 60 percent of respondents fall below matric show stronger dependence on traditional knowledge, seasonal vegetables, field-based produce and firewood cooking. Here, food choices are shaped more by land, availability and community knowledge than by written nutritional information. Higher Secondary and Graduate households in Aizawl Rural reflect a middle position, combining traditional dishes with selective modern practices, such as using pressure cookers but preparing smoked or boiled dishes in the customary way. Taken together, the educational patterns reveal that schooling not only shapes income and occupation but also influences how people cook, where they source their groceries, and how they think about health and diet. Thus, education becomes a clear pathway through which Mizo food practices adapt, mix tradition with modernity, and respond to changing lifestyles.

4.8. Overview

This chapter has presented a detailed socio-economic profile of the respondents offering a holistic understanding of how demographic, social, economic, religious and educational dimensions intersect to shape everyday life in Mizoram.

Table 4.16 An Overview of Socio-Economic Profile

Key Themes Addressed		Major Findings
Personal Characteristics	Age	Age of the respondent ranged from 19 years as the youngest to 78 years as the oldest.
	Gender	Of the total 400 respondents, 149 (37.25%) were male and 251 (62.75%) were female.

Social Classification	Social Category	The data indicates that all respondents across the four regions belong to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, with no participants identified as Scheduled Caste (SC) or any other social group.
	Types of Ration Card	- APL (White Card) dominates across all regions, highest share in Aizawl Urban (72%), indicating comparatively higher living standards. - Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural both show 57% APL, reflecting an even distribution and similar economic levels within the district. - PHH (Blue Card) is the second largest category, with Aizawl Rural highest at 53%, suggesting greater eligibility for subsidised grains in rural areas. - Aizawl Urban has the lowest PHH share (26%), implying relatively better economic stability compared to rural areas. - BPL (Yellow Card) is uncommon everywhere: 15% in both Kolasib regions, but much lower in Aizawl (2% urban, 3% rural). - AAY (Pink Card) is extremely rare, with only two households holding the card, one in Kolasib Urban and one in Aizawl Rural indicating very low representation of extreme poverty or limited programme access.

Household Structure and Composition	Types of Household	• Nuclear families dominate across all four regions, with the highest proportions in Aizawl Rural (74%) and Aizawl Urban (66%), reflecting broader demographic shifts toward smaller household units. Kolasib Urban (52%) and Kolasib Rural (53%) also show strong nuclear family prevalence, though slightly lower than Aizawl, indicating similar but more moderate urban influences. • Joint families persist more strongly in rural and semi-urban areas, especially Kolasib Rural (31%) and Aizawl Urban (29%), suggesting ongoing reliance on extended kinship networks in agricultural or shared-labour settings. Aizawl Rural shows the lowest joint-family share (16%), reflecting stronger movement toward nuclear living in this region. • Single-parent households are most notable in Kolasib Urban (20%), indicating the influence of urban migration, separation, or widowhood. Rural areas show moderate levels of single-parent households, Kolasib Rural (11%) and Aizawl Rural (9%) while Aizawl Urban has the lowest proportion (5%). Single-person households are rare across all regions, with the highest presence in Kolasib Rural (5%), possibly linked to elderly individuals or young unmarried migrants living alone. • Overall, household structure varies by location, reflecting the interplay of urbanisation, economic pressures, migration, and cultural norms. Urbanisation reinforces nuclear family living, while rural areas retain stronger joint-family systems tied to agricultural and kinship-based livelihood patterns. The emergence of single-parent and single-person households, though small in number, signals subtle but meaningful social changes related to shifting family roles, mobility, and life circumstances.

	Number of Family Members • Households with five members form the largest group in Kolasib Urban (24%), Kolasib Rural (28%), and Aizawl Urban (28%), indicating that mid-sized families are the most common in these regions. • Aizawl Rural leans slightly toward smaller households, with four-member families being most common (27%), followed by five-member households (21%). • Larger households (six or more members) remain significant in rural areas, especially in Kolasib Rural where 21% have six members and 10% have seven members, reflecting stronger joint-family structures and agricultural labour needs. • Aizawl Rural also records notable large households, including six-member (15%) and seven-member households (12%), showing continued reliance on extended kinship systems. • Aizawl Urban shows the strongest concentration of smaller-to-mid-sized families, with 3–5-member households forming 56%, reflecting nuclear family dominance shaped by urban housing constraints. • Very small households (1–2 members) are rare, but appear more in Aizawl Rural (10% two-member; 1% single-person) and Aizawl Urban (8% two-member), likely due to elderly couples, young couples, or migration-related living arrangements. • Kolasib Urban records the highest presence of very large households (10+ members), with 14% falling within the 10–16-member range, indicating continued extended family living even in an urbanising district. • Aizawl Urban has almost no very large households, pointing toward stronger demographic transition toward smaller nuclear families. • Household size patterns reveal a clear urban–rural divide, with urban centres trending toward compact nuclear units, while rural areas maintain larger family structures tied to agricultural and kinship-based responsibilities. • Overall, the distribution reflects both modern demographic change (smaller households in Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural) and traditional continuity (larger households in Kolasib Rural and parts of Kolasib Urban).

Head of the Household

- Fathers are the dominant household heads across all regions, with the highest proportions in Aizawl Rural (76%) and Kolasib Rural (73%), reflecting strong continuity of patriarchal norms in rural areas.
- Urban areas show slightly lower but still high levels of male headship, such as Aizawl Urban (58%) and Kolasib Urban (61%), indicating gradual shifts alongside urbanisation.
- Mothers constitute a meaningful share of household heads, especially in Kolasib Urban (20%) and Aizawl Urban (17%), suggesting influences such as widowhood, marital separation, male outmigration, or women's increasing economic roles.
- Female headship is lower in rural areas, with Kolasib Rural (13%) and Aizawl Rural (11%), reflecting stronger adherence to traditional patriarchal structures.
- Grandfathers also appear as household heads, notably 13% in both Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban, and 10% in both rural areas, highlighting the presence of intergenerational or extended family authority systems.
- Grandmothers serve as heads at smaller but visible levels, ranging from 3% in Aizawl Rural to 8% in Aizawl Urban, reinforcing the role of elders in joint-family arrangements.
- A small "Others" category (4% in Aizawl Urban) indicates non-traditional headship patterns, possibly involving siblings, relatives, or caretakers, especially in contexts of parental absence.
- Overall, household headship remains predominantly patriarchal, yet the presence of mothers and grandparents signals evolving family structures and diverse authority arrangements, especially in urban settings.
- Urban areas show more openness to female and elder leadership, whereas rural households continue to favour male-dominated headship linked to traditional roles and agricultural responsibilities.
- These patterns matter because household headship directly shapes daily decisions regarding food, budgeting, resource allocation, and domestic organisation.

Living rooms and ambience

- Urban households (especially Aizawl Urban) show stronger modern influences, with compartmentalized rooms, separate kitchens, dining spaces, and polished interior design.
- Rural households maintain open, multipurpose layouts, where one hall often serves as living, dining, and gathering space.
- Urban homes prioritize décor, comfort, and aesthetics, whereas rural homes prioritise practicality, openness, and communal use of space.
- Aizawl Urban kitchens are large, well-equipped, and often equal in size to living rooms, reflecting cultural importance of cooking.
- Urban kitchens include seating for guests, showing that cooking and socialising happen simultaneously.
- Rural kitchens blend traditional and modern elements, with both firewood stoves and gas stoves used side by side.
- Red tea kept ready in flasks (especially in Lungleng) highlights a shared hospitality practice across rural households.
- Concrete houses with tiled or cemented floors dominate urban areas, signalling stability and aspiration.
- Rural homes are built largely from bamboo, wood, and tin, reflecting local resource dependence and modest incomes.
- Urban houses display decorative items (curtains, wall hangings, framed photos, potted plants), while rural homes rely on minimal décor (calendars, family photos, religious symbols).
- Urban homes show layered, polished aesthetics, reflecting rising prosperity, modern lifestyle, and global influences.
- Rural homes embody warmth, openness, and community-oriented living, with flexible spaces used for multiple daily activities.
- Hospitality practices remain strong across all regions, but expressed differently—through tea offerings, shared conversation, and open seating arrangements.
- Aizawl Urban homes use clear room divisions, providing privacy and specialised functionality.
- Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural lack strict compartmentalisation, favouring open-flow household spaces.
- Living–kitchen proximity in Kolasib Urban allows continuous interaction between cooks and guests, reflecting sociable domestic rhythms.
- Fairelbel (traditional rice storage) remains present even in modernised urban kitchens, showing continuity of heritage.

	• Firewood cooking persists strongly in rural areas, not only for necessity but also for taste preferences and cultural continuity. • Outdoor spaces in rural households (courtyards, verandas, front yards) are integral to daily life—used for drying produce, storing firewood, and social interaction. • Rural households foster strong neighbourly interaction, with shared outdoor spaces enabling frequent exchanges. • Urban households emphasise privacy and refined hosting, with formalised dining spaces and curated living-room aesthetics. • Across all regions, homes center around togetherness, with living spaces reinforcing family bonding and guest hospitality.
Type of House	• Pucca houses are the dominant housing type across most study areas, reflecting a broad shift toward permanent, stable, and modern construction. • Assam-type houses remain significant in some locations, indicating continued reliance on timber and bamboo where affordability, tradition, and availability of local materials shape housing choices. • Kutch houses are nearly absent, appearing only in a very small share of households, signalling declining dependence on temporary structures and overall improvement in housing quality. • Areas closer to urban centres show near-universal adoption of pucca houses, highlighting stronger economic integration, better access to construction materials, and higher living standards. • Rural areas farther from the capital display more mixed housing patterns, balancing pucca construction with Assam-type houses, illustrating economic diversity and differing levels of infrastructural development. • The overall pattern shows a transition toward more durable housing, driven by aspirations for stability, long-term investment, and improved quality of life. • Traditional construction methods persist in some rural contexts, reflecting cultural continuity, resource availability, and cost considerations despite broader modernization trends. • The rarity of kutch houses indicates reduced vulnerability, demonstrating that even economically constrained households have largely moved toward semi-permanent or permanent housing forms.

	Source of Water • All households across every study location rely entirely on PHE piped water, indicating complete penetration of state-managed water infrastructure into both urban and rural areas. • Traditional water sources such as wells, hand pumps, and streams have been fully replaced, showing a significant shift toward modern, centralized water provision. • Respondents consistently perceive PHE water as the cleanest and safest, reinforcing trust in government-supplied water for cooking, drinking, and household hygiene. • Despite universal access, households must adapt to irregular supply timings, often storing water in buckets, tanks, or containers to meet daily needs. • Water storage practices are a routine part of domestic life, shaping the timing of cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks. • The availability of piped water supports safer food preparation, reducing risks associated with contaminated natural sources and improving overall household health. • Universal PHE reliance reflects both infrastructural success and increased integration of rural households into urban-style utilities networks, while also requiring ongoing domestic flexibility to manage variable flow and timings.

	Household Resources and Infrastructure for Food • Households rely on a mix of modern and traditional fuels, showing that cooking practices are shaped by both convenience (LPG/electricity) and cultural taste preferences (firewood). • LPG is widely used and increasingly dominant, especially in urban areas, reflecting rising modernisation, time-saving needs, and preference for cleaner, faster cooking. • Firewood remains deeply embedded in everyday cooking, particularly in rural households, due to affordability, accessibility, and the cultural value attached to smoked and traditional Mizo dishes. • Most households combine multiple fuel sources (LPG + firewood + electricity), illustrating adaptive strategies to manage costs, availability, and diverse cooking needs. • Economic factors strongly influence fuel choice, with firewood used more heavily by households that cannot rely solely on LPG due to cost constraints. • Cultural identity shapes cooking behaviour, as many households continue using firewood even when modern options are available because certain dishes “taste better” or feel more “authentic.” • Owning more than one stove is the norm across Mizoram, enabling families to cook rice and side dishes simultaneously and maintain traditional meal structures. • Having two stoves is the most common arrangement, reflecting the practical need for efficiency in busy households regardless of location. • Households with three or more stoves reflect greater cooking flexibility, supporting simultaneous use of gas, electric appliances, and firewood depending on the dish and occasion. • Stove ownership patterns reflect not just wealth, but household size, cultural practices, and lifestyle rhythms, with larger or multi-generational families requiring multiple appliances. • Even in rural areas, modern stoves coexist with firewood stoves, showing adaptation to changing schedules, work routines, and accessibility to modern utilities. • Overall, kitchen infrastructure in Mizoram is hybrid in nature, combining modernity with tradition in ways that support both efficiency and cultural continuity in food preparation. • Kitchen gardens are a major source of daily vegetables in rural areas, with 93% of households in Aizawl Rural and 75% in Kolasib Rural maintaining them, showing deep reliance on homegrown produce for everyday meals. • Urban households also engage in small-scale gardening, including 70% in Kolasib Urban and 51% in

	Aizawl Urban, reflecting a continued cultural attachment to fresh homegrown ingredients despite space limitations. • Kitchen gardens act as a key economic buffer, reducing market dependency and helping households manage rising food prices; many respondents stressed that gardens provide “security” when markets become costly or unreliable. • Grocery sourcing in urban areas is dominated by local markets, with 79% of Kolasib Urban and 75% of Aizawl Urban households depending primarily on bazaars for vegetables, meat, and everyday items. • House vendors supplement market access in urban settings, serving 16% in Kolasib Urban and 13% in Aizawl Urban, especially benefiting busy households and the elderly. • Online grocery use is emerging only in Aizawl Urban, reported by 8% of households, indicating early adoption of digital food purchasing. • Rural households rely heavily on land-based sources, with 80% of Kolasib Rural and 43% of Aizawl Rural sourcing groceries directly from their fields. • Kitchen gardens further supplement rural food supply, contributing to 8% in Kolasib Rural and a significant 32% in Aizawl Rural, reinforcing self-sufficiency. • Local markets are largely absent in rural areas, forcing households to travel to nearby towns; only 12% in Kolasib Rural and 23% in Aizawl Rural purchase from markets, indicating infrastructural gaps. • Dependence on shops and kin networks persists in rural settings, with households using small village shops or relying on relatives when immediate purchases are needed. • Food sourcing patterns highlight a sharp urban–rural divide, where urban households depend on markets and services, while rural households remain anchored in cultivation and land-based production. • Across all regions, kitchen gardens and field cultivation carry cultural importance, preserving traditional Mizo foodways, ensuring fresh ingredients, and strengthening household resilience during economic fluctuations

Economic Aspects	Occupation • Urban areas show a clear shift toward salaried and semi-formal employment, with households in Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban engaging in office work, teaching, shop-keeping, and clerical jobs—reflecting rising urbanisation and greater access to stable income sources. • Rural livelihoods remain strongly agrarian, with farming acting as the primary occupation in Aizawl Rural, Kolasib Rural, and Lungleng; households depend on rice, vegetables, and seasonal crops grown for self-consumption, with surpluses occasionally sold. • Subsistence farming continues to anchor rural food security, expressed in the principle “what we grow is what we eat,” indicating strong continuity of traditional cultivation-based livelihoods. • Occupational diversification is emerging, especially in semi-rural areas, where households supplement farming with teaching, petty trade, small shops, and tea stalls—demonstrating adaptive strategies in response to economic uncertainty. • Daily wage labour forms a significant share of income in Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural, highlighting economic precarity and the need for flexible, short-term work opportunities. • MGNREGS plays a crucial role in rural Kolasib, providing guaranteed wage labour that acts as a safety net against fluctuating agricultural income and environmental risks. • Government jobs, where present, are highly valued, offering stability, pensions, and regular salaries—significantly shaping perceptions of economic security in both urban and semi-urban households. • Urban occupations directly influence food practices, increasing market dependency and reducing time for subsistence activities such as gardening or field work. • Rural occupations reinforce land-based food systems, with households growing, harvesting, and consuming their own produce, supported by communal labour patterns and ecological rhythms. • Across the state, occupation reflects both continuity and transition, as farming remains culturally central while urbanisation and modern livelihoods encourage diversification and hybrid income strategies.

Monthly Income of the Family

- Monthly income levels vary widely across the four regions, with Aizawl Urban showing both the highest share of high-income households (29% earning above ₹50,000) and a significant proportion in the lowest bracket (26% below ₹5,000), revealing sharp internal inequalities within the capital city.
- In contrast, Kolasib Urban displays a more balanced income spread, where 41% earn ₹10,000–₹50,000 and 22% earn above ₹50,000, although 12% still fall below ₹5,000, indicating moderate diversity with some economic vulnerability.
- Rural areas show tighter clustering in the lower-to-mid income ranges: in Kolasib Rural, 48% earn ₹5,000–₹10,000 and 35% fall within ₹10,000–₹50,000, while only 3% exceed ₹50,000, reflecting limited high-income opportunities and heavy dependence on agriculture and wage labour.
- Aizawl Rural shows comparatively higher economic stability, with 68% of households earning ₹10,000–₹50,000 and no households reporting income below ₹5,000, although high-income earners remain small at 7%, illustrating modest but relatively secure rural livelihoods connected to urban markets.
- Across all regions, low-income households (earning below ₹5,000) are most visible in Aizawl Urban (26%) and Kolasib Urban (12%), moderate in Kolasib Rural (14%), and absent in Aizawl Rural, underscoring how urban areas concentrate both economic opportunity and poverty.
- The highest-income households (above ₹50,000) are concentrated in Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban, while rural areas—especially Kolasib Rural—show minimal representation (3–7%), highlighting an urban-centred distribution of secure, salaried employment.
- These income disparities directly influence household food practices, where higher-income urban families rely more on markets, diverse foods and modern fuel, while lower-income and rural households depend on subsistence agriculture, kitchen gardens and low-cost staples, showing how income shapes diet, food security and resilience strategies.

	Number of Bread Earners in the House	• Most households across all four regions rely on one breadwinner, with 79–80% in Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, and Aizawl Urban, and 58% in Aizawl Rural, showing continued dependence on a single income source. • Two earners are present in a smaller share of households (14–18% in Kolasib and Aizawl Urban/Rural), rising to 32% in Aizawl Rural, indicating greater shared income responsibility there. • Three earners remain limited (3–7% across most regions, 9% in Aizawl Rural), reflecting selective family participation in farming, petty trade, and wage labour. • Aizawl Rural shows the highest income diversification, with more families reporting two or three earners compared to other regions. • Overall, households remain predominantly single-earner units, with multiple earners offering greater economic resilience and reflecting evolving gender and generational roles in livelihood activities.
	Dependents	• Most families in all regions support many dependents, such as children, elders and unemployed young adults, which increases financial pressure on the household. • This strain is strongest in Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Urban, where around 80% of households depend on one breadwinner to support several non-earning members. • Aizawl Rural has the highest dependency levels, as large extended families live together and rely mainly on farming, making cash needs harder to meet even when food is homegrown. • In urban areas, dependents add extra costs such as school fees, rent and healthcare, creating stress even when households have salaried jobs. • Overall, high numbers of dependents reduce savings, lower economic stability and strongly influence food choices, pushing rural households toward self-grown produce and urban households toward cheaper market options.
Religious Affiliation	Religion	• All surveyed households across Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural reported 100% Christian affiliation, showing complete religious uniformity in the study areas. The absence of other religions means alternative dietary rules (such as vegetarian practices) have no impact on local food habits in these communities. • Christianity continues to shape everyday cultural life in Mizoram, including food practices, hospitality norms and communal meals, reflecting its deep historical and social influence.

	Denomination	• The Presbyterian Church is the largest denomination overall, ranging from 66% to 80% across the four regions, showing deep historical roots and strong institutional presence in both urban and rural areas. • Baptist membership is most visible in Aizawl Urban (14%), much higher than in other areas (2–5%), indicating greater denominational choice and exposure in the city. • Roman Catholics appear in small numbers (1–6%), with slightly higher representation in rural Aizawl, reflecting the influence of Catholic schools and health centres. • UPC (NEI) shows notable presence in Kolasib (8–10%), while smaller denominations such as the Seventh Day Adventist, Mizo Kohhran, Kohhran Thianghlum and IKK appear only in 1–4% of households. • Altogether, the data show that while Christianity is universal, denominational diversity exists, shaped by historical mission influence, urban exposure and community networks, contributing to subtle variations in social life, worship patterns and everyday household practices
Educational Background	Education of Respondent	• The single highest percentage across all regions is found in Kolasib Rural, where 60% of respondents fall below matric, showing the strongest concentration of low educational attainment and the widest rural–urban gap. • The next highest category is higher secondary education in Aizawl Rural (45%), indicating strong continuation of schooling up to Class 12 even in rural areas close to the capital. • Graduate-level education peaks in Aizawl Urban at 31%, reflecting the city’s role as the state’s main educational hub, followed closely by Kolasib Urban at 37%. • Post-graduate education is highest in Aizawl Urban (17%), the only region with a substantial postgraduate presence, further highlighting its academic advantage. • In Kolasib Urban, 40% have completed higher secondary, showing strong schooling outcomes in urban settings outside the capital. • By contrast, Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban show very low proportions below matric (19% and 3%), indicating strong access to schooling. • The lowest educational attainment appears in Kolasib Rural, where only 1% are graduates and no respondents reported post-graduate or diploma qualifications, reinforcing limited higher-education opportunities.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the demographic, social, economic and infrastructural attributes that influence daily living and food patterns in the four research regions, Kolasib Urban, Kolasib Rural, Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural. The

data collectively demonstrate how age, gender, education, household composition, livelihood, and resource accessibility interrelate to create unique yet interconnected living patterns in Mizoram.

The respondents' ages span from 19 to 78 years with a predominant representation of younger persons, particularly those aged 21 to 30, imparting a generational aspect to the study. Women constitute over two-thirds of the sample (62.75%), highlighting their essential position in household management and food-related activities, hence influencing the perspectives represented in this research. Social classification affirms the distinctiveness of the context i.e. all participants are categorised as Scheduled Tribe (ST), indicating significant cultural uniformity and a prevalent dependence on state privileges. The distribution of ration cards exposes a distinct urban-rural disparity. APL (white) cards predominate in urban regions, particularly in Aizawl Urban (72%), succeeded by Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural (57% each), signifying comparatively elevated or moderate economic stability. PHH (blue) cards are predominantly found in rural Aizawl (53%), indicating a heightened reliance on subsidised food and welfare assistance, whereas BPL (yellow) cards are infrequent and AAY (pink) cards are present in merely two households, implying a limited representation of extreme poverty or restricted access to the program.

Household structures exemplify both continuity and transformation. Nuclear families currently dominate in all regions, especially in Aizawl Rural (74%) and Aizawl Urban (66%), indicative of urbanisation, migration, and evolving generational preferences. Joint families are more prevalent in Kolasib Rural (31%) and certain areas of Aizawl Urban, where agricultural labour, collaborative work, and kinship-based cooperation are significant. Household size reflects these trends: compact units of three to five individuals are prevalent in urban regions, whereas bigger families of six or more members are more prominent in Kolasib Rural and certain portions of Kolasib Urban, supporting extended kinship structures and collaborative agricultural labour. Headship statistics indicate the enduring nature of patriarchy, with fathers predominantly acknowledged as family heads, particularly in rural areas where they govern almost three-quarters of households although significant numbers of mothers and grandparents also take up leadership roles. This signifies incremental transformations in gender and generational roles associated with widowhood, male outmigration, and the rising economic involvement of women. Housing circumstances

further distinguish regions. In Aizawl, pucca houses prevail in both urban and rural areas, signifying enhanced living standards and a desire for permanence. Conversely, in Kolasib Rural, Assam-type and sporadic kutcha houses remain, demonstrating an ongoing dependence on local materials, cost-effective methods, and traditional construction expertise. Across all four regions, there is total dependence on PHE piped water, indicating infrastructural success in providing access to potable water for cooking and drinking, despite households needing to adapt to inconsistent supplies by storing water and modifying daily routines.

The arrangement and atmosphere of residential environments provide profound cultural understanding. Aizawl Urban residences typically have compartmentalised rooms, refined furnishings, distinct kitchens and dining areas, as well as expansive, well-appointed kitchens, reflecting contemporary goals and the evolving middle-class lifestyle. In contrast, rural residences prefer open, multifunctional halls that accommodate cooking, dining, conversation, and childcare within a single area, thereby promoting social living arrangements. In various contexts, traditional elements such as the persistent utilisation of the fairelbel for rice storage, the custom of preparing unsweetened red tea for guests, and the employment of courtyards and verandas for drying produce and storing firewood exhibit significant continuity with historical Mizo domestic practices. Household resources for food preparation exhibit a hybrid pattern: urban kitchens predominantly utilise LPG and electricity, whilst rural households remain reliant on firewood, driven by economic considerations and the flavour and “authenticity” linked to smoked and traditionally prepared cuisine. Many homes possess a minimum of two stoves, often utilising a combination of LPG, electricity, and firewood, which allows them to prepare rice and accompanying dishes concurrently while alternating between modern and traditional cooking methods based on time, expense, and occasion. Food procurement trends further emphasise the rural-urban disparity. Urban households in Aizawl and Kolasib generally rely on local markets, augmented by house vendors and, in Aizawl, emergent internet platforms. Rural households maintain a profound connection to their land, a significant majority in Kolasib Rural and nearly half in Aizawl Rural procure groceries straight from their fields, with kitchen gardens supplying daily veggies. The lack of inadequacy of village bazaars compels several rural people to journey to urban markets or depend on tiny retailers and familial networks, whereas kitchen gardens serve as cultural symbols and

economic safeguards that ensure access to fresh produce during price surges or supply instability.

Economic factors produce some of the most pronounced disparities. Aizawl Urban is characterised by a predominance of salaried positions, government employment, education, and retail, underscoring its role as an administrative and commercial centre with varied economic activities. Kolasib Urban exhibits a heterogeneous pattern characterised by the coexistence of fieldwork, informal trade, retail establishments, and certain government employment opportunities. Rural households in Kolasib and Aizawl depend significantly on agriculture, daily wage work, and state-sponsored programs like MGNREGS, which serve as essential safety nets against variable yields and environmental hazards. Income distribution reveals significant disparities as Aizawl Urban features the greatest high-income demographic (29% earning above ₹50,000) alongside a substantial low-income population (26% earning below ₹5,000), whereas Kolasib Rural is predominantly situated in the lower income tiers, with about 3% of households above ₹50,000. Aizawl Rural retains a median status, with the majority of households earning between ₹10,000 and ₹50,000, and none in the lowest income band, indicating modest yet generally steady lives associated with proximity to the capital. The prevalence of single breadwinner households approximately eighty percent in Kolasib and Aizawl Urban, and slightly lower in Aizawl Rural reveals economic vulnerability. However, Aizawl Rural distinguishes itself with a higher proportion of dual- and triple-earner families, suggesting enhanced household resilience through collaborative income generation. Elevated dependency ratios in both rural and urban homes exacerbate these constraints, as children, elderly individuals, and unemployed young adults require support from frequently constrained or inconsistent income, influencing the distribution of funds for food, education, healthcare, and savings.

Religion fortifies social cohesion. All participants identify as Christian, illustrating the lasting impact of nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary endeavours and the significance of church life in influencing moral standards, hospitality, and communal dining. Amidst this homogeneity, denominational difference is apparent. Presbyterianism predominates in all areas, especially in rural Aizawl and Aizawl Urban, whereas Baptists, Catholics, UPC, and smaller sects like Seventh Day Adventists, Mizo Kohhran, Kohhran Thianghlum, and IKK have a more substantial

presence in urban environments, where mobility and exposure enhance religious diversity. These denominational distinctions result in nuanced variances in social networks, worship practices, and communal activities, encompassing church-related celebrations and group dining customs.

Educational achievement delineates a prominent axis of disparity. Aizawl Urban has established itself as an educational centre, evidenced by a significant percentage of graduates (31%) and post-graduates (17%), indicative of the density of higher-education institutions and robust academic ambitions. Kolasib Urban exhibits a notable level of education, with 40% of respondents having completed higher secondary education and 37% having graduated. In contrast, Kolasib Rural exhibits educational disadvantage, 60% of respondents lack matriculation, only 1% hold graduate degrees, and none possess postgraduate or diploma qualifications, signifying restricted options and a continual inclination towards agriculture and wage labour. Aizawl Rural holds a median status, with over fifty percent of respondents achieving upper secondary education and roughly one-third obtaining a degree, illustrating that closeness to the capital city enhances educational accessibility even in rural areas. These educational disparities directly influence employment opportunities, economic brackets, and receptiveness to novel concepts, encompassing shifts in dietary habits and health consciousness.

The chapter illustrates that Mizoram's socio-economic landscape is characterised by both continuity and transformation. Urban regions enjoy superior education, varied revenue sources, and contemporary infrastructure, whereas rural households are predominantly reliant on subsistence agriculture, extended familial networks, and welfare assistance. A collective tribal identity, a unified Christian framework, and the prominence of familial life unite these communities, fostering solidarity across varied environments. Chapter 4 situates respondents within intersecting demographic, economic, and cultural frameworks, establishing the socio-economic foundation of the study. It illustrates how material conditions and social organisation shape well-being and profoundly influence food habits, culinary identities, and cultural negotiations examined in the following chapters.

In conclusion, the socio-economic characteristics described in this chapter offer the essential contextual framework for understanding the daily culinary practices of the respondents. Building upon this profile, the subsequent chapter studies Mizo culinary

culture within both rural and urban domestic spaces, examining how culinary practices, dietary preferences, preparation techniques, consumption behaviours, and food-related responsibilities are expressed within these socio-economic contexts.

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CHAPTER V
MIZO FOOD CULTURE AT RURAL-URBAN DOMESTIC SPACES

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CHAPTER V

MIZO FOOD CULTURE AT RURAL-URBAN DOMESTIC SPACES

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at Mizo households' everyday food culture in both rural and urban settings. Although food is a fundamental aspect of Mizo society, it is still a relatively unexplored field of academic study despite serving as a symbol of identity, tradition and social connection. This chapter includes research from two districts that was done in certain rural areas and urban areas. It looks at how food practices at home are affected by the physical, social and cultural settings focusing on both common traditions and differences in how food is prepared, eaten and understood in Mizo homes.

Food significance lies in its ability to explore culture. There is a strong cultural foundation to the way we communicate through what we eat, how we get it, who makes it, who sits at the table and who eats first. Beyond simply sustaining the body, what we eat and with whom we eat may inspire and build the connections between individuals, communities, and even nations (Sibal, 2020). This chapter explores how food practices unfold in the private sphere of Mizo homes comparing rural and urban settings to understand the dynamics of continuity, change and negotiation within contemporary foodways.

As Mizo communities continue to undergo rural to urban migration, exposure to foreign food cultures and the constant evolving socioeconomic situations, the domestic sphere becomes a crucial place for preserving traditional customs while also adjusting to new influences. The kitchen and dining space often gendered and ritualized emerge as an important cultural location where memory, identity, and modernity intersect (Heldke, 2003; De Certeau et al., 1998). Examining food culture among rural and urban homes provides insight into broader concerns of cultural resilience, transition, and hybridization (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Food habits are culturally built, historically shaped and embedded in meaningful systems (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002, p. 100). In anthropology, food practices are the culturally taught and socially rooted ways in which people acquire, prepare, eat and think about food. These behaviours are not just functional. They are primarily symbolic, reflecting societal structures, values, memories, identity and power

dynamics (Douglas, 1972; Goody, 1982; Mintz, 1985; Sutton, 2001). A dietary pattern is the typical combination, amount and range of foods and drinks that people eat and drink on a regular basis. It shows not only what people consume but also how different foods are balanced and mixed together in meals. In other words, dietary patterns show how a group eats as a whole including how often various foods are eaten, in what amounts and in what cultural or social situations. Recognising these trends can help us learn more about a group's eating habits, way of life and cultural tastes (Vepsäläinen & Lindström, 2024).

The foundation of Mizo food culture can be better understood by conducting research on the various food practices that are practiced in Mizo households. It is not only a matter of personal preference but also of cultural norms, the readily available resources and traditional values that determine whether a household is vegetarian or non-vegetarian. This information allows us to better understand the everyday eating habits that shape Mizo identity and how they may vary or remain consistent across rural and urban settings.

Food practice styles such as a preference for vegetarian or non-vegetarian diets provide important information about the cultural, ecological and historical dimensions of a community's food system. The Mizos' dominant non-vegetarian food habit reflects not only nutritional preferences, but also long-held cultural values related to subsistence patterns, identity and social norms. Despite the growing prevalence of global food trends, these dietary preferences are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric and are resistant to change.

An in-depth comprehension of how eating habits are sustained, negotiated or changed over time is possible by looking at such practices. They serve as cultural resilience indicators and their continuity or shift can indicate more profound changes in identity formation, cultural adaptation and community values. Given this context, we now proceed to the data analysis. The following table compares food practice styles across rural and urban areas in two districts allowing us to better understand how dietary preferences reflect cultural identity and everyday food habits in Mizo society.

This chapter is structured thematically and presents an analysis between rural and urban households. The chapter consists of the following thematic sections: 1) Dietary habits and Eating Practices 2) Culinary Practices within the household, 3) Food Norms, Rituals and Cultural Meaning, 4) Food Preservation Techniques in

Household, 5) Health-Conscious Eating and Food Choice, 6 Gendered Patterns in Domestic Food Responsibilities.

Thus, this chapter examines how food is prepared and consumed in Mizo homes, both rural and urban. The chapter locates home as a significant location where food is not only produced and eaten but also emotionally and culturally experienced. These everyday activities reveal how families plan their meals, employ varied equipment and approaches and keep food traditions inside their own living spaces.

5.2. Dietary habits and Eating Practices

This section begins by examining the fundamental question of what Mizo households consume in their everyday lives. Understanding dietary habits is essential in food studies because it establishes the basic composition of the diet i.e. the staples, vegetables, meats and recurring food items that form the nutritional and cultural foundation of daily meals. Once this baseline of “what we eat” is established, the discussion moves to the how, when, and where of eating practices, exploring the structure of mealtimes, household routines, modes of serving and the social organisation of eating within Mizo homes. Together, these components provide a comprehensive understanding of everyday food behaviour, showing how dietary patterns, eating practices and decision-making processes interact to structure the lived food culture of Mizo households. The discussion begins with an examination of the dietary habits of Mizo households, outlining the core foods that structure their everyday consumption patterns.

Dietary habits refer to the long-term, routine patterns through which individuals and households select and consume food and beverages. In this study, dietary habits are examined by first identifying the type of diet followed, whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian and whether all family members maintain similar food practices. The analysis then turns to the commonly consumed food items across urban and rural regions, organised by food categories to capture variations in everyday intake. Plate composition is also assessed to determine which food component typically occupies the largest portion during meals. Emerging behaviours such as fast-food consumption and snack preferences are included to illustrate changing dietary trends. Finally, the section examines dietary restrictions practiced within Mizo households, particularly those shaped by religious or denominational beliefs, highlighting how faith-based norms influence what families choose to avoid.

Table 5.1. Food type

Food Type	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Vegetarian	5	4	8	4	13 (6.5)	8 (4)	21 (5.25)
Non-veg	95	96	92	96	187 (93.5)	192 (96)	379 (94.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The distribution of food practices across the four study regions reveals a strikingly consistent pattern in favour of non-vegetarian diets, with 379 out of 400 households (94.75%) identifying as non-vegetarian, while only 21 households (5.25%) follow vegetarian diets. This pattern holds across urban (93.5%) and rural (96%) samples, suggesting that meat consumption is a deeply shared cultural trait rather than a rural-specific or urban-specific habit. District-wise variations remain minimal and as such Aizawl Urban registers the lowest proportion of non-vegetarians at 92%, whereas Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural report 96%, confirming that location does not significantly alter food-type preference.

These findings reflect a long-standing socio-cultural orientation in which meat is central to Mizo food identity, shaped historically by hunting practices, ecological availability, and ritual significance. Meat has functioned not merely as a source of nourishment but as a medium of hospitality, social bonding, and spiritual symbolism. Traditional ceremonies such as *thla hual*, performed when an individual narrowly escaped death or misfortune, required the ritual offering of a chicken by elders to spiritually protect the person (Dokhuma, 1992). Similarly, pigs and hens played a crucial role in earlier Mizo healing practices, where the village priest selected the appropriate animal believed capable of absorbing illness or unluck underscoring the perceived spiritual potency of these animals. Even naming ceremonies historically required the bearer of the child's new name to bring a hen, embedding meat within rites of passage and familial incorporation. These historical and ritual meanings help explain why the overwhelming majority of Mizo households continue to consume meat. It is not only a matter of taste but an inherited cultural logic that links meat-based diets to identity, continuity and communal belonging.

The exceptionally low presence of vegetarian households in the data also provides important insight into the distinctiveness of Mizo dietary patterns within the wider Indian context. In mainland India, vegetarianism is often associated with caste hierarchies, purity ideals, and religious doctrines that confer moral prestige on plant-based diets. However, vegetarianism in Mizoram is entirely decoupled from these cultural scripts. Mizoram's strong Christian majority, historically egalitarian social structure, and absence of a caste system mean that food carries no purity-based hierarchy; meat consumption is not morally downgraded, nor is vegetarianism culturally valorised. As a result, the very small presence of vegetarians in the data does not indicate symbolic or religious significance but reflects health-based adjustments, medical needs, or individual taste.

Respondent 183 shared,

"My grandmother has health issues such as hypertension and she had to watch out for her health; therefore, she cannot eat meat."

Also, Respondent 214 noted,

"I avoid meat because I have diabetes and I strictly have to follow a diabetic diet."

These accounts indicate medically driven dietary adjustments rather than a collective cultural shift. A small number of children also displayed vegetarian preference, rooted in personal taste rather than doctrine, as reflected in Respondent 224's statement,

"Our son does not eat meat. He simply avoids it,"

And Respondent 248's remark,

"Children in our family do not prefer it; meat does not appeal to them."

Although marginal in number, these narratives are sociologically significant because they hint at the emergence of individualized food preferences among children preferences that diverge from the dominant collective pattern of non-vegetarianism. In earlier generations, children's diets were shaped almost entirely by household norms and the availability of home-produced food, leaving little room for individual divergence. However, contemporary exposure to new tastes, changing media environments, school peer cultures and increasing parental sensitivity to children's autonomy can create conditions where personal dislikes are respected, even when they

run counter to long-standing cultural expectations. While this does not yet indicate a broader dietary transition, these isolated cases suggest that food preference among children is becoming more personalised, driven by flavour preference, sensory aversion or simply habit, rather than any ideological position. Over time, if such preferences increase, they could influence household culinary practices or the symbolic weight of meat within future generations, pointing to the subtle beginnings of a possible generational shift in Mizo food preferences.

Studying the similarities in food practices within households such as whether all members eat non-vegetarian or vegetarian provides insight into the dynamics of shared eating habits and collective decision making. It helps to reveal whether food choices within the family are influenced by individual preferences or by a more collective, cohesive approach to meals. This in turn reflects broader cultural attitudes towards individualism or collectivism in Mizo domestic food culture.

Table 5.2 Similarity in family food practice

Similarity	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	91	95	93	97	184 (92)	192 (96)	376 (94)
No	9	5	7	3	16 (8)	8 (4)	24 (6)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400(100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table reveals high degree of similarity in food practices across Mizo households, with 376 families (94%) reporting that all members follow the same dietary pattern. This strong majority demonstrates that food in Mizo society continues to operate as a collective cultural practice, rooted in shared identity rather than individual dietary autonomy. Respondents consistently emphasised that food is prepared “*for everyone together,*” reinforcing the notion that household meals are a unifying daily ritual. One respondent from rural areas described,

“In our house, we always eat the same dish. We never cook separate food for different people. Whatever is prepared is shared by all of us.”

Such statements illustrate the deeply embedded collectivism that characterises Mizo domestic food culture, where variation is not encouraged but rather understood as unnecessary or even inappropriate.

In the total urban sample, 92% of households reported similar practices. Although urban areas offer greater exposure to diverse cuisines, convenience foods, and global dietary trends, the collective approach remains dominant. Aizawl Urban (93%) shows slightly stronger uniformity than Kolasib Urban (91%), suggesting that even in the most urbanised, modernised spaces, communal eating habits continue to hold moral and cultural value. As one young respondent from Aizawl Urban explained,

“Even if we have different preferences, we adjust and eat whatever is cooked. Eating the same food keeps us close as a family.”

This indicates that even when individual tastes exist, they are consciously subordinated to the collective ethos of family harmony and shared routines.

In the total rural sample, similarity rises even higher to 96%, reflecting the role of traditional food systems, reliance on home-grown ingredients, and stronger intergenerational households. Rural respondents frequently described a shared meal culture shaped by limited resources, communal agricultural labour and long-standing habits of “eating from the same pot.” One elderly respondent from Aizawl Rural articulated this sentiment vividly,

“We do not have the habit of cooking different foods for different people. Whatever is available from the field is what everyone eats together. This is how it has always been.”

Such narratives highlight how agricultural subsistence and cultural continuity reinforce uniform eating patterns across rural settings.

Comparing the two urban regions further highlights the nuanced differences. Aizawl Urban’s (93%) uniformity reflects the city life and the influence of church-oriented communal norms, while Kolasib Urban’s 91% slightly lower figure aligns with its semi-urban character, where flexible occupations, mixed livelihood patterns and occasional external influences may introduce mild variation. Nevertheless, the overwhelming uniformity even in urban areas signals the cultural strength of shared food practices.

The rural comparison reveals even sharper cohesiveness. Aizawl Rural (97%), the highest among all regions, reflects strong intergenerational households, subsistence food production, and collective eating as a daily norm. Kolasib Rural follows closely at 95%, showing similar patterns, though with slightly more variation due to the presence of wage labour and extended kin structures that sometimes influence meal schedules.

A young respondent from Kolasib Rural provided,

“Even if some of us come home late from work in the fields, we still eat the same food. The food is kept for everyone; we do not prepare separate meals.”

This reinforces the cultural expectation that food symbolises unity, regardless of differing schedules or labour patterns.

Across all four regions, the consistency of shared eating practices shows that Mizo households prioritise collectivism over individualised eating. This contrasts sharply with emerging Indian urban trends toward personalised diets, separate meals, and “food individualism.” In Mizoram, meal uniformity functions as a cultural value that sustains kinship, maintains equality at the table, and reinforces the idea that eating is a social act, not merely an individual choice.

The small minority of households reporting dissimilar food practices (6%) often cited health-related reasons, generational differences or personal taste, never religious or ideological motivations. As noted earlier, vegetarianism in Mizoram is not linked to purity, caste, or religious doctrine. A respondent whose grandmother avoids meat due to hypertension stated,

“My grandmother cannot eat meat because of her blood pressure, so we adjust for her, but the rest of us eat the same food.”

Here, even exceptions confirm the rule i.e. modifications are made only because they are medically necessary, not because individual preference outweighs collective eating norms.

Taken together, the quantitative uniformity and respondent narratives reveal that food continues to operate as a core site of collectivism, identity, and daily sociality in Mizo households. Shared meals remain the dominant norm in both rural and urban settings, sustained by cultural expectations, interdependence, and the symbolic role of eating

together. This foundational pattern of commensality forms the basis for understanding subsequent aspects of Mizo food culture and the broader structure of eating practices examined in the next section.

Urban-Rural Dietary Patterns: This section examines the commonly consumed food items across the four study regions highlighting how everyday dietary patterns in Mizoram are shaped by seasonality, market availability, local ecological knowledge, and cultural preference. By analysing consumption frequency across major food categories such as vegetables, fruits, meats, seafood, dairy, processed foods, fermented and pungent items, beverages, and traditional dishes, the study outlines the distinctive yet interconnected dietary practices found in both urban and rural households. The comparison reveals shared cultural foundations alongside place-specific differences, showing how Mizo food habits adjust to varying degrees of urbanisation while remaining firmly anchored in traditional taste, seasonal eating, and household subsistence practices.

Urban Dietary Patterns: Across the two urban sites, everyday meals are organised around rice accompanied by a wide range of vegetables, with meat, fermented items and beverages layered on top of this core. In both Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban, leafy and non-leafy vegetables are consumed very often, and respondents repeatedly emphasised that a meal feels incomplete without them. In both towns, vegetables form the staple anchor of everyday meals. Households described vegetables not simply as ingredients but as the *non-negotiable core* of a daily meal. As a woman in Kolasib Urban elaborated at length,

“Even if we don’t have meat, we cannot prepare or eat our meals without vegetables. We always need some sort of leafy vegetable or whatever is in season.... from mustard leaves to pumpkin leaves, even cowpea leaves. Sometimes we buy them, sometimes neighbours bring them, but vegetables must be there. If we boil vegetables with chilli and a little salt, that is already a proper meal for us.” (KU-R41)

Mustard, pumpkin and cowpea leaves sit alongside brinjal, potatoes, beans, cabbage and chayote as routine ingredients. In Aizawl Urban, access to larger markets extends this collection to supermarket vegetables such as lettuce, broccoli and kale, signalling how city-based food networks diversify but do not displace the traditional vegetable

base. This insistence highlights the deeply seasonal pattern of the urban Mizo diet. Even households that rely heavily on markets continue to describe their vegetable consumption through the vocabulary of seasonal cycles, *what is available now, what grows well at this time, what is fresh in the market today*. Imported supermarket vegetables such as lettuce, kale or broccoli appear in Aizawl Urban kitchens, but always as additions, never substitutes.

As one respondent put it,

“We buy lettuce or broccoli sometimes, but they don’t replace our own vegetables. We buy whatever is fresh that season. Seasons tell us what to cook; the market only brings more choice.” (AU-R220)

Fruit is eaten often but unevenly. Bananas and lemons are everyday items, while apples, dragon fruit or grapes appear when money allows or guests visit, marking fruit as both nourishment and social display. One respondent explained,

“Banana is every day because it is cheap and fills the children. But fruits like apple, pomegranate or dragon fruit... those come only when we have extra money or when we expect guests. We buy them to show respect and to make the meal look richer.” (KU-R64)

Meat consumption in urban areas remains culturally central but is moderated by income, health and time. Pork is the most desired red meat in both towns, followed by beef and more occasionally, mutton. Urban meat consumption reflects a balance between cultural preference and household economy. Pork retains symbolic primacy “meat that feels like a complete meal,” as several respondents phrased it. One urban respondent offered a longer reflection,

“If there is pork in the house, everyone becomes happy. It is the meat that feels like real food. But we cannot buy it as often now, so we adjust with beef or chicken. Still, pork has a special place. On Sundays or when relatives come, it is almost compulsory. Even the children know that Sunday means pork if possible.” (AU-R205)

while others noted that beef is eaten only a few times a year. Chicken and fish are more routine and flexible, chosen when pork is expensive or unavailable; one Aizawl

respondent stated that *“Chicken twice a week suits both price and cooking time”* (R293). Urban access to fish markets and frozen products makes seafood (fish, prawns, crabs and snails) more visible in town diets than in most rural households. Dried fish and smoked pork continue to be used, but often as convenience or “backup” foods when fresh items are scarce.

Fermented and pungent foods retain a strong presence in urban kitchens, especially in Aizawl. Sa-um (fermented pork fat), fermented soybeans and fermented chilli are used to turn simple boiled vegetables into what respondents call “real Mizo food.” One Aizawl respondent observed,

“Even when we make a simple vegetable stew, if we add a spoon of um or fermented soybean, the whole dish becomes Mizo again. It gives the smell of our parents’ kitchen. My children don’t always like the strong smell, but for us, that is the real taste. Without it, the food feels empty, like something is missing.” (AU-R243)

Pungent plants such as climbing wattle, stink bean and pithraj leaves, together with culantro and other herbs, are added frequently, particularly in *bai*. These ingredients anchor the sensory profile of urban Mizo cuisine and express continuity with rural taste, even when purchased rather than foraged.

Processed foods and take-away meals in the towns signal selective, not wholesale, modernisation. In Urban, instant noodles, biscuits, sausages and tinned or frozen meat are eaten occasionally, usually when “tired or late from work.” Processed foods and take-away meals are slowly entering urban diets, but respondents framed them as occasional conveniences. A young working mother shared,

“When we come home late or feel tired, we make noodles or heat frozen meat. But that is not proper food. Proper food is when we wash vegetables, cut them, boil them and eat together. These quick foods are only for busy days, not for our main meals.” (KU-R18)

Aizawl Urban households also use packaged snacks and frozen items, yet many respondents stressed that they still prefer fresh, home-cooked dishes and treat take-away meals such as momo, noodles, fried rice, pizza or burgers as occasional treats

rather than staples. This pattern suggests that convenience foods are incorporated into busy urban schedules without redefining what counts as a proper meal.

Beverages further illustrate this negotiated modernity. Tea is consumed very often in both urban sites and tea remains the emotional centre of urban households. Milk tea is common in the mornings and evenings and black tea preferred by some older respondents. One respondent explained,

“Evening tea is like a rule in our house. If we don’t drink tea together, the day feels unfinished.” (KU-R68)

Respondents consistently described tea as indispensable. One Aizawl Rural respondent narrated,

“We drink tea so often that I cannot even count. Morning tea, noon tea, evening tea.... sometimes four times a day. During winter, it becomes even more. When a guest arrives, we must offer tea first; without tea the conversation does not start.” (AR-R337)

Coffee is more visible in Aizawl Urban, where instant, filter and machine-made varieties are taken by students and office-goers needing to “keep awake for night work” (R92). Packaged juices (Tang, Real, Maaza) and soft drinks (Coca-Cola, Sprite, Pepsi) appear mainly among children and youth, while energy drinks such as Sting or Red Bull are occasional indulgences. Dairy products milk, yogurt, paneer, ice cream has entered urban diets but remain supplementary and adults consume them mostly in tea or coffee, while children are the main consumers of ice cream and milkshakes. Overall, the two urban sites reveal a hybrid dietary system in which rice, vegetables, chilli and fermented condiments remain central, while new ingredients and processed foods are selectively added according to income, health advice and taste.

Rural Dietary Patterns: In both rural sites, food consumption is even more closely tied to agricultural lifestyle, home gardens and local ecology. Leafy vegetables form the backbone of everyday meals. Households in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural repeatedly stressed that they “*cook whatever is available*” from fields and gardens. Mustard, pumpkin and cowpea leaves are constant companions to rice, supplemented by spinach, edible arum, Szechuan button leaves, Indian ivy-rue and glory bower leaves according to season. Non-leafy vegetables such as potatoes, lentils, brinjal, pumpkin, gourds and lady’s fingers extend this base. Respondents repeatedly

described their meals not in terms of recipes but in terms of what the land gives at that moment.

A Kolasib Rural respondent offered a beautifully detailed explanation,

“Every day we cook whatever is available...mustard leaves, pumpkin leaves, cowpea leaves, or colocasia leaves when they grow well. When the rains come, we shift to the rainy-season vegetables. When the sun comes out, we use ivy-rue leaves or glory bower leaves. We don’t plan dishes in advance. We cook according to the season. Whatever grows, we eat.” (KR-R185 / KR-R191)

Non-leafy vegetables such as potatoes, lentils, pumpkin, bottle gourd, lady’s fingers are also rooted in seasonal logic. As one respondent narrated,

“Sometimes we have plenty of chayote or papaya or carrot, and that month we cook them again and again. When the season changes, the taste of the house also changes. Our diet follows the garden.” (AR-R339)

Respondents often framed their diet in terms of sufficiency and seasonality rather than fixed recipes. as one Kolasib villager put it, “whatever is seasonally available” becomes the day’s dish (R188). Thus, Seasonality is not simply a matter of availability, rather it is a cultural principle.

One Aizawl Rural respondent summarised it in a way that captures rural food philosophy,

“We eat a lot of whatever is in season because that is when it tastes right. Even if the market has everything, it never tastes as good as when it is eaten in its own season.” (AR-R334)

Fruit consumption follows the same rhythm. Citrus fruits and bananas are common, but pineapples, dragon fruit and other varieties are eaten more when grown on household land, as one respondent explained, “we eat pineapples and dragon fruit from our field” (R368). Red meat, particularly pork, carries strong cultural and dietary significance in rural areas. In Aizawl Rural, several respondents stated that “pork is valued above all else in this house” (R369) and “pork first,” with beef or other meats taken only when available (R323, R336).

An extended reflection on this as stated by one respondent,

“Pork is valued above all else in this house. When we cook pork, everyone eats with more appetite. Even if it is expensive, we try our best. When we cannot buy pork, we feel something is missing, so we use chicken or fish. But pork is the soul of our food.” (AR-R369)

Rural households thus described pork as the main meat, even when health concerns have led some families to reduce portion size. Chicken and fish are widely consumed white meats. In Kolasib Rural, one respondent remarked that they “really like” river fish but eat it only occasionally due to supply constraints (R182). In both rural sites, crabs, periwinkle snails and prawns appear as seasonal delicacies tied to river conditions rather than routine items.

Fermented foods and pungent ingredients remain important markers of rural taste, though they are used with varying intensity. In Kolasib Rural, many households keep fermented soybeans, fermented chillies and *sa-um* ready for daily use, describing,

“Sa-um and fermented chilli are always there in our house. We prepare it ourselves. We don’t eat it every day, but when we want real Mizo taste, we put a little Sa-um l in the Bai. The food becomes strong and satisfying. Even when vegetables are simple, sa-um gives them life.” (KR-R160)

Aizawl Rural families similarly mix *sa-um* with ground chilli to deepen the flavour of stews but some respondents expressed ambivalence. In Rural, health discourses are beginning to reshape food practice as stated,

“We used to eat fermented foods a lot, but now we try to reduce them. We heard they are not good for health, so we eat them once in a while. But still, we feel something is missing without them.” (AR-R352)

Chillies in rural households are treated not just as flavouring but as an essential, everyday food. As several respondents insisted,

“We cannot eat meals without chilli. Chilli must be there.... whole, ground, pounded, sometimes fermented. Even when there is only rice and vegetables, chilli makes the food complete.” (KR-R126 / AR-R347 composite)

Pungent plants such as climbing wattle, stink bean and pithraj leaves are widely used in both villages, often combined with fermented condiments to create strongly flavoured accompaniments. These ingredients embed local ecological knowledge directly into the meal and sustain a sensory link to the landscape. Preservation practices and processed foods exhibit a distinct rural profile. Dried and smoked foods are still prepared in many households, especially in Aizawl Rural where dried cowpea leaves, roselle, bamboo shoots and smoked pork are kept for periods when fresh vegetables are scarce. Yet health concerns are beginning to reshape these practices as one respondent said they avoid dried/smoked items because “*we believe they’re carcinogenic*” (R326). In Kolasib Rural, limited drying space also constrains preservation. Packaged snacks, instant noodles and canned goods are present but not dominant. Children are the main consumers of biscuits, noodles and chips, while adults use sausages or tinned fish as quick side dishes when time or fresh ingredients are lacking. Take-away meals are rare in both sites, mentioned mainly in relation to bazaar visits, and are constrained by distance and cost: “It’s quite difficult for us villagers,” one Aizawl Rural respondent remarked (R367).

Beverage practices in rural areas reinforce the centrality of tea and the modest role of modern drinks. Tea structures rural daily life even more than in urban areas and consumed three to four times a day, shared with neighbours and visitors. Tea is consumed very often, often four times a day in Aizawl Rural, with black tea and sweetened milk tea used to warm the body and welcome guests (R337). Some households specifically prefer Mizo tea leaves over packaged brands, underscoring attachment to local taste (R376). Jaggery is used where available, though its high price leads some families to rely on sugar. As stated,

“We use jaggery when we have it, but it is costly these days.

One kilo is the same price as two kilos of sugar.” (AR-R182)

Coffee is taken occasionally, mainly as milk coffee, and rarely becomes a daily habit. Carbonated drinks and energy drinks are largely rejected as one Kolasib Rural respondent put it, “*we’re not keen on following this trend*” (R182). Milk and dairy products are scarce and usually reserved for children, guests or special occasions, such as yogurt, lassi or kulfi during festivals.

Across both rural sites, chillies, salt and simple cooking techniques knit these elements into a coherent food system. Chillies are eaten with virtually every meal ground,

pounded, fermented or whole. Several respondents insisted they “*cannot eat meals without*” chilli (R126; R368). Best Choice and similar refined oils are the main cooking media, occasionally complemented by mustard or other oils for specific dishes. Salt is both cooked into food and sometimes placed on the table as a side dish, one Kolasib Rural respondent said that “*salt as a side dish is a must*” (R199), though a few families now limit visible salt for health reasons. Boiling and frying are the dominant techniques, with baking absent. Meals typically consist of rice, a boiled or stewed vegetable dish, a pungent or fermented side and meat when available, followed by fruit, tea or betel quid rather than elaborate desserts.

Taken together, both urban and rural areas show a shared Mizo meal structure anchored in rice, vegetables, chilli and modestly seasoned stews, but urban and rural settings inflect this core in different ways. Urban households in Kolasib and Aizawl draw more heavily on market networks, incorporating supermarket vegetables, a wider range of fruits, seafood and occasional take-away foods, yet they continue to define “proper food” as home-cooked and vegetable-centred. Rural households in Kolasib and Aizawl remain more tightly bound to fields, gardens and rivers and their diets are shaped by what is harvested or foraged, with pork, chicken and fish integrated according to availability and income. Processed foods, dairy and restaurant meals have penetrated urban diets more than rural ones, whereas fermentation, pungent plants and seasonal vegetables remain strong across all sites, with particularly intense attachment in rural areas. Across all contexts, the Mizo diet is not only traditional, it is ecological, season-bound, collective, and emotionally anchored. Urbanisation has diversified ingredients but has not weakened the cultural grammar through which Mizo households understand, prepare and consume food. With the commonly consumed food items established, the next section examines how these foods are proportioned on the plate.

Table 5.3. Plate arrangement style

Plate arrangement style	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Staple food	83	88	79	80	162 (81)	168 (84)	330 (82.5)
Main dish	9	6	13	17	22 (11)	23 (11.5)	45 (11.25)
Side dish	5	5	3	1	7 (3.5)	6 (3)	13 (3.25)
Soup	3	1	5	2	9 (4.5)	3 (1.5)	12 (3)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

***Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural**

Across all four study locations, Table 5.3 reveals a deeply rooted and consistent pattern of plate arrangement that mirrors the cultural logic of Mizo eating practices. Staple food, predominantly rice forms the largest portion of the plate for 82.5 percent of households, with rural areas (84%) showing a slightly stronger adherence compared to urban areas (81%). District-level comparisons reinforce this stability: Kolasib Rural records the highest share (88%), followed by Kolasib Urban (83%), Aizawl Rural (80%) and Aizawl Urban (79%). This dominance of rice is reflected not only in the proportions but also in the physical layout of the plate, which follows a long-standing and almost ritualised format. Mizo households typically place a mound of rice at the centre of the plate, with the other components such as meat, vegetables, boiled dishes, chutneys, fermented relishes and occasionally soup, arranged around it in smaller portions. Respondents described this as the “correct” or “proper” way to plate a meal, with one noting,

*“Rice must be in the middle, and the dishes go around it. . .
that is how our meal is arranged, otherwise it looks strange.”*

The central placement of rice symbolises its role as the anchor of the meal, with the supporting dishes orbiting it like satellites.

This plate structure also reflects deeper cultural meanings. In Mizo society, the word for food is synonymous with rice, and eating food is linguistically equated with eating rice. As one respondent explained,

*“For us Mizos, when we say we have eaten, it means we have
eaten rice. Even if there are snacks or many dishes, if rice is
not there, we do not feel like we have eaten.”*

The narratives show that rice is not merely a staple but the substance that satisfies hunger, provides physical energy and gives emotional completeness to the meal. This link becomes especially clear in rural regions where agriculture is the primary livelihood.

Respondents frequently referenced the physical demands of farm work, as illustrated by one in Kolasib Rural who stated,

“We eat a lot of rice because that is what really gives us strength. We go to the farm early, and without enough rice we feel weak by mid-morning.”

Another added,

“Vegetables and meat are good, but they cannot keep us full for long...only rice fills the stomach properly.”

This explains why rural households maintain larger rice portions and adhere strongly to the traditional plate structure.

The expectation that rice must be present at every meal appears vividly in respondents’ narratives. Several recounted incidents that humorously but powerfully illustrate how indispensable rice is. An Aizawl Urban respondent told a family story,

“One evening our daughter-in-law prepared so many dishes...chicken, vegetables, soup and everything was ready. But when we were about to eat, we realised she forgot to cook rice. We had to wait for the rice to finish cooking because without it, the meal would not satisfy us. The other dishes, no matter how many, cannot replace rice.”

Such accounts reveal that cooked rice is not only the largest portion but the defining element of the meal and its absence renders even a plentiful table incomplete.

Urban areas, especially in Aizawl, show slight movement toward more diversified plate compositions, reflected in the 13 percent who chose main dishes as the largest portion. As Respondent 201 explained, *“We eat dishes a lot,”* indicating a growing importance of meat and vegetable preparations in some households. Yet even among those who preferred balanced plating such as those saying *“All in proportion”* (Respondent 207) or *“Equal portions”* (Respondent 292), none suggested replacing rice as the core element. Aizawl Urban respondents reaffirmed the centrality of rice even amidst exposure to varied cuisines, with Respondent 193 emphasising,

“Rice. It wouldn’t make sense for the dishes to be bigger because they are just accompaniment to the rice.”

Family dynamics also shape portions, as seen in “*Leafy dishes for Father*” (Respondent 209), reinforcing that arrangement is guided by both cultural norms and household roles. One urban respondent from Aizawl explained in a detailed reflection,

“Rice is the first thing we think of when we talk about eating. Even if we cook three or four side dishes, if rice is missing, the meal feels empty. We can manage without meat or vegetables for a day, but not without rice...it is what fills the stomach and makes the meal complete.”

Similarly, another Aizawl Urban respondent noted,

“Whenever we prepare food, we start with the question, ‘How much rice shall we cook?’ Everything else is planned after that. Because for us, rice is the real food, and the dishes are just to help us enjoy the rice.”

These narratives reflect a deep cultural logic that is unchanged by urbanisation.

Overall, the plate arrangement seen in Mizo is rice centrally placed and served in the largest quantity, surrounded by smaller supporting dishes that symbolises a persistent food ethos anchored in cultural identity, labour needs and emotional satisfaction. Both quantitative proportions and qualitative narratives converge to show that rice (buh) remains the defining element of Mizo meals, shaping not only how food is eaten but how it is understood. Urban respondents repeatedly emphasized that regardless of changing food trends, rice is what satisfies hunger, carries cultural meaning and provides the foundation of the Mizo meal. The consistency of these narratives underscores that while urban households may diversify their diets, the fundamental structure of the Mizo plate i.e. rice at the centre, surrounded by smaller supporting dishes remains remarkably stable across generations. Even as food options diversify, the basic structure of the Mizo plate continues to be guided by cultural continuity, daily work demands and the enduring belief that “*a meal is not a meal without rice.*” Having established the centrality of rice in plate composition and the enduring cultural logic that shapes how meals are arranged in Mizo households, the next step is to examine how these traditional eating patterns interact with newer forms of consumption. In particular, analysing family fast-food consumption per week will help reveal the extent to which modern, convenience-based eating practices are being adopted alongside traditional home-cooked meals across both urban and rural settings.

Table 5.4 Family fast food consumption frequency per week

Fast food consumption	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everyday	10	8	3	16	13 (7.5)	24 (12)	37 (9.25)
Too often	8	5	6	5	14 (7)	10 (5)	24 (6)
Occasionally	5	2	30	7	35 (17.5)	9 (4.5)	44 (11)
Rarely	34	31	47	14	81 (40.5)	45 (22.5)	126 (31.5)
Never	43	54	14	58	57 (28.5)	112 (56)	169 (42.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall distribution of fast-food consumption across the 400 households shows that fast food is not a central part of the Mizo dietary system, with 42.25% never consuming it and 31.5% consuming it rarely. Only 15.25% (everyday + too often) consume fast food at higher frequencies, while 11% do so occasionally. This baseline indicates that although fast food has entered Mizo foodways, it remains peripheral to daily eating patterns.

Urban-rural differences deepen this pattern. In urban areas, fast food has greater visibility as seen in the data which shows 40.5% rarely, 17.5% occasionally, and a combined 14.5% consume it daily or too often. In contrast, rural areas show a strong cultural and practical distancing, with 56% never consuming fast food, and only 4.5% occasionally. The contrast is sociologically meaningful as urban households negotiate time pressure, labour transitions, schooling schedules, and new media exposure, while rural households continue to rely on home-grown produce and long-standing ideas of “proper food” that remain deeply embedded in agrarian life.

Aizawl Urban exhibits the most diversified fast-food interaction, with 30% occasional consumers, reflecting greater access to fast-food outlets and stronger youth influence. Kolasib Urban shows 10% daily consumers, the highest among urban locations, suggesting specific localised pathways of adoption. Meanwhile, rural Kolasib and rural Aizawl show the highest rejection rates with 54% and 58% never consuming fast food respectively illustrating how rural food identities are still defined through freshness, sufficiency, and self-prepared meals.

The respondents' narratives bring this divide to life. Rural households often framed fast food as insufficient for hard physical labour. One respondent in Kolasib Rural explained at length,

"We work in the jhum, in the fields, and sometimes walk long distances early in the morning. Fast food cannot fill our stomachs or give us strength. It finishes very quickly. We prefer our own rice and vegetables because they give us energy for the whole day."

Another rural father elaborated,

"Our body is used to eating rice and proper meals. If we eat noodles or fried foods in the morning, we feel hungry again after one hour. It is not food that can support our work."

Such statements reflect an embodied understanding of food as labour-supporting sustenance, not merely taste.

Some rural narratives also emphasised availability and identity as stated by Respondent 345,

"We have our vegetables, we have our pigs, we have everything at home. Why should we buy food from outside? Our own food is enough for us."

This resonates with the broader theme of rural self-sufficiency and intergenerational continuity of food practices.

Urban households expressed a different rationale, pointing to convenience, work demands, and children's tastes. One Aizawl Urban respondent who works long hours noted,

"Sometimes we reach home at 8 or 9 pm. On those days, we just order momo or fried rice because it is quick. We cannot cook a full meal after a long day."

Another parent in Kolasib Urban described youth influence,

"Our children like pizza, Korean noodles, burgers. They see them on TV or online and ask us to buy. We don't eat these often, but on weekends or special days, we buy for them."

These narratives show that while adults remain attached to home-cooked meals, younger generations increasingly interact with globalised taste cultures such as Korean tteokbokki, instant ramen, fried chicken and social media trends.

Interestingly, Aizawl Rural shows 16% daily consumers, the highest figure across all four sites, suggesting emerging cultural shifts even outside urban centres. A parent there explained,

“The younger ones always ask for noodles or fried items. Even when we cook proper meals, they say they want something different.”

Here, youth taste represents a potential early stage of transition in rural areas.

These changing patterns are further shaped by the expanding presence of global food brands (KFC, Domino’s, Laziz Pizza, Barista) and the rising cultural influence of Korean cuisine. As one urban respondent put it,

“My daughter watches Korean dramas. After that she wanted kimchi, she wanted tteokbokki. We started buying Korean ingredients from the market.”

This reflects the cultural circulation of taste through media, leisure, and aspirational lifestyles. This resonates with Counihan & Van Esterik (1997), who argue that fast food often carries symbolic value such as ‘youthfulness, modernity, social belonging’ beyond its nutritional function. At the same time, the enduring strength of Mizo culinary identity is visible in the large proportion of rural and many urban households who still prioritise home-cooked food.

Yet despite these shifts, the cultural weight of home-cooked meals remains central in both rural and urban Mizoram. Respondents repeatedly affirmed that “proper meals” boiled dishes, vegetables, rice, simple meat preparations carry emotional comfort and cultural grounding. One grandmother in Aizawl Urban emphasized,

“No matter how many outside foods we eat, our stomach feels full only when we eat rice. That is real food for us.”

Such sentiments highlight how fast food may supplement but does not replace the symbolic and bodily satisfaction associated with the Mizo meal. Overall, the finding reveals a dual food landscape in contemporary Mizoram. First, Urban areas exhibit growing but moderate fast-food integration which is often shaped by work culture, youth trends and exposure to global cuisines. Secondly, Rural areas maintain

traditional eating patterns where fast-food is marginal, only occasionally tasted and often morally devalued.

As fast-food consumption highlights differences in accessibility and preference across regions, the next step is to examine snacks consumption, which reflects everyday eating habits more closely than fast-food meals. Unlike fast food, snacks are woven into daily routines especially for children, adolescents, and working adults and offer insight into how processed items, traditional homemade snacks, and globalised products enter household life. The following section explores whether snacks act as meal substitutes, leisure foods, socialisation tools, or simple between-meal fillers in both urban and rural settings.

Table 5.5 Family snacks consumption between meals

Snacks consumption	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	50	30	60	15	110 (55)	45 (22.5)	155 (38.75)
No	50	70	40	85	90 (45)	155 (77.5)	245 (61.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall distribution of snack consumption across the 400 surveyed households shows that 38.75 percent reported consuming snacks between meals, while 61.25 percent did not. This indicates that, at the population level, snacking is not yet an established or universal dietary behaviour among Mizo households. When the data is split by settlement type, a clear divergence emerges. In urban areas, 55 percent of respondents reported snack consumption, reflecting a majority engagement. Conversely, only 22.5 percent of rural households reported snacking, with 77.5 percent saying they did not consume snacks between meals. This demonstrates a substantial urban-rural divide in snacking behaviour.

Comparing urban and rural regions shows that snacking is much more embedded in urban daily routines, where exposure to markets, packaged goods, and convenience foods is higher. In contrast, rural families remain strongly aligned with a traditional three-meal structure, where eating outside main meals is uncommon. The district-level comparison further clarifies these tendencies. Within the urban sample, Aizawl Urban shows the highest snacking rate at 60 percent, followed by Kolasib Urban at 50

percent. This suggests that the capital city where commercial food environments, school shops, and youth culture are more pronounced drives the urban inclination toward snacking. In the rural sample, both districts exhibit low snacking, but the contrast is stark as Kolasib Rural records 30 percent snacking, while Aizawl Rural shows only 15 percent, making it the least snack-consuming region among all four locations. This aligns with Aizawl Rural's stronger adherence to conventional meal schedules and limited integration of globalised or processed foods.

When respondents were asked to specify what snacks their families consumed, the qualitative data revealed a wide range of items, dominated by packaged and ready-to-eat foods. Many households listed multiple snack items. Respondent 1 mentioned "*noodles, snacks, drinks*", while Respondent 2 expanded this to "*chips, noodles, fast food, cold drinks*." Brand-specific products were repeatedly referenced, signalling strong market penetration as Respondent 3 cited "*Lays, bread, Sprite*." Instant noodles especially WaiWai, Mama, and Rumpum emerged as the most recurrent snack choice. Many children were explicitly mentioned as primary consumers, reinforcing the generational shift. Respondent 208 observed that "*children consume cold drinks, chips*," while Respondent 226 similarly stated, "*children eat chips, noodles*."

At the same time, several respondents highlighted the persistence of traditional practices, with betel quid emerging frequently in adult snacking routines. Respondent 61 listed "*noodles, chips, betel quid*," and Respondent 84 also mentioned "*noodles, chips, betel quid*."

Taken together, the statistical and qualitative findings show that snacking is emerging as a distinctly urban behavioural shift shaped by increased access to packaged goods, changing work and school schedules, youth preferences, and broader exposure to global consumer culture. In rural Mizoram, however, snacking remains limited, with most households maintaining the traditional pattern of consuming only defined meals at set times. The presence of betel quid across both rural and urban contexts also indicates that while modern snacks have expanded, deeply rooted cultural habits continue to coexist with new food trends.

Overall, these findings show that while snacking and fast-food consumption are becoming a visible part of everyday life especially in urban households, they function largely as additions to the main meals rather than replacements for them. Urban families incorporate these items more frequently, whereas rural households continue

to follow structured meal routines with minimal food intake between meals. These contrasts reflect broader shifts in lifestyle, exposure, and generational preferences. Yet, even as new eating habits emerge, deeper cultural values continue to shape what families consider acceptable or appropriate to eat. To understand this more clearly, it becomes essential to explore the dietary restrictions that households observe, particularly those rooted in religious denomination and moral beliefs which continue to influence food choices across both rural and urban settings.

Table 5.6 Religious Influences on Household Dietary Practices

Religious Influences	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	7	9	24	2	31 (15.5)	11 (5.5)	42 (10.5)
No	93	91	76	98	169 (84.5)	189 (94.5)	358 (89.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table shows that dietary restrictions based on religious beliefs are not a dominant feature of Mizo food culture, with only 10.5% of the total 400 households reporting any form of religiously motivated restriction and 89.5% reporting none. This immediately indicates that religion in Mizoram does not function as a prescriptive dietary system but rather as a cultural background within which most food choices remain flexible and guided more by habit, availability, and tradition. When the data are separated by settlement type, urban areas show a notably higher proportion of restrictions with 15.5% of urban households reported some form of religious dietary limitation, compared to only 5.5% of rural households. This suggests that religious restrictions are more commonly found in urban contexts, where exposure to various denominations, evangelical teachings, and health-oriented interpretations of scripture may be more prominent.

Comparing the two categories further clarifies this split. Urban households are nearly three times more likely than rural ones to report religious restrictions, indicating distinct cultural environments. Urban spaces where religious identity is expressed through selective dietary discipline, and rural spaces where food practices remain largely embedded in longstanding cultural routines with minimal religious modification. Within the urban category, the difference between the two districts is

pronounced. Aizawl Urban, at 24%, shows the highest concentration of religious restrictions of any region, far above the total urban average of 15.5%. Kolasib Urban, at only 7%, falls well below this average. This comparison shows that Aizawl Urban alone pulls the urban total upward, reflecting a more denominationally diverse and religiously expressive environment in the state capital. In the rural category, the pattern is reversed, Aizawl Rural, with only 2% reporting restrictions, shows even more flexibility than the total rural proportion of 5.5%, while Kolasib Rural, at 9%, is the only rural region that slightly exceeds the rural average. These differences highlight how local religious cultures, not just Christianity broadly shape dietary practices in specific ways across settlements.

The narratives provided by respondents further illuminate these quantitative patterns. Those who reported restrictions were overwhelmingly members of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination, the only Christian group in Mizoram with consistent, doctrinally prescribed dietary boundaries. Their voices reveal how scriptural interpretations directly shape food choices. One SDA respondent explained at length that in their household,

“Pork, tea, and fish without scales should not be eaten because in the Bible they are counted as unclean, and we try to follow what is written as closely as possible, even if others around us do not follow the same rule,”

making explicit the link between scripture and daily practice. Another SDA household gave a similarly detailed explanation,

“We avoid pork, dog meat, tea, prawns, and all animals that the Bible describes as unclean because we believe the body is the temple of God, so what we put inside must be clean and disciplined. Even when others cook these foods, we prefer not to partake because it is part of our faith identity.”

These longer statements show that SDA families view dietary restriction as an ongoing, everyday expression of faith and moral discipline, making them the primary contributors to the “yes” category in the table.

Other denominations appear mainly through occasional or seasonal restrictions. Catholic households described Lent-related abstinence rather than permanent taboos.

One Catholic respondent explained,

“During Lent we do not eat any meat at all on Fridays and especially on Ash Wednesday. Even if the children ask or guests come, we follow this as a family rule because it is part of our religious observance, but outside of Lent we eat normally.”

This demonstrates how Catholic restrictions shape only specific periods of the year rather than general food culture.

Meanwhile, the majority of respondents who reported no restrictions explained their stance in ways that reflect both cultural continuity and practical concerns. One respondent from Aizawl Rural stated,

“We do not have any restriction in our home. We eat what is available and what we have grown, and religion does not tell us to avoid anything. Our elders also ate this way.”

emphasising the continuity of cultural foodways over religious rule-making. Another added that their dietary choices were shaped not by faith but by circumstance,

“Sometimes we avoid certain foods only because we are struggling or poor, not because of religion. If we had more money, we would eat whatever we like.”

Such narratives reinforce the statistical pattern showing that rural households, in particular, prioritise availability, affordability, and tradition over religious guidelines. When viewed together, the table and accompanying narratives reveal that religious dietary restrictions in Mizoram exist but do not constitute a dominant cultural force. They are concentrated mainly in urban areas especially Aizawl Urban and stem almost entirely from SDA doctrine or from seasonal Catholic practices. Rural food culture remains the least affected by religion, sustained instead by long-standing culinary traditions and practical household realities. The overall picture is one in which religion shapes food practices not through rigid prohibition but through selective, denominationally specific, and often personally interpreted forms of abstinence, leaving Mizo food culture largely open, adaptive, and grounded in everyday social life.

Although Christianity forms the moral backbone of most communities across Mizoram, it does not impose rigid dietary laws comparable to Halal, Kosher, or Hindu

vegetarian regimes. Instead, food routines remain guided primarily by cultural continuity, availability, and household pragmatism. Thus, religion in Mizoram influences dietary practices not by imposing boundaries but by shaping the cultural rhythms through which food becomes meaningful. Households negotiate faith and food through flexible interpretations, personal convictions, and communal traditions, allowing Christianity to coexist with a largely inclusive culinary landscape. Within this system, Adventists stand out as the only group whose dietary boundaries are consistently structured by doctrine, while Catholic abstinence remains seasonal and symbolic. For most Mizos, however, food continues to be guided far more by custom, taste, memory, and circumstance than by religious prescription.

Eating practices refer to the specific, repeatable ways people approach and interact with food. They encompass the behaviours, routines, and manners that shape everyday food consumption, and are distinct from dietary habits, which focus more on the nutritional composition or types of food eaten. This section addresses the key questions of how, when, where, and with whom food is consumed, providing a detailed understanding of everyday eating arrangements within Mizo households. The section examines the fundamental components of Mizo eating practices, including the basic meal structure, everyday eating styles, and the extent to which meals are shared within the family. It explores the importance attached to eating together, how and where family meals are taken, the serving traditions that accompany them, the consistency of meal timings across weekdays and weekends, and the various factors that influence when families eat.

Basic Mizo Meal Pattern: The Mizos traditionally follow three-meal structure each day comprising a full course morning meal, a mid-day meal, and a full course evening meal, each carrying its own cultural meaning and domestic significance. In Mizo terminology, the morning meal is known as Tukthuan, the afternoon meal as Chaw-chhun, and the evening meal as Zanriah. This tripartite structure forms the backbone of everyday food organisation in Mizo households, shaping when food is prepared, how it is consumed, and what constitutes a “proper” meal. Unlike many global food cultures that differentiate sharply between breakfast, lunch, and dinner in terms of size and content, the Mizo meal structure is characterised by a remarkable continuity i.e. rice remains the staple for all three meals, and the morning and evening meals are typically full, substantial meals rather than light, snack-based ones. The preparation

of these meals and the frequency with which they are consumed provide valuable insights into the daily routines of households as well as the socio-cultural values associated with each time of eating. This section examines how commonly households in rural and urban Kolasib and Aizawl prepare these three meals and how the resulting patterns reflect cultural continuity, occupational demands, and emerging urban lifestyle shifts.

Tukthuan (Morning Meal): Among these three meals, Tukthuan, or the morning meal, holds a central place in the domestic routine. It holds particular importance in rural areas where physical labour and early schedules require substantial nourishment. Unlike the Western notion of “breakfast,” which is generally associated with light foods such as tea, biscuits, or toast, the Mizo morning meal is conceptually defined as a full plate of rice accompanied by side dishes. As one respondent explained,

“We don’t really have breakfast in our house. We always eat a full meal, as Mizos usually do, so we don’t have what you would call breakfast in the morning.”

This statement reflects a cultural distinction wherein the morning meal cannot be categorised as “breakfast” because it does not align with the idea of a small, snack-like morning intake. The Mizo understanding of the term “breakfast” differs significantly from the Western meaning of the word. In Mizo culture, “breakfast” is associated with a light snack such as tea, biscuits, or something minimal. Because the morning meal is always a full course meal, the Mizos generally do not use the English word “breakfast” to describe Tukthuan.

Meal timings for Tukthuan follow a relatively stable pattern across the study areas, although clear differences emerge between rural and urban locations. In rural communities, where agricultural work begins early, the morning meal is typically eaten between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. In contrast, urban households, shaped by school schedules, office timings, and commuting routines tend to eat slightly later, around 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. The frequency with which households prepare this morning meal further illustrates the influence of occupation on eating practices. Rural areas report the highest rates of daily breakfast preparation, highlighting the need for a full meal before starting fieldwork. Urban areas show slightly lower frequencies, where there are households reporting who never preparing a morning meal at home. These variations indicate an increasingly common urban trend skipping the morning meal or

relying on alternatives purchased outside the home due to the time constraints of modern employment.

The content of the morning meal across all four study areas demonstrates that Tukthuan is overwhelmingly rice-centric, yet clear differences emerge between rural and urban households. In rural areas, the morning meal is almost universally composed of Mizo chaw, a full rice-based meal accompanied by *chhum* (boiled vegetables), *bai* (stew), *tlak* (boiled leafy greens) and *kan* (*fried*). This strong adherence reflects not only cultural continuity but also the demands of agricultural labour, which require early, substantial nourishment. Rural households rarely deviate from this pattern, and lighter alternatives such as *sawhchiar* (rice porridge) appear mainly for children rather than adults.

In contrast, urban households, though still dominated by rice consumption, we have seen a greater dietary variation, reflecting shifting lifestyles and increased exposure to external food influences. Urban morning meals have undergone noticeable change as households incorporate a wider range of alternatives that diverge from the traditional full rice-based meal. A small but significant segment of urban respondents reported consuming bread, noodles, chips, tea-and-snack combinations or fast-food items indicating the growing presence of convenience-oriented foods. The inclusion of Western-style or globally familiar options such as cereals, toast, eggs, pancakes, waffles or oatmeal, although still limited, represents an emerging intercultural adaptation that is more visible in towns and cities than in rural areas. These additions reflect the influence of café culture, easy availability of packaged foods and shifting work and school schedules that encourage quicker, more portable forms of breakfast. Urban respondents were also more likely to skip the morning meal altogether, as seen in comments such as “*I don’t eat anything in the morning*” and “*I usually can’t eat meals in the morning,*” which reveal how office timings, school routines and the fast pace of urban life disrupt the possibility of preparing and consuming a full morning meal at home. Together, these patterns demonstrate that while rice remains central, urban morning meals are undergoing gradual diversification marked by both the incorporation of alternative foods and the increased tendency to forego the morning meal due to time constraints.

Western-style items collectively referred to as “*sap chaw*” including cereals, toast, eggs, pancakes, waffles or oatmeal were found almost exclusively in urban settings

and remain limited both in frequency and diversity. Their near absence in rural households highlights the uneven exposure to global food markets and the stronger attachment to traditional meal structures in these areas. Overall, while urban households demonstrate some openness to experimenting with modern or foreign-style items, these foods remain supplementary rather than substitutive. The cultural expectation that the morning meal must be filling and rice-based continues to guide eating behaviour across Mizoram. The rural-urban contrast therefore reflects not a weakening of tradition but differing daily schedules and occupational demands i.e. rural households maintain a consistent full meal pattern, whereas urban households show emerging flexibility shaped by lifestyle changes. Despite these variations, Tukthuan remains a powerful expression of continuity in Mizo food culture, anchoring identity and routine even amidst gradual dietary diversification.

Chaw-chhun (Mid-Day Meal): The mid-day meal, known as Chaw-chhun, forms the second major eating occasion in Mizo households, though its preparation and consumption are far more variable than the morning meal. A pronounced urban-rural divide characterises lunch practices across the four study locations. In rural areas particularly, Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural majority of households prepare lunch on a daily basis reflecting the continuity of home-centred routines, in which families either consume freshly prepared food or rely on leftovers from the morning meal. Lunch in rural households therefore fits into the daily domestic lifestyle where family members often return home mid-day and meal preparation remains an integrated part of everyday chores. In contrast, urban households show significantly lower rates of daily lunch preparation. The decline seen indicates a clear departure from traditional eating patterns and highlights how urban work schedules, school timings and access to outside food sources reshape midday consumption.

Lunch timings also differ across settings. In rural households, Chaw-chhun is typically eaten between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m., aligning with the agricultural workday and the practice of returning home midday. Urban households, however, tend to consume lunch later, around 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. reflecting extended office hours, longer commutes, and structured school routines. Many urban respondents noted that they either ate lunch at their workplace or did not follow a fixed lunch schedule, underscoring the growing disconnect between household life and midday eating in urban environments. For some households, lunch is irregular or replaced by

alternatives purchased outside the home, such as takeaway meals, tea accompanied by snacks, or food consumed in offices, schools, and local eateries. This signals a gradual shift from home-based lunch practices toward more mobile and convenience-driven patterns of consumption.

Despite these divergences in frequency and setting, rice remains the central element of the mid-day meal across all regions. Rural households in particular maintain strong continuity in food habits. Rice is commonly paired with vegetables, lentils, beans, leafy greens, chutneys or meat curries, forming a simple yet filling meal. Sawhchiar (rice porridge) also plays an important role, especially in rural areas like Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural, where respondents frequently mentioned it as a preferred lunch option due to its affordability. In urban households, however, sawhchiar tends to appear less regularly, used more selectively rather than as a staple.

Urban households display greater experimentation and dietary diversification. Items such as fried rice, pulao, and noodle-based meals appear more frequently in Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban, suggesting the influence of modern food markets, convenience foods, and shifting tastes. Instant noodles particularly “Wai Wai” were regularly mentioned in urban locations, sometimes eaten plain, prepared in a soupy style, or even combined with rice. While noodles are present in rural areas, they appear less frequently and usually as a supplementary addition rather than the main component of the meal. This contrast indicates the stronger penetration of globalised and convenience-oriented foods in urban centres.

Urban areas also show notable reliance on snack-based or light lunches, particularly tea accompanied by biscuits, bread, cakes or packaged snacks. This practice, which was common in both Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban, reflects changing work patterns and time constraints that make lighter meals more practical than the traditional rice-based lunch. Rural households, by comparison, rarely replace lunch with tea or snacks, underscoring the continuing importance of Chaw-chhun as a substantial meal in agrarian settings.

One of the most striking contrasts emerges in the consumption of leftovers (“chaw thing”). In rural areas, leftovers play a major role in lunch preparation, in rural areas, households commonly rely on food prepared earlier. This practice is not seen largely in Aizawl Urban where food delivery services, restaurant meals and shop-bought items constitute a significant share of urban midday consumption, many urban

respondents mentioned opting for delivered or purchased meals. This marks a significant departure from home-centred foodways and signals the growing accessibility of commercial food systems in urban Mizoram, shaped by infrastructure, market availability, and busier lifestyles.

The consumption of noodles is higher in Urban as compared to Rural. This uneven distribution demonstrates how globalised and modern food products gain traction first in urban spaces where access and exposure are higher. Meanwhile, rural diets remain strongly rooted in traditional rice-based meals prepared at home. Finally, a small number of respondents across both rural and urban areas reported skipping lunch altogether, though this practice was more prevalent in urban contexts. While not widespread, such behaviour indicates that the mid-day meal is less rigidly defined than the morning or evening meal, and its regularity is more easily disrupted by work routines, commuting schedules, and modern lifestyle changes.

Taken together, the analysis of Chaw-chhun reveals a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in Mizo food practices. While rice continues to anchor the mid-day meal across all regions, rural households maintain stronger adherence to traditional patterns, home-cooked meals, leftovers, and substantial rice-based dishes whereas urban households display greater openness to convenience foods, ordered meals and snack-based alternatives. The contrasts reflect broader social transformations involving occupational mobility, market access, and exposure to external food cultures. Lunch, therefore, emerges as the meal most affected by urbanisation, marking a point where traditional food values encounter modern demands with noticeable variation in how households negotiate these shifts.

Zanriah (Dinner): *Zanriah*, or the evening meal, emerges as the most consistently prepared and consumed meal across nearly all locations in the study. In both rural and urban settings, the vast majority of households in Kolasib and Aizawl regularly prepare dinner at home. Rural households, in particular, show an almost universal pattern of evening meal preparation, with Kolasib and Aizawl villages reporting extremely high levels of daily cooking. Urban Kolasib also reflects a strong adherence to dinner preparation, indicating that, unlike the morning or mid-day meals, dinner remains deeply anchored in household routines regardless of location. Dinner serves as an important moment of togetherness in Mizo homes, a time when members gather after the day's work to eat, converse and reconnect. This period of shared relaxation

highlights that *Zanriah* is not viewed solely as a functional eating event but as a meaningful social practice that reinforces kinship, hospitality, and the value of family time.

A contrasting pattern, however, appears in Aizawl Urban, where only a minority of households prepare dinner daily. This noticeable deviation signals the growing influence of urban lifestyles, where work-related time constraints, heavy traffic, and access to restaurants or takeaway options alter the conventional expectation of home-cooked evening meals. In urban centres, evening routines often extend beyond the household as is shaped by office hours, social engagements, or reliance on readily available prepared food which leads some families to purchase dinner rather than cook it. Still, even in such contexts, *Zanriah* retains cultural importance. In Mizo norms, inviting someone for a meal almost invariably implies an invitation to dinner. Social rituals, visiting relatives, and entertaining guests are traditionally associated with this meal, reaffirming its symbolic weight even where preparation practices are shifting. Dinner consumption patterns show strong continuity with traditional Mizo foodways across all four study locations. Regardless of region, almost all respondents described dinner as a rice-based meal accompanied by classic Mizo dishes such as *tlak* (boiled vegetables), *kan* (fried dishes), *bai* (vegetable/meat stew), and *hmarcha rawt* (ground chilli). The frequent mention of *bawl* stands out as particularly significant. While *bawl* appears in both rural and urban responses, it is more routinely found in rural households, suggesting that traditional fermentation-based dishes remain more deeply tied to village food culture. Urban households, especially those in Aizawl, showed more diversity in preparation styles, including references to “traditional curry style” dishes or modified recipes, reflecting a broader culinary experimentation that aligns with city-based exposure to different cooking methods and ingredients.

Distinct regional patterns also surface within dinner preferences. In Aizawl’s rural households, foods such as lentils, potatoes and eggs were repeatedly described as “a must” or essential components of dinner. This signals a stable reliance on affordable, nutritionally dense items that complement the centrality of rice. In contrast, these items were mentioned less often in Kolasib households, where meat-based dishes including variations of *bai* and *bawl* appear more prominently. Urban Kolasib respondents occasionally mentioned lighter alternatives such as oatmeal or roti, choices rarely found in village settings, suggesting a small but meaningful shift toward

convenience and dietary modification in towns. Meanwhile, rural households across both districts continue to maintain the conventional pattern of rice paired with boiled or fried accompaniments, stews and chilli preparations, demonstrating the persistence of traditional culinary rhythms in village life.

Urban households, particularly in Aizawl, show greater diversity and flexibility. Some respondents described eating fried rice, roti, oatmeal, or other quick dishes as substitutes for rice on certain evenings. These alternatives illustrate a gradual urban adaptation where the demands of modern schedules, ease of preparation, and access to varied food products shape dinner choices. Nevertheless, such departures remain limited in scale. Rural households continue to show strong commitment to rice-based dinner structures, and even urban families generally return to rice as the central dinner item on most days.

A striking finding across all four locations is the complete uniformity with which households reported consuming a traditional rice-based dinner accompanied by vegetables and either meat or poultry. This universal reliance on rice goes beyond dietary preference. In Mizo culture, rice (*buh*) is not simply the staple, it is the *definition* of a meal. Everyday language reflects this fusion. The word *chaw*, used for “food,” is often synonymous with “rice,” symbolising how deeply rice is woven into the conceptual framework of eating. To “eat dinner” effectively means to “eat rice,” reinforcing rice as both the nutritional centre and cultural anchor of the Mizo meal system.

This uniformity also reflects the powerful role of socialisation in shaping taste and food preferences. From childhood, individuals in Mizo households are introduced to dinner as a shared, rice-based, home-cooked meal eaten together with family members. Over time, this daily exposure forms a deeply cultivated palate that places rice at the centre of dinner identity. Even in urban settings where fast food, cafés, delivery services, and global food products are increasingly available, the comfort and familiarity of a rice-centric dinner remain compelling. The household dinner table thus becomes a site of cultural continuity where food identities are not only enacted but also transmitted across generations. Taste is not merely acquired but also emotionally reinforced through the routines of domestic life, making the traditional Mizo dinner remarkably resilient to change.

Thus, the three-meal structure in Mizo households reveals a blend of modern adaptation, particularly at lunch, and adherence to traditional practices. Morning and evening meals remain consistent, centred around rice and shared at home, reinforcing family ties and daily routines. While lunch shows more variation in urban settings, rice remains a staple across all meals, indicating a mix of minor changes and strong cultural continuity in Mizo eating habits.

Table 5.7. Family Meals Taken Together as a Shared Household Practice

Number per week	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
0-2 times	7	6	4	1	11 (5.5)	7 (3.5)	18 (4.5)
3-5 times	18	13	10	7	28 (14)	23 (11.5)	51 (12.75)
6-8 times	22	14	30	11	52 (27)	25 (12.5)	77 (19.25)
9+ times	53	67	56	81	109 (54.5)	148 (74)	257 (64.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data presents the frequency of shared family meals across the four study regions and demonstrates that communal dining remains a deeply embedded cultural practice in Mizoram. When the total sample of 400 households is considered, the findings show that 64.25% of all households sit and eat together nine times or more per week, while only 4.5% fall in the lowest category of 0-2 times. Another 12.75% dine together 3-5 times, and 19.25% share 6-8 meals as a family each week. This distribution highlights the continuing cultural emphasis on mealtime as a collective ritual, reinforcing kinship bonds and serving as a key space for everyday interaction and intergenerational communication within Mizo households. The significance households attach to shared dining emerges clearly in the narratives of respondents who regularly stressed consistency as a norm,

“We always eat together unless something important comes up” (Respondent 5)

“We dine together daily” (Respondent 22)

and

“I absolutely forbid not dining together” (Respondent 246).

For many, disruptions occur only due to structural or practical constraints. Respondents noted that irregularities often stem from “*work*,” “*work and studies*,” or “*late return from work*”. Some households adapted by preserving partial togetherness, such as dining together only during dinner, as expressed by Respondent 216,

“We dine together every night, not so much in the morning”

and Respondent 293 who similarly stated,

“We dine together for dinner only.”

These voices highlight that mealtimes continue to function as more than a routine, they remain a meaningful cultural act that shapes family identity, social bonding, and the transmission of values.

A clear contrast emerges across the four regions when examining the highest and lowest frequencies of families eating together. Aizawl Rural records the strongest adherence, with 81% of households sharing meals nine or more times a week, making it the region with the highest frequency of communal dining in the entire sample. This is followed by Kolasib Rural (67%) and Aizawl Urban (56%) and finally Kolasib Urban (53%). At the opposite end of the spectrum, the lowest frequency of shared meals is observed in Aizawl Rural, where only 1% fall in the 0-2 times category, indicating that minimal shared dining is rare in this setting. The region with the highest proportion of low-frequency meals is Kolasib Urban, where 7% of households eat together only 0-2 times weekly, followed closely by Kolasib Rural (6%).

Family meals in urban Mizoram continue to hold significant emotional and cultural value, even as households navigate the pressures of modern work pattern, schooling schedules, and individualized routines. The data show that most urban households still emphasise the importance of eating together, viewing it as the only stable moment in otherwise fragmented daily lives. This experience was described by one urban respondent, who reflected,

“In town, our lives are fast and scattered. Everyone leaves home at different hours...some for office, some for school, some for coaching and by the time we return, each of us carries the tiredness and noise of the whole day. That is why eating together becomes the one steady moment we try our best to hold onto. Even when we cannot manage all three

meals, we make sure at least dinner is shared. It is during that meal that we finally see one another properly and no phones, no rushing....just sitting down and breathing as a family. We talk about our day, clear misunderstandings, laugh a little, and remind ourselves that even in the middle of changing lifestyles, we still belong to each other. When we miss these shared meals, the house feels strangely fragmented, like something important has gone missing.”

In rural Mizoram, the importance of family meals emerges even more strongly. Respondents describe shared meals as moments of completeness, patience, and unity, where relationships are nurtured and values are passed down. One rural respondent articulated,

“In the village, eating together has always been our way of life. Our work may keep us occupied...some in the fields, some looking after livestock, some managing shops but no matter how busy the day becomes, we all return home knowing that we will sit and eat together. We wait for one another, because mealtime is when the family feels complete. During these meals, elders give advice, children share their stories from school, and we talk about everything from daily worries to church matters. Sometimes we pray together before we eat. It is during these moments that respect, discipline, and family values are passed down. We believe that if a family stops eating together, their hearts will slowly grow apart. For us, sharing meals is not just a habit. . . it is a principle that binds us together.”

This narrative echo rural agreement on the importance of mealtime, showing how commensality functions as a core feature of rural Mizo family life. Thus, across both urban and rural regions, family meals stand out as one of the strongest cultural anchors in Mizo households, serving as daily rituals through which families reconnect, communicate, and reaffirm their shared identity. A respondent summarised this collective experience in a way that resonates across settings,

“Whether in town or in the village, eating together is what keeps a Mizo family close. In cities, it may be harder as we have different schedules, late nights, and busy routines but we still try to gather, especially for dinner. It becomes the only proper time we see one another. In rural homes, it is a natural part of everyday life. . . everyone waits, and meals feel incomplete unless all are present. But the meaning is the same everywhere. . . .mealtime is when we talk, guide, encourage, and reconnect. We share our day, we settle the small tensions that arise, and we remind ourselves of the love that binds us. Even when someone is not hungry, they sit with the family because being together matters more than the food. Eating together is one of the few traditions that continues to carry our values of unity, respect, patience, and peace. It is what makes us feel like a family.”

Overall, the findings indicate that commensality holds a central place in Mizo household life, serving as more than just meal times. Shared meals foster family cohesion through conversation and companionship, allowing members to express care and reinforce a sense of belonging. Despite daily schedule challenges, families prioritize this practice, highlighting its cultural significance. Thus, commensality is a defining characteristic of Mizo family life, strengthening relationships and sustaining household unity.

Mealtime styles: The term mealtime styles in this section refers to the main ways in which Mizo households organise their everyday meals. Instead of covering every possible dining practice, the discussion focuses on three key aspects that shape how families eat together such as how they sit, who serves the food, and how food is eaten. These three elements capture the spatial, practical, and cultural organisation of the meal and are the most useful for understanding how commensality is experienced within the home.

Family Seating Arrangements: Across both urban and rural households, one of the most consistent mealtime patterns is the presence of a “usual seat” for many family members, especially the father. This fixed place is not based on formal rules. There are no prescribed directions, no culturally mandated “head of the table” yet nearly

every family recognises that certain seats quietly “belong” to particular individuals. The location differs from house to house, but the idea of ownership over a seat is widely understood. The significance of this seat lies not in hierarchy alone but in the sense of order and predictability it brings to household life. When each person sits where they always do, the meal begins in a familiar and unspoken pattern and the arrangement signals that everyone is present, that the family is intact, and that the dining space is functioning as it should. This fixed location becomes an anchor, giving structure to an otherwise flexible domestic environment.

It also carries a powerful sense of belonging. Having a usual seat especially for the father, but also for mothers, older siblings acts as a non-verbal acknowledgment of a person’s place within the family. The seat itself becomes a gentle confirmation that “this is where you fit,” reinforcing identity and relational bonds.

What makes this practice uniquely Mizo is how deeply recognisable it is across households. When a Mizo guest visits another Mizo home for a meal, they do not simply sit wherever a seat appears empty. They pause, look around, and ask quietly, “*Khawi ah hian nge ka thut ang?*” (“Where would be appropriate for me to sit?”). Several respondents explained that this hesitation comes from not wanting to “sit in someone’s usual place,” as it may unintentionally make the host feel uneasy, not offended, but slightly uncomfortable in the way only shared cultural knowledge can trigger. It is an embodied etiquette; a Mizo person immediately understands that a wrong seat can feel like stepping into a space that symbolically belongs to someone else. This practice is not rigid or hierarchical in an oppressive way. Rather, it reflects an intimate, culturally specific attentiveness to social space. The usual seat becomes a subtle marker of identity and placement within the household. It reassures the person who sits there, and it signals to others how to move around them.

Across all regions, the practice of having formally or informally a usual place remains a subtle but telling cultural feature. It demonstrates how Mizo families organise social space through warmth rather than rigidity, using familiar seating to build continuity, identity and comfort within the household.

Serving Tradition: Across Mizo households, the act of serving food during mealtime, especially rice (*buh*) the staple and emotional anchor of the Mizo meal remains one of the most enduring and symbolically meaningful aspects of everyday domestic life. While lifestyles in Kolasib and Aizawl differ, and urban households negotiate busier

schedules and shifting gender expectations, the practice of one particular family member consistently serving rice continues almost universally. This is more than a practical habit; it reflects a deeply cultural logic of care, attentiveness, and order that quietly structures how Mizo families eat together.

In most homes, this responsibility falls on women usually the mother, and in her absence, a daughter or daughter-in-law. Respondent 12 stated plainly,

“Mother serves the rice,”

while Respondent 13 added,

“It is the daughter who serves in our family.”

This continuity across generations shows how serving becomes part of how women anchor the household’s everyday life. Even in more urban settings, where roles can be more flexible, the pattern remains strong. As Respondent 44 explained,

“Mother and daughter-in-law share the responsibility,”

highlighting that the role is passed down, maintained, and embodied by whoever stands as the nurturer of the household at that moment.

Aizawl Urban, although more exposed to modern routines and external influences, also preserves the practice. There are rare exceptions. Respondent 34 noted,

“Father serves the food,”

and Respondent 265 recalled,

“In my grandparents’ house, grandfather took charge of the rice pots.”

These outliers remind us that families adapt according to personal circumstances. Yet, even here, the cultural foundation remains the same i.e. the act of serving rice is a structured gesture that expresses attention to others, and the desire to keep the mealtime orderly and collective.

In rural households especially in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural, the cultural weight of this practice is even more visible. Respondent 40 mentioned,

“It was grandmother who always served,”

showing how elder women act as guardians of domestic tradition.

A particularly significant cultural feature is that only rice is served by this designated person. All the other dishes are placed on the table for everyone to take as they need. But the distribution of rice comes from one pot, and it is only the server who handles it. The server must be attentive, thoughtful, and aware of each person’s needs,

ensuring that anyone who needs more rice receives it when needed. Respondent 182 captured the gravity of this role when they said,

“The rice pots are placed in the matriarch’s hands,”

emphasising that this act carries a sense of authority, care, and responsibility. The rice pot becomes a symbolic centre of mealtime, what ties the family together physically and emotionally during the meal.

Overall, the practice of one family member consistently serving rice stands out as a defining feature of Mizo mealtime styles. It is not an assigned duty but an assumed role taken up naturally because it fits the household’s social organisation and unspoken expectations. The act itself becomes a quiet, ritualised gesture, where the server ensures that every plate is checked and refilled before tending to their own. This personal distribution of rice, unlike other dishes taken individually, gives the meal a shared centre and reinforces a sense of care, attentiveness, and order within the family. In this way, the simple, repeated action of serving rice becomes a cultural marker, an everyday ritual that holds together the social and emotional fabric of the Mizo household.

Eating styles in Mizo households reveal not only how food is consumed but also how shared meals are organised, experienced, and given meaning. Various eating styles appear across the four regions such as buffet-style, passing dishes around the table, individual serving but the analysis consistently shows that the most significant practice is *Kil*, the traditional Mizo custom in which the family gathers around the table and eats together in an orderly, collective manner.

The strongest presence of *Kil* appears in Aizawl Rural, where families continue to uphold highly structured mealtimes. In Kolasib Urban as well, adherence to *Kil* remains strong. Even in settings shaped by salaried work, tighter schedules, and compact households, many families still emphasised the need to gather at the same time. Respondents frequently expressed discomfort with the idea of eating apart. One respondent from Kolasib Urban (Respondent 144) remarked,

“I cannot imagine eating separately as a family,”

explaining that separate meals feel like a disruption to what they see as the natural flow of family life. This reflects how urban households in Kolasib retain a strong sense of tradition despite living in changing environments.

Kolasib Rural displays a blend of consistency and flexibility. Families here still prefer *Kil*, but the demands of agricultural work create occasional exceptions. As one participant (Respondent 221) explained,

“If someone comes late from the fields, they may eat separately,”

but this is seen as an adjustment forced by circumstances, not a shift in values.

The most visible changes appear in Aizawl Urban. While *Kil* is still practiced widely, the daily realities of city life compressed living spaces, unpredictable schedules, and greater exposure to individualised routines shape more flexible eating styles. A young respondent (Respondent 302) noted,

“We eat together when we can, but often it is easier to just take food and sit where it is convenient.”

This reflects a shift not away from the value of shared meals, but toward a recognition that time, space, and work schedules in urban Aizawl often make strict *Kil* difficult to maintain.

Alongside *Kil*, other eating styles exist, though they remain marginal. Passing food around the table appears more frequently in Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Rural, pointing to a less formal but still communal practice where family members share dishes informally. This style aligns with households that do not have a fixed server or where mealtime is more relaxed. One respondent from Aizawl (Respondent 183) explained that in their home *“we pass the dishes around,”* which indicates a more fluid mealtime where shared participation replaces structured serving. Buffet-style eating remains the least common across all regions and is typically associated with special occasions, larger gatherings, or times when meals are not taken as a family unit. Families rarely use this style for everyday meals.

Kil carries meanings far deeper than a simple description of how families sit and eat. In Mizo households, *Kil* is both a practice and an idea, a way of gathering that gives mealtime its cultural weight. At its core lies the principle of intentional assembly: family members do not merely eat together, they arrive together and settle together, turning an ordinary moment of consumption into a small but meaningful communal event. The act of waiting for one another before eating, of beginning the meal as a unit rather than as individuals, reinforces the idea that shared space and shared time take precedence over personal convenience.

The cultural depth of *Kil* becomes even more evident in language. When inviting someone to join a meal, Mizos traditionally say, “*Chaw hlui min lo kilpui turin kan sawm a che*” (We warmly invite you to join us for a meal), an expression that means far more than “please come and eat with us.” Here, *kilpui* translates as “come and gather with us,” signalling hospitality as a moral gesture rather than a casual offer of food. It is an invitation that honours both host and guest, expressing humility, sincerity, and respect. The phrase is often used in more formal or considered settings, where the act of sharing a meal carries emotional and social weight. Through this linguistic form, *Kil* becomes a moral language of generosity, extending the values of the household outward to the community.

In essence, *Kil* is the soul of Mizo commensality. It translates the cultural ideal of togetherness into a concrete, disciplined, and deeply meaningful household practice. More than a style of eating, it is a way of being with others, an embodied expression of social warmth, familial closeness, and shared moral life within Mizo society.

A second dimension of eating styles concerns the tools used to eat. The persistence of hand-eating across the four regions reveals an enduring sensory and cultural connection to Mizo food. In Kolasib Rural, respondents spoke of hand-eating as enhancing the pleasure and ease of eating rice and chawhmeh. Respondent 119 noted simply,

“For us, eating with the hands makes the food feel alive. When we hold the rice, we can feel whether it is soft enough, warm enough, or needs more stew. It helps us know how much we should take, how to mix it, and how to enjoy it properly. Even if spoons are available, we still prefer our hands because that is how we grew up, and it is how rice tastes best. It feels natural...almost like the food listens better when we touch it first.”

Hand-eating remains strongly present even in urban households like Kolasib Urban, where its continuity signifies attachment to cultural identity and comfort. In Aizawl, however, cutlery use such as spoons and forks has become more common, particularly among younger generations. Respondent 193 observed, “*Some use spoon and fork,*” while Respondent 182 added, “*We give spoons to children when they ask for it.*” These comments show how cutlery use arises from schooling, restaurant culture, or

convenience rather than a rejection of tradition. Younger members experiment with spoons and forks while elders continue to prefer hands.

Eating with the hands in Mizo households is more than a practical technique. It is an embodied cultural habit that carries memory, comfort, and identity. Hand-eating becomes a quiet but expressive cultural marker. It is a non-verbal way of saying “this is how we eat,” a daily act that preserves belonging and continuity within changing household environments. Even as urban households negotiate modernity, the hand remains central to the sensory and cultural experience of the Mizo meal.

Table 5.8. Family meal timing consistency weekdays/weekends

Consistency	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	66	81	59	82	125 (62.5)	163 (81.5)	288 (72)
No	34	19	41	18	75 (37.5)	37 (18.5)	112 (28)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Across the total sample of 400 households, 288 (72%) maintain consistent meal timings throughout the week, while 112 (28%) experience changes between weekdays and weekends. A clear urban-rural divide emerges as rural households are far more consistent (81.5%) compared to urban households (62.5%), indicating that rural routines remain more stable and predictable, whereas urban families face greater variability. Within the urban areas, Kolasib Urban (66%) shows slightly stronger consistency than the total urban average (62.5%), while Aizawl Urban (59%) has the lowest consistency. In rural areas, Kolasib Rural (81%) and Aizawl Rural (82%) align closely with the total rural pattern (81.5%). Overall, the table suggests that while most households try to maintain regularity, urban families experience more fluctuation, whereas rural households remain anchored in established daily patterns.

Although many families across the four regions maintain a stable meal schedule throughout the week, significant differences emerge between rural and urban contexts particularly in response to work demands, Saturday market routines, and Sunday church services. In urban areas, work obligations were the most common cause of irregularity including office hours, late return from work, and the pressure of urban employment structures shaped the timing of meals.

One of the clearest distinctions between rural and urban meal-timing patterns emerges around the cultural institution of the Saturday market, known commonly as *Inrinni zing bazar*. While urban households consistently reported delays in Saturday morning meals, rural households rarely mentioned any such shift. This is because the very notion of a Saturday bazar is almost absent in most rural localities. Many rural families grow their own vegetables, purchase meat locally, or rely on smaller village markets that operate throughout the week. As a result, their meal timings remain largely unchanged on Saturdays.

In urban areas, however, *Inrinni zing bazar* has long shaped household routines. Although today groceries are available throughout the week, the Saturday morning bazar continues to influence the structure of the day. People still set out early in the morning just as the older generations did to buy the week's vegetables, meat, and other fresh ingredients. This habit dates back to a time when urban centres had limited daily market access, vegetables and meat were primarily sold on Saturdays, making it the one dependable day for stocking up for the entire week. Even with modern shops offering daily supplies, the older pattern persists i.e. the majority of households still look forward to Saturday as the designated grocery day and buy enough to last the week.

This long-standing practice has now become a cultural routine rather than a necessity, and its influence is clearly visible in mealtime shifts. Respondents repeatedly described "*late meals on Saturdays*" (Respondents 33, 48, 61) or "*slightly later [breakfast] on Saturday mornings*" (Respondent 5). It is not only grocery-related delay but the shared memory of Saturday as a special market day that still guides household behaviour. Thus, in urban Mizoram, *Inrinni zing bazar* has become a quiet but persistent cultural force that continues to shape the timing of meals, even in a context where groceries are easily available every day.

In rural households, where this tradition is not embedded in the same way, Saturday meal timings remain more stable. The absence of a Saturday market routine allows rural families to maintain their weekday structure, reinforcing the observation that rural mealtime patterns are generally more consistent. These accounts highlight how *Inrinni bazar*, more prominent in urban centres alters the household's internal schedule. Families leave early for the market, return with vegetables, meat, and fresh ingredients, and only then begin preparing the day's meals. This routine is less

common in rural areas, where homegrown vegetables, nearby vendors, or smaller local markets reduce the need for a weekly excursion. Therefore, Saturday delays emerge as a distinctly urban food-cultural pattern.

If Saturday cultural routines delay meals, Sunday religious obligations often bring them forward. Families across regions explained that meals, especially morning meal are taken earlier to accommodate church services. Respondent 54 described “*slightly earlier [meals] on Sundays due to church service,*” while another said simply “*earlier meals on Sundays*” (Respondent 68). Respondent 205 was precise, “*Sunday breakfast is at 8.30 am,*” and Respondent 212 explained that meals must be earlier “*due to church service.*”

The Sunday schedule demonstrates how religious life structures family routines. It is not simply a matter of time management as it reflects the centrality of the church in Mizo social organisation, shaping when families gather, cook, and eat.

Thus, the findings show that mealtime consistency in Mizoram is shaped by the interplay of work, school, church, and cultural routines. Rural households tend to preserve more stable mealtime structures, while urban households navigate more fragmented schedules.

5.3. Culinary Practices within the household

Culinary practices refer to the way’s food is prepared, handled, seasoned, cooked, and presented within a household. They include not only the techniques used but also the cultural reasoning, material tools, and sensory choices that guide these techniques. In this study, the term culinary practices is used to capture both the method and the meaning behind cooking in Mizo homes.

Table 5.9. Primary cooking method used

Cooking method	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Frying	71	16	77	15	148 (74)	31 (15.5)	179 (44.75)
Boiling	26	83	20	83	46 (23)	166 (83)	212 (53)
Grilling	1	1	2	1	3 (1.5)	2 (1)	5 (1.25)
Baking	2	1	1	1	3 (1.5)	2 (1)	5 (1.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall results show that boiling is the most dominant cooking method used in Mizo households, accounting for 53% of all responses, followed closely by frying at 44.75%. Grilling and baking remain marginal, together making up just over 2% of reported practices. When comparing urban and rural totals, significant contrasts emerge. In urban households, frying (74%) is more common than boiling (23%), whereas in rural households, boiling overwhelmingly dominates (83%) while frying accounts for only 15.5%. This illustrates a clear rural-urban divergence. Rural kitchens remain closely aligned with traditional cooking preferences, where boiling supports dishes like *bai*, *tlak* made with local vegetables.

According to the data, the combination of boiling and frying emerges as the dominant cooking method across most regions. This preference suggests a clear cultural pattern i.e. Mizos tend to favour dishes that are both flavourful and nutritious, with frying adding texture and taste and boiling reducing excess oil content. The dual use of these techniques suggests that families aim to create meals that are satisfying but not overly heavy, aligning with a wider preference for moderation and balance in Mizo cuisine. As one Respondent 217 from Aizawl Urban explained,

“We usually boil vegetables first and then fry them lightly. It gives a better taste but still feels clean. My children prefer it that way because it isn’t too greasy.”

Similarly, respondent 78 from Kolasib Urban reflected,

“Almost every dish we cook involves both frying and boiling. Frying gives the food flavour, but boiling keeps it soft and fresh. It is the way we were taught by our mothers.”

These responses capture how the blending of methods has become embedded in household routines, passed down through generations. A closer look at the field responses adds further depth to this pattern. In Kolasib Urban, it was observed that when participants were asked about their ways of preparing dishes, many found it difficult to describe their methods in detail. This was not because they lacked knowledge, but because cooking is such an ordinary and instinctive part of daily life that articulating it verbally felt unnecessary or unfamiliar. This tendency reflects how culinary skills in Mizo households are learned through observation, imitation, and shared experience rather than through formal explanation. This shows that cooking

knowledge is something Mizos learn naturally by watching and doing together, rather than something they feel the need to describe in words.

In contrast, Rural depend on frying and the practicality of frying in rural households where it enhances the texture and flavour of food without requiring elaborate tools. Many rural respondents emphasised the sensory satisfaction that frying provides. For instance, Respondent 187 shared,

“Most of our dishes are fried because it makes even simple vegetables more delicious. When we have fresh mustard leaves or beans, we fry them with pork fat or chillies...it gives a rich taste.”

Another Respondent 182 from rural reflected on the convenience of frying,

“It takes less time to fry, especially when we return late from the fields. We use what we have and fry them together.”

These accounts reveal the practicality and sensory appeal that underlie frying’s popularity. Yet, even within this trend, traditional cooking mediums persist. Respondents 131 and 132 highlighted the enduring use of ash filtrate, an alkaline solution as a distinctive ingredient in *bai* saying,

“We use chingal (ash filtrate) that we prepare ourselves. In urban, they use soda, but we still make ours from ash. When relatives come from the city, they always take some back with them.”

The use and exchange of ash filtrate not only mark regional culinary distinctiveness but also illustrate how rural households sustain cultural continuity through material and familial exchange. The act of sharing this filtrate with relatives in Aizawl points to kin-based networks that sustain culinary continuity between rural and urban households.

Urban kitchens also show a willingness to experiment. One Aizawl Urban participant reflected,

“We try new styles sometimes like baking or stir-frying after watching online videos. But our main dishes are still the same boiled and fried ones we grew up with.” (Respondent 232)

Even when people experiment with new cooking styles, these changes remain occasional rather than replacing what already exists. One respondent put it plainly,

“We bake only on Sundays or during Christmas. For everyday meals, we stick to our usual methods i.e. boiling and frying.” (Respondent 229)

This suggests that newer techniques are welcomed as additions rather than substitutions and they are associated with leisure, celebration, or moments of curiosity, while the everyday cooking identity remains firmly rooted in boiling and frying.

The data shows that boiling stands as the most dominant cooking method across Mizo households, and this pattern carries cultural weight. Although Mizo food is sometimes described as bland because of its simplicity, boiling is not a sign of limitation but a deliberate choice. The method reflects a philosophy in which flavour is drawn from the ingredient itself rather than created through added spices or heavy seasoning. Over time, this way of tasting has become an acquired palate which is subtle, familiar, and deeply tied to memory. What may appear simple is, for Mizos, the most authentic expression of taste. In this sense, the preference for boiled food is not just about convenience or habit. It reflects identity, belonging and culture.

Table 5.10. Cooking with fresh ingredients

Fresh ingredients	KU	KR	AU	AR	Total urban (%)	Total rural (%)	Total (%)
Always	83	91	60	83	143 (71.5)	174 (87)	317 (79.25)
Most of the time	13	5	32	12	45 (22.5)	17 (8.5)	62 (15.5)
Sometimes	2	2	3	4	5 (2.5)	6 (3)	11 (2.75)
Rarely	2	1	4	1	6 (3)	2 (1)	8 (2)
Never	0	1	1	0	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	0
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data shows that the use of fresh ingredients is a defining feature of Mizo cooking across all households surveyed. Out of the total 400 respondents, 317 households (79.25%) reported that they always cook with fresh ingredients, and an additional 62 households (15.5%) cook with fresh ingredients most of the time. This means over 94% of all households rely on fresh produce regularly, signalling a strong and consistent cultural preference rather than a circumstantial habit. Only a very small number reported infrequent use of fresh ingredients, 2.75% “sometimes,” 2%

“rarely,” and just 0.5% “never.” These minimal percentages highlight that processed, packaged, or long-shelf-life ingredients have not replaced fresh cooking practices in Mizoram. Thus, across all four regions, the data reveal a consistent emphasis on freshness and home preparation.

The responses to the question on cooking meals from scratch with fresh ingredients reveal a strong reliance on traditional, home-prepared food practices in Mizoram. Many participants highlighted the frequent use of local vegetables. For instance, Respondent 9 listed in detail, “Potatoes, Pumpkin, Bean, antam (Mustard leaves), behlawi hnah (Cowpea leaves), Stink Bean, Behliang, Tomato, samtawk (Ethiopian eggplant), Brinjal.” The listing of such a wide range of vegetables suggests not only diversity in diets but also a preference for fresh, seasonal produce sourced locally. Similarly, Respondent 17 shared that their household usually cooks “Boiled dishes, Mustard leaves, Fried Potatoes, Cowpea leaves Stew,” while Respondent 165 mentioned preparing “Stew, sawhchiar (Rice porridge), Fried dishes, Boiled dishes.” These examples highlight the central role of traditional cooking methods such as boiling and frying.

A recurring theme across the responses is the rejection of ready-made or processed foods. Respondent 21 declared,

“We do not consume ready-made foods,”

while Respondent 22 reinforced this point by stating,

“We absolutely do not eat readymade foods.”

and Respondent 263 noted,

“Our dishes are usually homemade/organic...leafy greens and vegetables.”

Together, these responses suggest that food preparation is not just about sustenance but is tied closely to health, authenticity and cultural identity.

Table 5.11. Recipe cooking method usage

Recipe usage	KU	KR	AU	AR	Total urban (%)	Total rural (%)	Total (%)
Always	3	3	3	3	6 (3)	6 (3)	12 (3)
Most of the time	12	5	6	6	18 (9)	11 (5.5)	29 (7.25)
Sometimes	24	3	21	8	45 (22.5)	11 (5.5)	56 (14)
Rarely	0	11	35	0	35 (17.5)	11 (5.5)	46 (11.5)
Never	61	78	35	83	96 (48)	161 (80.5)	257 (64.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

***Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural**

The data shows that recipe-based cooking is not a dominant practice among Mizo households. A significant 64.25% of respondents reported that they never use recipes, making this the majority pattern across the sample. Only 3% reported “always” using recipes, and another 7.25% reported doing so most of the time, highlighting that formal or instructional cooking remains rare. The mid-range responses, 14% who sometimes use recipes and 11.5% who rarely do indicate that while recipes are present in the culinary landscape, they serve mostly as occasional reference points rather than everyday tools.

An urban-rural contrast is evident. Urban households demonstrate more engagement with recipe-based cooking (48% never use recipes), compared to rural households where 80.5% never use them. This pattern suggests that urban respondents are slightly more influenced by changing foodscapes, digital media exposure, and diverse food encounters, whereas rural respondents continue to rely more on inherited knowledge and established routines. Among the regions, Aizawl Urban shows the highest openness, with only 35% reporting “never” using recipes and 21% reporting occasional use. In contrast, Aizawl Rural displays the strongest tradition-based pattern, with 83% stating they never use recipes. Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural reflect this divide as well, though both remain on the lower end of recipe reliance.

Respondents who do use recipes mentioned a small but distinct set of sources, showing how external references are beginning to supplement though not replace traditional learning. The most commonly cited source was YouTube. The qualitative responses strongly affirm the patterns shown in the table. Recipe use functions as a backup method, while everyday cooking relies on instinct, memory, and embodied experience. Respondent 261 explained,

“When dishes are unfamiliar or difficult to prepare, I tend to look at the recipes from social media especially YouTube.”

Similarly, Respondent 264 noted,

“I usually watch recipes available on YouTube when I come across Mizo dishes that are hard to prepare.”

These responses indicate that recipes are used when needed but are not foundational.

Many participants emphasised that cooking knowledge comes from home, family, and lived experience and not written instructions. This sentiment is reflected in statements such as,

“My mother is highly skilled.” (Respondent 117)

“Whatever my mother teaches me.” (Respondent 265)

“When I cook, I use my mom’s recipe which I called traditional recipes.” (Respondent 233)

This shows a learning style based on observation, repetition, and sensory familiarity, rather than reading or following step-by-step instructions.

Thus, in Mizo households, cooking is learned through doing, shaped by repetition and familiarity and passed down rather than written down. Recipe-based cooking does not replace tradition. The Mizo kitchen remains a cultural space where knowledge is inherited, not instructed, where the act of cooking is not only a practical task, but a meaningful continuation of shared memory, identity, and everyday experience.

Table 5.12. Ajinomoto usage for seasoning

Ajinomoto usage	KU	KR	AU	AR	Total urban (%)	Total rural (%)	Total (%)
Always	59	88	66	83	125 (62.5)	171 (85.5)	296 (74)
Most of the time	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sometimes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rarely	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Never	41	12	34	17	75 (37.5)	29 (14.5)	104 (26)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

***Note:** KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural

The data on Ajinomoto usage reveals a striking pattern across regions, showing that seasoning with Ajinomoto has become a common and deeply embedded cooking practice in many Mizo households. When viewed in total, 74% of respondents reported that they always use Ajinomoto, while only 26% stated they had never used it. The most notable contrast appears between rural and urban households: Ajinomoto use is significantly higher in rural areas (85.5%) compared to urban regions (62.5%), indicating stronger attachment and reliance on the seasoning outside city centres.

Among rural locations, Kolasib Rural stands out with 88% usage, the highest among all surveyed areas, followed closely by Aizawl Rural at 83%. In urban regions, usage

remains high but more divided, Aizawl Urban records 66% always-usage, while Kolasib Urban shows the lowest at 59%, accompanied by a notably higher proportion of non-users (41%). This suggests that while Ajinomoto is widely used, urban households are more divided in preference, likely influenced by health awareness, exposure to alternative seasonings, and shifting perceptions about food additives.

Respondent narratives strongly support the quantitative findings. In rural areas, Ajinomoto is described as *essential*, not optional. Respondent 173 stated simply, “*It is a must,*” while Respondent 185 explained, “*I include it in all the dishes.*” Another respondent from Kolasib Rural admitted its centrality, sharing, “*It’s hard for us to do without Ajinomoto anymore,*” and Respondent 188 reinforced this by saying they “*add it to everything.*” These statements illustrate how Ajinomoto has moved beyond being a supplementary flavour enhancer, it has become a defining component of taste expectations in rural cooking.

Taste preference also encourages continued use. Respondent 182 reflected on both habit and curiosity, noting,

“We add it to bai and kan. I don’t think we consume much of it compared to others. I’m even considering eating it more as I’ve heard more praises about it.”

Such responses highlight a pattern in which Ajinomoto is not only normalized but also endorsed within peer and community taste culture.

In contrast, resistance and moderation are more commonly observed in urban households. Respondent 39 from Kolasib Urban asserted, “*We avoid as we feel it is not good for health,*” and Respondent 4 echoed this sentiment, explaining,

“We use it rarely as we are concerned about the negative impact on health.”

Others demonstrated selective usage, limiting Ajinomoto to specific dishes such as *bai*, *hmarcha rawt*, or *bawl*. In Aizawl Urban, Respondent 204 shared, “*Just a little,*” while another explained usage based on dish type, stating it is added to “*Bai, Ground Chilli, bawl.*” Some respondents have replaced Ajinomoto with alternatives. For example, Respondent 292 shared, “*We prefer to use Chicken Powder instead,*” while Respondent 293 confirmed, “*We only use Chicken Powder.*” This reflects a subtle shift among some households who continue to seek flavour enhancement but through perceived “safer” or more modern substitutes.

Ajinomoto has become a key part of Mizo food flavouring, especially in rural contexts, where the seasoning contributes to taste expectations. The fact that usage remains high even amid global health debates suggests that taste, familiarity, and habit outweigh concerns about additives for many households. Yet, the emerging hesitation, seen more strongly in urban settings signals a slow negotiation within food culture between habit and change, convenience and health awareness, tradition and new dietary ideas. Thus, the pattern reflects a broader cultural process. Taste is not only a sensory preference, it is shaped by memory, familiarity, social endorsement, and cultural belonging. In this sense, Ajinomoto usage reveals more than cooking practice, it reflects changing relationships between flavour, identity, and food modernity within Mizo households.

Cookware used: Mizo households commonly use a mix of traditional and modern cookware, but the patterns vary between rural and urban settings. Across all regions, a core set of items appears repeatedly i.e. aluminium pots (*bel/dekchi*), pressure cookers, metal frying pans, and stainless-steel vessels. These items form the basic cooking toolkit in most Mizo households.

In both urban and rural homes, the pressure cooker is widely used for cooking rice because it is faster and more convenient than boiling rice over a regular pot. However, when preparing traditional dishes such as *bai* (vegetable stew) and *tlak*, respondents consistently reported that the *dekchi* or metal pot is preferred. Many explained this choice in simple functional terms rather than cultural symbolism, noting that these dishes “cook better,” “taste right,” or “cook evenly” in these vessels.

Rural households reported a higher use of traditional cookware, including locally made aluminium pots and tools used for pounding. This reflects long-established cooking routines and the continued availability of locally made utensils. Urban households, on the other hand, showed a gradual shift toward modern options such as non-stick pans and branded cookware like Prestige or Hawkins. This aligns with more compact kitchen spaces, faster cooking needs, and increased market access. Respondent statements illustrate this pattern clearly. Many respondents listed equipment in practical groupings such as,

“Pan, cooker, pot.”

“Cooker for rice, pan for frying, pot for stew.”

Material preference also came through in the responses. Stainless steel and aluminium were mentioned most often because they are durable, affordable, and easy to clean. A few respondents mentioned non-stick cookware or cast iron, mainly in urban areas, showing slow but noticeable adoption of newer cooking technologies. The choice of cookware is therefore shaped less by tradition alone and more by practicality, familiarity, and everyday cooking requirements.

The use of electrical cooking appliances in Mizo households reflects a gradual shift in culinary practice. While modern devices such as rice cookers, microwaves, blenders and instant pots have entered domestic kitchens, their role remains secondary to traditional methods, especially in households where cultural preference, habit and familiarity continue to guide cooking decisions.

Across both urban and rural regions, the rice cooker stands out as the most widely adopted electrical appliance, particularly in urban homes. It is often used for everyday rice preparation, especially in households where convenience, time management and work schedules shape cooking routine. Yet even among frequent users, the rice cooker has not fully replaced traditional methods. A notable portion of households both urban and rural continue to cook rice using stovetop pressure cookers or pots. For many respondents, rice cooked in a pressure cooker tastes “right,” and aligns better with texture and consistency expected in daily meals. One woman explained simply that she prefers boiling rice in a pressure cooker because, *“it tastes better and feels more like home than rice from a machine.”* This suggests that convenience alone does not determine appliance adoption, sensory memory and taste expectations still carry weight.

In rural areas, electrical appliances are used even less frequently. Many families continue to rely on stovetop and fire-based cooking. Several respondents described rice cookers and similar appliances as “helpful but not necessary,” signalling that utility does not automatically translate into cultural relevance. Microwave ovens follow a similar pattern. Even in households where they are present, their use is irregular. They are often reserved for reheating rather than cooking, and in many homes, they sit unused for days at a time. For many, reheating food over a stove feels more natural than using a microwave. One respondent summarised this sentiment well,

“We don’t store much leftover food, so there isn’t anything to heat.”

This reflects another cultural tendency, freshly cooked food is prioritised over stored meals, reducing the perceived need for reheating appliances. Microwaves remain symbols of modern convenience rather than necessities, used more often in urban homes but rarely central to daily cooking.

Blenders and food processors show the least integration into culinary routines. Their limited use stems from both practical and cultural reasons. Mizo cuisine traditionally does not rely heavily on puréed textures or blended bases, unlike many Indian or Southeast Asian food systems. Techniques such as pounding, chopping or grinding continue to be done manually, often because the texture achieved by hand is preferred. As one respondent explained,

“Some ingredients should be crushed, not blended as the taste is different.”

Such statements highlight how texture and tactile engagement remain embedded in culinary meaning. Even when urban households experiment with smoothies, baking or fusion dishes, these appliances are additions and not replacements. The use of modern electric appliances varies based on location, accessibility, familiarity, and perceived cultural relevance. Urban households display higher integration and experimentation, while rural homes maintain stronger continuity with inherited practices. The overall pattern demonstrates that technology does not simply replace tradition, it enters the kitchen gradually, selectively and conditionally. Electrical appliances are welcomed when they support existing preferences, but they do not redefine what cooking is. Instead, Mizo households show a layered form of adoption where traditional practice remains the core, electrical appliances are supplemental rather than central, Cooking knowledge continues to be embodied and inherited rather than technology-led. Thus, Cooking remains a practice shaped not only by tools, but by values and those values, even amidst modernization, continue to be anchored in culture.

Use of Tableware in Mizo Households: Although traditional Mizo cuisine is remembered for its simplicity and rustic presentation, the way food is served today reflects both continuity and gradual adaptation. Historically, meals were served using natural materials, with green banana leaves functioning as plates during gatherings,

community feasts, or informal meals. Dishes such as *bai* (vegetable stew), boiled meat, or steamed greens did not require elaborate plating.

In contemporary households, however, serving practices have diversified. Modern tableware such as ceramic plates and bowls, stainless steel sets, melamine dinnerware, and various forms of plastic ware now play a central role in daily dining. Ceramic plates and bowls have become common in many urban homes and restaurants, sometimes chosen for their aesthetic appeal as well as durability. Stainless steel continues to be a reliable material across many households because it is long-lasting, easy to clean, and culturally familiar. Plastic and melamine tableware are also widely used because they are lightweight, affordable, and available in multiple designs and patterns.

Glassware for drinks, though less common historically, is now part of household serving practices, particularly in urban areas. Meanwhile, wooden bowls, boards, and platters have started appearing in some homes, sometimes as decorative serving pieces or for specific dishes, suggesting a subtle return to natural textures, though now through purchased products rather than gathered materials.

Brand influence is also evident in household choices. Several respondents specifically mentioned branded tableware such as *Tupperware* and *Ektra*, indicating that recognition of commercial brands now shapes purchasing decisions and domestic preferences. These branded items often serve dual purposes as an everyday utility and subtle markers of status, modernity, or personal taste.

Across households, the selection of tableware tends to vary by occasion. Everyday meals often rely on melamine, steel, or mixed plastic sets because they are practical. In contrast, ceramic or branded sets may be reserved for guests, celebrations, or formal meals. Traditional serving methods, such as banana leaves, are still used occasionally, often during cultural events, church gatherings, or curated “traditional Mizo meals,” where they serve more symbolic than functional purpose.

Thus, these patterns show that tableware in Mizoram is not only a matter of utility, it reflects changing aesthetics, economic access, exposure to global and regional markets, and shifting ideas about presentation and hospitality. Traditional and modern forms coexist, not through replacement, but through layering where serving practices adapt while retaining traces of earlier cultural sensibilities.

5.4. Food Norms, Rituals and Cultural meaning

Food norms, understood as the unwritten social rules governing food behaviour and food rituals, fixed, repeated, and symbolic actions surrounding cooking and eating play an important role in shaping how meals unfold in Mizo households. Together, these practices transform food from a basic necessity into a cultural act that reinforces social hierarchy, transmits generational knowledge, and anchors shared identity. This section examines important cultural patterns, including pre-meal rituals, familial interactions during meals, serving orders, and specific practices. It also addresses evolving and contested food traditions, particularly regarding perceptions of dog-meat consumption in Mizo society.

Table 5.13. Pre-meal rituals

Pre-meal rituals	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	66	72	87	84	153 (76.5)	156 (78)	309 (77.25)
No	34	28	13	16	47 (23.5)	44 (22)	91 (22.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table on pre-meal rituals shows that a majority of households in Mizoram continue to observe ritualised behaviours before eating, with 309 (77.5%) out of 400 households reporting that they practice some form of pre-meal ritual. While variation exists across regions, adherence is strong in both urban and rural contexts, with the highest participation in Aizawl Urban (87%) and Aizawl Rural (84%), followed by Kolasib Rural (72%), and the lowest yet still significant participation in Kolasib Urban (66%).

In Mizoram, this ritual practice is widely known as *chhung-inkhawm*, a compound term that offers insight into its meaning and social function. The term is culturally loaded, *Chhung* translates to *family*, while *inkhawm* refers to a *service or devotional gathering*, similar in structure and tone to a church service. Thus, *chhung-inkhawm* is not merely prayer before food, it is a ritualised gathering where the family sits together, listens, participates, and reflects.

This ritual typically includes a shared prayer but extends further into acts of reading scripture, devotional reflection, and occasionally short moral or practical discussions.

Leadership of the ritual is not fixed. Rather, households often practice a rotational leadership pattern, where a different family member leads the ritual each time. This practice formalises participation and functions as an embodied method of teaching responsibility, confidence, and moral orientation. As respondents repeatedly highlighted, the ritual is not simply spoken. It is performed, maintained by embodied acts of gathering, waiting, sitting together, and observing order before food is served. One respondent described,

“Before we eat, we always have chhung-inkhawm. We sit together, someone leads the prayer, and we read a passage from the Bible. Sometimes we talk about the meaning, and if there are things we need to correct, we speak about them gently. My father always says this time is precious because it reminds us that we are one family, not just people living under the same roof.” (Respondent 184)

Another respondent expressed how the ritual extends beyond devotion and becomes a site of emotional closeness,

“Food tastes better when we pray together. During chhung-inkhawm, we talk about what happened during the day and if anyone struggled or had a problem, we share and support each other. It is not just prayer...it is the time when we feel like a family.” (Respondent 291)

The ritual also serves social purposes beyond devotion. In some households, it becomes a structured platform for guidance and correction. As one participant explained,

“Sometimes after the prayer, we talk about mistakes or attitudes that need to change. My parents always say this is the right time because we are calm and united.” (Respondent 94)

This suggests that *chhung-inkhawm* operates as an informal governance space within the household, reinforcing hierarchy, transmitting values, and affirming emotional bonds. The persistence of *chhung-inkhawm* across the state shows that the ritual remains a living cultural practice rather than a symbolic memory. While urbanisation

and shifting routines may alter the frequency or format, the function remains constant. It marks mealtime as a moment of unity, gratitude, and collective identity.

Thus, the quantitative findings and narrative testimonies show that pre-meal rituals especially *chhung-inkhawm* continue to play a significant role in structuring daily food practices in Mizoram. They transform the act of eating into a meaningful social moment grounded in shared faith, mutual respect, and intentional togetherness.

Mealtime as a Social Institution: The data shows that conversations during meals remain a defining feature of household life across urban and rural Mizoram. Mealtime is not merely a moment for physical nourishment, it is a relational and cultural institution. It functions as a structured social space where communication, learning, evaluation, bonding, and emotional exchange take place. The consistency of this pattern across regions indicates that, in Mizo society, eating together holds cultural weight that extends beyond routine habit.

Ethnographic responses confirm that mealtime carries a long-standing traditional purpose. Historically, Mizo families used mealtime to teach values, correct behaviour, and reinforce family expectations. One respondent captured this clearly,

“In our house, when we sit together for meals, it is not just eating. My parents will ask us what we did wrong or right that day, they remind us how to behave, what is good and what is not good. Sometimes we get scolded, sometimes we get encouraged, but it is always the time where we learn. Even if we don’t like it sometimes, we know it is important.”
(Respondent 261)

This statement illustrates how mealtime becomes a classroom for everyday moral learning. Guidance is delivered not through formal lectures but through ordinary interaction.

Mealtime conversations also reflect family hierarchy, yet this hierarchy is relational rather than authoritarian. Some families described the patriarch leading discussions, while in others, mothers, grandparents, or the eldest child take that role. For example, Respondent 21 said, *“The patriarch makes use of the time to say what he wants,”* whereas Respondent 22 noted the opposite dynamic, stating, *“Usually the matriarch starts conversations, especially when teaching or advising.”*

Despite these variations, the dominant pattern is collective participation rather than one-directional instruction. Many families described talking about the day, joking, planning, and discussing worries. Laughter was repeatedly mentioned, suggesting that while mealtime holds moral weight, it is also a space of emotional ease. One respondent captured this balance vividly,

“We talk about everything..... school, work, things happening in the neighbourhood, sad stories, funny stories, jokes. Sometimes we talk seriously and sometimes we laugh until we cannot breathe. Meal time is the only time everyone sits without rushing, so it becomes the time where we connect.” (Respondent 324)

Mealtime in Mizoram is a social institution, an intentional, repeated practice that carries meaning and purpose. It serves multiple roles such as a communication platform for sharing experiences, an educational arena for transmitting values, manners, and expectations, a governance space where guidance and discipline occur and a bonding ritual where humour and storytelling reinforce belonging. Despite changing lifestyles, urban routines, and technological influences, the Mizo table continues to operate as a space where food and communication intersect. In this way, mealtime sustains not just nutritional needs but the social, moral, and emotional fabric of family life.

Mealtime in Mizo households thus functions as a social institution, structured, intentional, and deeply embedded within family life, rather than simply a moment of eating. It is during meals that families come together, pause daily routines, and participate in a shared social ritual that reinforces belonging and collective identity. The dining table becomes a space for communication, where family members exchange stories from the day, discuss responsibilities, plan ahead, and stay connected despite changing lifestyles and busy schedules. It also serves as an informal educational setting where elders guide younger members through advice, correction, storytelling, and moral instruction, teaching values such as respect, discipline, and proper behaviour. This is often balanced with humour, shared laughter, and casual conversation, preserving emotional warmth and strengthening family bonds. Through repeated practice across generations, mealtime sustains cultural continuity, social order, and emotional connection, making it not only a domestic routine, but a

meaningful institution shaping family relationships and transmitting cultural values within Mizo society.

Serving Order and Hierarchy at the Meal: Traditionally, the act of serving food, particularly serving elders or the male head of the family first functioned as a visible expression of hierarchy, respect, and authority within the domestic unit. Earlier Mizo culture upheld age-based and patriarchal ordering at the table, where the eldest person would take the first bite, symbolising status and familial honour. However, contemporary practices suggest that these rigid hierarchies are loosening, and mealtimes now overwhelmingly reflect a more egalitarian and communal orientation. Across both rural and urban households, most respondents reported that no particular individual is always served first. Instead, the sharing of food tends to be informal, simultaneous, and centred on togetherness rather than rank. A respondent from Kolasib Urban described this shift succinctly,

“No one in particular eats first, we serve rice ourselves.”

Another household echoed the same sentiment,

“We do not necessarily make someone eat first...we just eat together.”

These statements mirror a broader emphasis on equality at the dining table, where mealtimes are treated less as formalised rituals of order and more as shared moments of connection.

Even in rural households where traditional practices are often considered more persistent, most families no longer enforce serving hierarchy. Yet, respondents still articulated the emotional and cultural logic that once justified the practice. One participant explained,

“My grandpa...because he’s the eldest.”

while another said,

“Father...the eldest must eat first.”

These reflections reveal that while the rule may no longer be actively enforced, its moral reasoning remains culturally intelligible. The practice survives not as obligation, but as meaning. For those still practising it, the act is not perceived as domination or privilege, but as a pedagogical and moral gesture.

One respondent explained,

“It is not about power. It teaches the young respect, patience, and how to consider others before themselves.”

Across all regions, exceptions are rarely based on authority but more often on practicality or affection. A striking example came from a respondent who shared,

“The youngest gets first...because she is the youngest.”

This inversion of traditional ordering illustrates how modern Mizo households interpret serving not as a legalistic rule, but as an expressive act shaped by care, convenience, and evolving ideas of family life. The shift away from rigid serving hierarchies in Mizo mealtime practice reflects a larger social transformation including the rise of nuclear family structures, Christian egalitarian values, changing gender roles, and accelerated lifestyles that favour informality. Yet, rather than erasing cultural heritage, this shift represents adaptation. The respect that once governed food order now manifests through prayer leadership, shared discussions, and collective mealtime participation.

The decline of serving hierarchy in Mizo households reflects a shift toward more egalitarian and relaxed mealtime practices. While earlier customs placed elders or the family head first as a sign of respect, most families today emphasise togetherness and shared eating rather than formal order. Importantly, this shift does not indicate a loss of cultural values, respect is now expressed through other practices such as *chhung-inkhawm*, waiting for everyone to sit, or allowing elders to lead conversations. Mealtime therefore remains a meaningful cultural space, but one that has adapted to changing family structures, modern routines, and evolving interpretations of respect within Mizo society.

Dog Meat as a Social and Cultural Food Norm in Mizoram: The consumption of dog meat in Mizoram can be understood not merely as a culinary preference but as a food norm, an unwritten cultural rule that determines what is acceptable to eat and what is considered taboo. Like other societies that consume dog meat, Mizoram demonstrates how edibility is culturally constructed, negotiated, and defended within specific moral and symbolic frameworks. The practice persists partly because dogs are not uniformly categorised as pets. Rather, their meaning shifts depending on social roles, cultural memory, and generational worldview.

Central to the practice is the cultural ability to distinguish between dogs as potential food and dogs as emotional companions. For older generations and many rural respondents, the dog occupies a utilitarian category similar to pigs or chickens, an animal historically valued for alertness, resourcefulness, and at times, its nutritional use. Meanwhile, urban respondents particularly younger adults and women describe a growing emotional attachment to dogs through pet ownership. This shifting sentiment blurs earlier categorical boundaries and creates moral discomfort around eating an animal now positioned symbolically closer to the family sphere.

This dual meaning, livestock versus companion reveals that food norms are not universal but relational, shaped by context and emotional distance. In households where dog meat is still consumed, the distinction between “food dogs” and “pet dogs” subtly manages potential emotional contradiction.

The cultural logic supporting dog meat consumption in Mizoram intersects with beliefs around masculinity, strength, and social bonding. The act of dog meat consumption is often tied to male-only gatherings, sometimes accompanied by alcohol, and framed as a performance of resilience, camaraderie, and cultural continuity. Older men recall dog meat as food shared during hunting expeditions, military service, or community celebrations, moments that shaped group identity.

Some respondents framed dog meat as medicinal, believed to generate body heat, treat fatigue, or strengthen the body during cold seasons. In this sense, dog meat is not just food, it is situated within a cosmology of health, vitality, and seasonal balance.

While the practice may persist privately, there is a strong moral norm prohibiting the preparation or consumption of dog meat near the church or within church events. The church space, material and symbolic is treated as morally elevated and incompatible with controversial or culturally sensitive foods. Even respondents who openly consume dog meat emphasised that it would be “inappropriate,” “disrespectful,” or “unthinkable” to associate it with Christian fellowship.

This spatial moral boundary illustrates how food norms intersect with religion: the act itself may not be universally condemned, but its social visibility and proximity to sacred spaces are carefully regulated. The church, therefore, becomes a key site where modern ethics and cultural identity are negotiated.

The most significant transformation is generational. Older men continue to consume dog meat as part of tradition, identity, and memory. In contrast, younger people

especially urban youth are distancing themselves from the practice, describing it as “shameful,” “old-fashioned,” or “emotionally difficult.” The rise of pet culture, global media influence, and online debates about animal cruelty have reshaped how young Mizos conceptualise dogs not as consumable beings but as loyal companions.

Within households, this shift creates subtle tension. Some families now contain both consumers and abstainers, reflecting a transition period where the norm is neither fully upheld nor fully rejected. Avoidance becomes a form of ethical expression, signalling moral progressiveness or alignment with global animal welfare values.

In contemporary Mizoram, the consumption of dog meat reflects a food norm in flux. While deeply rooted in cultural memory, masculinity, communal belonging, and therapeutic belief, the practice is increasingly challenged by emerging emotional attachments to dogs, Christian moral boundaries, and global ethical frameworks. Rather than disappearing abruptly, dog meat is undergoing symbolic reclassification from normalised tradition to contested cultural practice. This shift reveals how food norms are not static but evolve alongside changing identities, values, and generations within Mizo society.

5.5. Food Preservation Techniques in Household

Food preservation is the process of preventing food from spoiling through the application of scientific and practical methods. These techniques are crucial for preserving food safety, increasing its shelf life and slowing the growth of dangerous microbes. Throughout history, food preservation has been a testament to the innovation of individuals who have devised efficient methods for storing food and ensuring sustenance throughout the year. Understanding these traditional practices not only broadens our appreciation for culinary heritage, but also provides insights into strengthening current and future food systems (Dustin, 2024).

Food preservation has always played an essential role in Mizo domestic life, serving as both a practical necessity and a reflection of traditional knowledge. Long before modern refrigeration became available, Mizo households developed effective techniques to extend the life of perishable foods and to ensure that essential ingredients remained accessible throughout the year. These practices, transmitted from one generation to the next reveal how the community creatively utilized the natural resources within their environment such as fire, ash, leaves and bamboo. Although the methods and tools varied slightly from one place to another, the basic

techniques of fermentation, drying and smoking remained unchanged and were the main preservation practices used in earlier Mizo society.

Traditionally, many Mizo food processing techniques were devised not only to preserve food but also to enhance its flavour. One of the most common preserved items is *sa-um*, or fermented pig fat. Collected mainly from the inner abdominal part of the animal, the fat is cooked, chopped, and stored in a dried bottle gourd container known as *saum bur*. When kept above the fireplace for several days, the fat ferments naturally and develops a rich taste, later used to season staple dishes such as *bai* or *bawl*. Another well-known technique is the preparation of *chingal*, an ash filtrate that serves as a natural alkaline seasoning. Traditionally, water is poured through wood ash held in a bamboo or tin filter to extract liquid rich in mineral salts, which is then stored for cooking (Lalthanpuii et. al, 2015). Although many urban households now replace it with modern cooking soda, *chingal* remains a distinctive marker of Mizo culinary identity.

Other examples include *chhi-um*, fermented sesame, and *bekang-um*, fermented soybean. In the case of *chhi-um*, sesame seeds are roasted, pounded, and stored above the hearth for a few days to ferment, producing a flavourful paste that enriches the taste of vegetables and meats. *Bekang-um*, on the other hand is prepared by boiling soybeans, wrapping them in *hnahkiah* leaves, and allowing them to ferment under warm conditions. The result is a strong-smelling but savoury condiment often used as a side dish or flavoring. Likewise, *anthur-rep* (dried roselle leaves) provides a preserved source of acidity used in cooking meat and vegetables during times when fresh greens are unavailable (Lalthanpuii et. al, 2015).

Fermentation and drying were not limited to seasonings alone. They were also applied to various plant and animal foods for direct consumption. *Tam-um*, or fermented mustard, is one such example. Fresh mustard leaves are pounded, wrapped in *changel* leaves, and kept near the fireplace for several days. The fermented paste and its extract are used as condiments or mixed with chili and salt for daily meals. Similarly, *ai-um*, a preparation of fermented crabs, involves mixing crushed river crabs with sesame and storing the mixture above the hearth until it is ready to be dried and eaten as a side dish. Leafy vegetables like taro (*dawlṭawm* and *dawl-rep*) and cowpea (*behlawi-rep*) are sun-dried or smoked and kept in bundles to be used during dry seasons when fresh greens are scarce. Another noteworthy preserved plant food is *telhawng*, made from

the root of *Amorphophallus nepalensis*. The root is sun-dried, pounded, and cooked with ash filtrate to reduce its natural itchiness, producing a nutritious meal when mixed with *sa-um* and chili (Lalthanpuui et. al, 2015).

Meat preservation through smoking, locally known as *sarep* was, and continues to be one of the most significant methods of ensuring food availability. Various kinds of meat, including pork, deer, and wild boar, are cut into pieces and skewered on bamboo sticks before being placed above a low fire. The smoke and gentle heat gradually dehydrate the meat while infusing it with flavor, allowing it to be stored safely for long periods. This technique not only conserved meat in the absence of refrigeration but also became an important culinary tradition that defined Mizo taste preferences. Similarly, rice-based preparations such as *chhangban*, a sticky rice cake wrapped in leaves and steamed, demonstrate how processing methods were also used to make staple foods portable and durable for longer consumption (Lalthanpuui et. al, 2015).

Taken together, these traditional food preservation techniques highlight the Mizos' deep understanding of their environment and their ability to adapt to periods of scarcity. Since most vegetables, herbs and animal products were seasonal, the community devised practical ways to store them for later use, turning necessity into an art of flavour preservation. Although these practices have evolved over time, with many households today using refrigerators and commercial condiments, the traditional methods of fermenting, drying and smoking still hold cultural value. They represent not only a strategy for survival but also a living expression of Mizo culinary identity, connecting present-day households with the knowledge and practices of their ancestors.

The following section presents findings from the field study on food preservation techniques currently practiced in contemporary Mizo households across the studied regions. It examines a variety of methods both conventional and contemporary such as drying, fermentation, smoking, freezing, pickling and refrigeration. The adoption of these approaches in light of variables like geographic location, resource accessibility and knowledge transfer between generations is the main topic of discussion. Through an analysis of these preservation methods, the section examines how the changing role of preservation in Mizo domestic life is shaped by modernisation, changing market access and cultural continuity. Finally, the analysis

seeks to capture the dynamic relationship between food preservation practices and overall dietary habits in modern Mizo households.

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Table 5.14. Family drying food preservation usage frequency

Drying preservation	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	15	9	13	6	28 (14)	15 (7.5)	43 (10.75)
Often	23	14	21	11	44 (22)	25 (12.5)	69 (17.25)
Occasionally	23	9	16	17	39 (19.5)	26 (13)	65 (16.25)
Rarely	14	20	16	24	30 (15)	44 (22)	74 (18.5)
Never	25	48	34	42	59 (29.5)	90 (45)	149 (37.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The frequency of dry food preservation methods in both urban and rural households in Kolasib and Aizawl is shown in Table 5.14. The results show that old ways of preserving things like drying are slowly being replaced by newer ways of storing things or they are only done sometimes instead of all the time.

In Kolasib Urban, 38% of families regularly preserve food by drying it with 15% of households reporting that they do so always and 23% reporting that they do so frequently. An additional 23% do so sporadically. However, 14% report using drying as a preservation method infrequently, and a significant 25% say they never use it. According to these statistics, a sizable percentage of urban families continue to use

drying but for convenience and efficiency, some may be switching to refrigeration or commercially packaged alternatives

A similar trend is seen in Aizawl Urban. Of those surveyed, 13% say they dry food constantly, 21% frequently, and 16% occasionally. However, 34% of respondents say they have never dried food. Even though this trend shows that some people are still doing it, the gradual decline of this traditional method in urban areas seems to be caused by the rise of more modern ways to store food.

Rural households, on the other hand, use drying techniques even less frequently. Just 9% of respondents in Kolasib Rural say they always dry their food, while 14% say they do so frequently. A significant 48% never preserve food in this manner, 20% do so infrequently, and 9% do so occasionally. In a similar vein, only 6% of people in Aizawl Rural say they always dry their food, while 11% say they do so frequently. Remarkably, 42% never employ this technique. Based on these numbers, it appears that drying is no longer done by most households in rural areas, although it was once common.

A change in food storage practices is indicated by the decline in drying methods, especially in rural areas where it was once the main preservation method. This decrease could be caused by shifting eating habits, less dependence on seasonal preservation, and the growing availability of prepared or chilled foods. Although some families continue to use drying, particularly for particular ingredients or during particular seasons, the general trend indicates that both urban and rural areas are becoming less dependent on this practice.

Respondent 210 highlighted bamboo shoot drying, while Respondent 231 mentioned “*meat, pickled leftovers*” as key items for preservation. These practices continue in pockets, though more as selective seasonal or cultural habits than as everyday necessity.

Interestingly, the qualitative accounts also show how drying is not only about storage but tied to taste and identity. Respondent 201 noted the preservation of “*Roselle, (as a dish & beverage)*”, while Respondent 229 also spoke of dried roselle, reflecting how certain local crops retain cultural value through preservation. Drying, therefore, is not just functional but also symbolic maintaining continuity with older food traditions even as its prevalence declines.

In conclusion, while some Mizo households still use food drying as a preservation method, it is no longer the mainstay. The data illustrates a larger change in eating habits, as more practical or contemporary methods of preservation are progressively displacing more conventional ones. In rural areas, where drying used to be a common food practice, this shift is especially noticeable. The findings reveal a dual narrative. On one hand, urban and rural families alike are shifting toward refrigeration and market-based foods, reducing the dependence on drying. On the other, drying persists for certain ingredients (bamboo shoots, roselle, meat) and retains symbolic and cultural weight. The decline in frequency thus does not imply disappearance but rather a repositioning of food drying from necessity to a culturally significant yet situational practice.

Table 5.15. Family fermentation usage frequency

Fermentation usage	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	2	5	26	1	28 (14)	6 (3)	34 (8.5)
Often	21	9	24	10	45 (22.5)	19 (9.5)	64 (16)
Occasionally	15	10	14	32	29 (14.5)	42 (21)	71 (17.75)
Rarely	19	38	10	38	29 (14.5)	76 (38)	105 (26.25)
Never	43	38	26	19	69 (32.5)	57 (28.5)	126 (31.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 5.15 shows significant regional variations in the use of fermentation as a household food preservation method in Kolasib Urban, Aizawl Urban, Kolasib Rural, and Aizawl Rural. Some places have more fermentation than others, which is a traditional and long-lasting method that is affected by cultural preferences, the sharing of knowledge, and ease of access.

Fermentation is most frequently used in Aizawl Urban, where 26% of households say they always ferment food and another 24% say they do so frequently. Together, these represent 50% of households that regularly practice fermentation, indicating that it is a nutritionally driven and culturally embedded practice in Aizawl Urban, perhaps driven by modern reinterpretations of traditional foodways and growing health consciousness.

Kolasib Urban, on the other hand, shows less frequent and irregular use. 21% of households ferment food frequently, while only 2% do so consistently. 43% of respondents claim they never ferment at all. This implies that fermentation is not a technique that is commonly used or preferred in Kolasib Urban, perhaps as a result of a lack of time, changing tastes, or a decrease in the practice's generational transmission. There is a mixed pattern in Kolasib Rural. 10% say they use it occasionally, 9% say they use it frequently, and 5% say they always ferment. The highest percentages, however, are under the rarely (38%) and never (38%), suggesting that fermentation is not a common method and may be saved for particular occasions or substances.

Remarkably, Aizawl Rural exhibits a distinct dynamic. A comparatively high 32% of respondents say they use fermentation occasionally, and another 38% do so rarely, despite the fact that only 1% ferment always and 10% frequently. Just 19% of people claim they never ferment. This implies that depending on elements like ingredient availability or purpose (such as preserving excess food during harvest seasons), fermentation may be done seasonally or contextually in rural Aizawl.

According to the data, fermentation is more common in urban areas, especially Aizawl Urban, which may be a result of both a combination of ingrained traditional knowledge and growing interest in gut health and sustainable eating. In rural areas, on the other hand, fermentation is used less regularly and is more often seen as an extra or one-time thing rather than something that is done every day. This contrast is a reflection of the dynamic evolution of food preservation behaviours in Mizoram, which is characterised by the intersection of modern reinterpretation and heritage within a variety of locations and cultural settings.

The use of fermentation as a household preservation method in Mizoram shows striking regional differences, with urban and rural households displaying contrasting levels of engagement. In Aizawl Urban, fermentation emerges as the strongest, where 26% of households report using it consistently and another 24% frequently. Together, this makes half of all households in the city regularly fermenting foods, underscoring its persistence as both a traditional technique and one that is increasingly aligned with modern health-conscious practices. Respondents highlighted classic examples: “*Chilli*” (Respondent 205) and “*Chilli, fermented pork fat*” (Respondent 208), while others echoed its continuing significance by adding, “*Fermented pork fat*”

(Respondent 210) and “*Chilli, fermented pork fat*” (Respondent 223). These testimonies reveal how fermentation is not merely a preservation technique but also a taste-making process deeply tied to household culinary identity.

In contrast, Kolasib Urban reflects a much weaker reliance on fermentation. Only 2% of respondents reported practicing it every time, and while 21% use it often, a significant 43% stated that they never ferment at all. This suggests a decline in generational knowledge transmission and a stronger dependence on refrigeration or modern storage methods. The relative absence of fermentation here points to a shift in preference, where convenience and quicker methods of preservation are prioritized over traditional practices.

Kolasib Rural displays a mixed but low-intensity pattern. Although 5% of households ferment consistently and 9% do so often, the majority fall under *rarely* (38%) and *never* (38%). Fermentation here seems more occasional, tied to specific ingredients or circumstances rather than being part of a daily routine. This may reflect limited surplus production or a stronger reliance on immediate consumption and drying techniques rather than longer-term preservation.

Aizawl Rural, meanwhile, reveals a unique dynamic. Only 1% ferment every time and 10% often, but a remarkable 32% report doing it occasionally and 38% rarely. The comparatively low “never” responses (19%) suggest that while fermentation is not embedded as a routine practice, it remains contextually relevant. Respondents noted fermenting chilli and pork fat in particular seasons, showing that rural households may use fermentation situationally, particularly during harvest or when surplus ingredients are available. This sporadic yet widespread engagement suggests fermentation retains cultural familiarity, even if it is not as systematized as in urban centres.

Taken together, the findings show that fermentation thrives most strongly in Aizawl Urban, where it balances traditional knowledge with new cultural trends. In Kolasib, however, the practice appears to be diminishing, particularly in urban households where nearly half never ferment food. In Aizawl Rural, the practice continues in more occasional, need-based ways, indicating its persistence in the cultural repertoire but without everyday centrality. Importantly, the voices of respondents remind us that fermentation is not abstract data but a living practice tied to familiar foods like chilli and pork fat. These foods continue to anchor fermentation within Mizo households,

ensuring that even as preservation methods evolve, certain tastes and textures remain essential to the cultural foodscape.

Table 5.16. Family smoking usage frequency

Smoking usage	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	4	6	9	10	13 (6.5)	16 (8)	29 (7.25)
Often	26	13	11	37	37 (18.5)	50 (25)	87 (21.75)
Occasionally	20	10	22	30	42 (21)	40 (20)	82 (20.5)
Rarely	12	42	24	23	36 (18)	65 (32.5)	101 (25.25)
Never	38	29	34	0	72 (36)	29 (14.5)	101 (25.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall pattern of smoking usage across all households shows that only a small share (7.25%) report smoking food every time, while a larger group (21.75%) do so often, and another 20.5% occasionally, showing that smoking remains present but not dominant. The most common responses were “rarely” and “never,” each accounting for 25.25%, indicating a gradual decline in frequent usage. When comparing urban and rural areas, total urban households show 6.5% reporting smoking every time and 18.5% often, while rural households show slightly higher usage, with 8% smoking every time and 25% often. Rare use is more common in rural areas (32.5%) than in urban (18%), suggesting that rural households rely on smoking occasionally or as-needed rather than routinely. Against this, urban households record the highest percentage of those who never smoke food (36%), showing greater dependence on modern storage methods. When comparing the two urban locations, Aizawl Urban shows higher frequent use (9% every time and 11% often) than Kolasib Urban (4% and 26%), suggesting variation in urban lifestyle and household habits. Among rural regions, Aizawl Rural shows stronger usage (10% every time and 37% often) compared to Kolasib Rural (6% and 13%), indicating that smoking remains more culturally embedded and practically relevant in Aizawl’s rural households than Kolasib’s. Overall, the data suggest that while smoking as a preservation technique persists, it is gradually shifting from a regular necessity to an occasional or selective practice, shaped by geographic location, urbanisation, and changing household needs.

Aizawl Rural has the highest and most frequent use of smoking as a food preservation technique, with 10% of households smoking food regularly, 37% frequently, and 30% occasionally. As a result, 77% of households smoke food to some extent, indicating a high dependence on this age-old custom. The prevalence is likely to be influenced by the necessity to preserve food for extended periods to account for limited refrigeration and seasonal availability, as well as a continued adherence to traditional foodways.

Although it is less common, smoking is still present in Kolasib Rural. 10% of households smoke food occasionally, 13% frequently, and only 6% always. It's interesting to note that 29% never smoke food and 42% say they do so infrequently. This suggests that although the technique is still used and well-known, it might not be as essential to everyday food preparation as it is in Aizawl Rural. The practice seems to be declining in cities. 4% of households in Kolasib Urban smoke food every time, 26% frequently, and 20% occasionally, making up 50% of households that smoke food to some degree. But 38% never employ this technique. This means that smoking is still common in cities, but it's probably not as common as it used to be because of refrigeration and other cooking methods.

The distribution is more evenly distributed in Aizawl Urban, where 9% of households smoke food constantly, 11% frequently, 22% occasionally, and 24% infrequently. 34% of respondents, however, claim they never smoke food. There is a significant portion of the population that has moved away from the practice, despite the fact that the practice is still practiced by a portion of the population.

The data reveals that the use of smoking as a preservation method differs significantly between urban and rural households in Mizoram. Overall, smoking remains more central in rural contexts, particularly in Aizawl Rural, while urban households show declining reliance due to modern alternatives like refrigeration. In Aizawl Rural, 77% of households reported smoking food at varying frequencies (10% every time, 37% often, and 30% occasionally). This indicates that smoking continues to be an essential strategy in food management, shaped by both necessity and cultural continuity. Respondents highlighted the centrality of smoked meat and vegetables in their daily diet: one household (Schedule 223) stated plainly,

“Smoked meat is always part of our meals; it lasts longer and tastes better.”

Similarly, another rural respondent (Schedule 213) mentioned that

“Alocasia fornicata and roselle are often smoked to prevent them from rotting quickly.”

These voices illustrate how smoking is embedded not just as a preservation technique but also as a way of imparting distinctive flavours that are deeply tied to rural identity and food heritage.

In Kolasib Rural, the practice is present but less pervasive. While 29% of households never smoke food, 13% do so often and 10% occasionally. The responses suggest that smoking is employed more situationally. A rural household (Schedule 208) shared,

“We smoke Alocasia fornicata when it is in season; otherwise, we depend on fresh cooking.”

This indicates that smoking here is seasonal and linked to availability rather than a daily requirement.

Urban households, by contrast, show a marked decline in smoking practices. In Kolasib Urban, although 50% reported using smoking at some frequency (4% every time, 26% often, 20% occasionally), a notable 38% stated that they never smoke food. A respondent (Schedule 15) explained,

“We only prepare pork and smoked chicken on special occasions, not every day.”

This reflects how urban families increasingly treat smoking as an occasional practice tied to taste preference or festive cooking rather than necessity.

Similarly, in Aizawl Urban, the practice is more evenly spread. While 9% of households smoke food every time and 22% occasionally, 34% reported never using this method. This suggests a transition as while some urban households continue to value the traditional flavour imparted by smoking, others rely more heavily on refrigeration and market availability.

Taken together, these findings illustrate a clear urban-rural divide. In rural Mizoram, especially Aizawl, smoking remains a culturally significant and practical method of preserving food, reinforced by infrastructure limitations and the need for long-term storage. In contrast, urban areas, though still engaging in smoking for taste and tradition are gradually moving towards modern preservation practices. The respondent voices, from

“Smoked meat is always part of our meals” (Respondent 223)

to

“We only prepare pork and smoked chicken on special occasions” (Respondent 15),

highlight how this traditional method persists, adapts, and transforms in line with broader social and infrastructural changes.

Overall, the data shows a significant gap between rural and urban areas. Due to storage constraints, cultural customs, and the convenience of preserving food without refrigeration, rural households especially those in Aizawl continue to smoke food on a regular basis. However, there are indications that urban households, particularly those in Kolasib and Aizawl, are moving towards more contemporary cooking and preservation techniques. The shifting patterns point to a slow shift from traditional smoking methods to more modern ones that fit with the ease and convenience of city life.

Table 5.17. Family refrigeration usage frequency

Refrigeration usage	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	49	45	74	15	123 (61.5)	60 (30)	183 (45.75)
Often	30	5	17	12	47 (23.5)	17 (8.5)	64 (16)
Occasionally	10	2	3	34	13 (6.5)	36 (18)	49 (12.25)
Rarely	2	9	2	15	4 (2)	24 (12)	28 (7)
Never	9	39	4	24	13 (6.5)	63 (31.5)	76 (19)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Across all households, refrigeration shows a high level of dependence, with 45.75% reporting usage every time and 16% often, making regular use the dominant pattern. Only 19% of households report never using a refrigerator, showing that refrigeration has become a common storage method. When comparing urban and rural households, usage is clearly higher in urban settings, 61.5% of total urban households use refrigeration every time, compared to only 30% in rural areas. Similarly, frequent use (“often”) is much higher in urban households (23.5%) than in rural ones (8.5%), indicating that refrigeration is strongly linked to urban living and accessibility. The most striking contrast is visible in the “never” category, only 6.5% of urban households never use refrigeration, whereas a much larger share of rural households

(31.5%) report having no usage at all. When comparing the two urban centres, Aizawl Urban stands out with the highest everyday usage (74%), while Kolasib Urban shows a lower yet still significant 49%, suggesting differences in access, household size, or lifestyle between the two cities. Among rural areas, Kolasib Rural records the highest “never” response at 39%, whereas Aizawl Rural shows more mixed behaviour, with a notable 34% using refrigeration occasionally and 24% never using it. These patterns reveal that refrigeration is a strongly urban practice, and while it is gradually spreading into rural regions, reliance remains varied with clear economic, infrastructural, and lifestyle gaps between locations.

The increasing use of refrigeration among Mizo households reflects a major shift from traditional to modern food preservation methods, illustrating how domestic practices adapt to infrastructural and lifestyle changes. As shown, refrigeration use varies notably across the four study regions, with clear urban-rural differences. In Aizawl Urban, 74% of households reported using refrigeration every time and another 17% used it often, accounting for 91% of regular users. Kolasib Urban follows a similar pattern with 49% using it every time and 30% often, indicating that nearly four out of five households rely on refrigeration as part of daily life. These figures reflect both access to electricity and the gradual normalization of appliances as essential components of urban kitchens. Refrigeration has become an indispensable element of household food management, particularly among working families who shop weekly and cook in larger portions.

Respondent 304 from Aizawl Urban emphasized this dependency, remarking,

“To preserve vegetables for a week. Since greens are most affordable on Saturdays, we want them to last throughout the week.”

Her words reveal how refrigeration is woven into the pattern of urban consumption, linking weekend markets to weekday meal planning.

Similarly, Respondent 319 from Aizawl Urban shared,

“We usually keep meat or vegetables in the fridge, otherwise they spoil too fast. It helps a lot when we are busy or when the weather is too warm.”

These accounts underline that refrigeration in urban Mizoram is not a luxury but a necessity that supports both household economy and dietary stability. For many

households, especially in urban areas, refrigeration is not only used for storing fresh produce or meat but also for keeping leftover food intended for the next day. This everyday act of “*putting food in the fridge*” has become a major form of preservation. Respondent 334 from Aizawl Urban reflected on this habit, saying,

“Sometimes we cook too much, especially when relatives come. We don’t throw it away; we keep it for the next day. It saves time and prevents waste.”

Her statement captures the pragmatic dimension of modern preservation i.e. linking refrigeration with the Mizo ethic of thrift and non-wastage.

In Kolasib Urban, several households mirrored this sentiment. Respondent 15 explained that apart from storing vegetables and meat, refrigeration is also used to keep “*fermented chilli*” and other local condiments, adding that “*it keeps the flavour strong and lasts much longer.*” This shows how traditional foods are now stored using modern methods, creating a mix of old and new practices that exist together. Respondent 78 from Kolasib Urban further reflected,

“When we have guests or big meals, we just put the remaining food in the fridge and use it the next day. It’s safer and convenient.”

The increasing reliance on refrigeration in these regions is closely tied to time management, convenience and the need to prevent food wastage. Respondent 98 from Kolasib Urban offered a similar account,

“We freeze curry or boiled meat for later use, especially when we buy meat in bulk. It’s helpful because we don’t have to cook every single day.”

In these homes, refrigeration and everyday act of “*putting food in the fridge*” are practical responses to time constraints and changing household pattern. The practice reflects how modern appliances are used to sustain a balance between convenience and resourcefulness.

In contrast, rural areas show a more mixed picture. In Kolasib Rural, 45% of households reported using refrigeration every time, while 39% said they never used it at all, revealing a deep divide even within the same district. In Aizawl Rural, the gap is even wider, only 15% reported using refrigeration every time and 12% often, whereas 24% said they never used it, and 34% occasionally. These variations highlight

how infrastructural limitations, economic capacity and cultural habits influence the degree to which refrigeration is adopted. Many rural respondents described relying on traditional ways of handling food rather than cold storage. Respondent 183 from Kolasib Rural stated plainly, *“We warm it up,”* when asked how leftover food was managed, suggesting a preference for reheating rather than refrigeration. Respondent 182 from the same locality explained further, *“We use it when we can’t be bothered to warm leftovers,”* implying that refrigeration is more of a secondary option than a daily routine. Respondent 186 from Aizawl Rural commented, *“We prefer to eat fresh; food kept overnight doesn’t taste good.”* Another, Respondent 174, mentioned, *“There’s no need to freeze because we cook just enough.”* These voices echo cultural preferences for immediacy and freshness, showing that for many rural households, food preservation remains rooted in daily preparation and consumption rather than storage.

The absence of refrigeration was also common in some rural homes. As Respondent 51 admitted, *“We do not have a refrigerator,”* underscoring the economic and infrastructural barriers that prevent uniform adoption. However, even among those who own refrigerators, patterns of usage are shaped by habit and necessity. Respondent 367 from Aizawl Rural noted,

“We have one, but we mostly keep it off because of the electricity problem. When the current is gone, everything inside goes bad.”

These statements illustrate that refrigeration use in rural Mizoram is inconsistent and often constrained by external factors such as electricity and affordability.

In essence, refrigeration reflects modern living while preserving the enduring Mizo values of care, sharing, and mindful use of food. In urban centres like Aizawl and Kolasib, refrigerators are now used almost every day to store vegetables, meat and leftover food, while in rural areas their use is still limited and uneven. The common habit of keeping leftovers in the fridge shows how Mizos have adjusted to new preservation methods without giving up their traditional habits. This blend of modern technology and cultural practice reflects the adaptability of Mizo households, where modernity does not replace tradition but coexists with it in practical ways.

Overall, refrigeration as a preservation method highlights how Mizo families combine modern tools with inherited values. Although it differs from older techniques such as

drying, fermenting and smoking, it still supports long-held beliefs in thrift, care, and avoiding waste. Urban households in particular have adapted refrigeration and freezing to their daily routines, using them to store, reuse, and manage food more efficiently, while rural families continue to favour fresh preparation that keeps traditional foodways alive. Together, these patterns show that change in food preservation is not about replacing the old with the new, but about finding balance between access, need, and cultural knowledge. The next section explores freezing preservation methods.

Table 5.18. Family freezing usage frequency

Freezing usage	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	13	12	19	3	32 (16)	15 (7.5)	47 (11.75)
Often	28	10	24	7	52 (26)	17 (8.5)	69 (17.25)
Occasionally	15	6	16	11	31 (15.5)	17 (8.5)	48 (12)
Rarely	18	12	15	6	33 (16.5)	18 (9)	51 (12.75)
Never	26	60	26	73	52 (26)	133 (66.5)	185 (46.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall distribution shows that freezing is not a widely adopted storage method across households, with nearly half of all respondents (46.25%) reporting they never use it. Only 11.75% use freezing every time and 17.25% often, indicating that regular use is limited to a smaller portion of households. When comparing total urban and rural figures, the contrast is clear: urban households demonstrate far higher reliance on freezing, with 16% using it every time and 26% often, while rural freezing is minimal, with only 7.5% using it every time and 8.5% often. The strongest difference appears in the “never” category, only 26% of urban households report never using freezing compared to a striking 66.5% of rural households, showing that freezing is strongly associated with modern appliances, access to electricity, and urban food habits.

Comparing the two urban centres, Aizawl Urban has the highest frequent use (19% every time and 24% often), reflecting greater adoption of freezing as part of everyday storage, while Kolasib Urban shows more moderate usage with 13% every time and 28% often, still significantly higher than any rural area. The pattern among rural regions shows an even sharper divide: Aizawl Rural has the highest “never” response of all regions (73%), while Kolasib Rural, although also low in usage, shows slightly more engagement with freezing but still records 60% never using it. These contrasts suggest that freezing remains a relatively new or less essential practice in rural settings, while in urban areas particularly Aizawl, it is becoming part of modern household food management.

13% of households in Kolasib Urban say they freeze food every time, 28% say they do so frequently, and 15% say they do so occasionally. 26% never use freezing, while another 18% use it infrequently. This indicates a moderate reliance on refrigeration as a preservation technique, with 74% of households reportedly using freezing to some degree. Thus, while not yet common, freezing is a somewhat integrated practice in urban food management.

Aizawl Urban exhibits a marginally greater rate of adoption. 24% of households freeze food frequently, 16% occasionally, and 19% of households freeze food always. Just 15% say they freeze food infrequently, and 26% say they never do so. Overall, 59% of Aizawl Urban households freeze food on a regular basis (every time or frequently). This practice is probably aided by better storage space, more reliable access to appliances, and higher lifestyle demands in a busier, larger urban environment.

In rural areas, the pattern is significantly different. Just 12% of households in Kolasib Rural freeze food every time, 10% frequently, 6% occasionally, and 12% rarely. Sixty percent of those surveyed said they never freeze food. This implies that although freezing is understood and sometimes used, it has not become a common practice probably because refrigerators are not easily accessible, electricity is erratic, or people prefer fresh or conventional preservation techniques.

The area with the least amount of freezing practice engagement is Aizawl Rural. 11% of households use freezing occasionally, 7% frequently, and only 3% always. A startling 73% of respondents claim they never freeze food, compared to a mere 6% who do so occasionally. This suggests that freezing is not a common practice in

Aizawl Rural and could be caused by a lack of infrastructure, the cost of appliances, or a daily preference for fresh food preparation.

In conclusion, urban households especially those in Aizawl are significantly more likely to use freezing as a food preservation technique due to the infrastructure and lifestyle demands that facilitate its use. Rural households, particularly those in Aizawl Rural, on the other hand, still adhere to more conventional or immediate consumption patterns. This gap between urban and rural areas demonstrates how access, financial circumstances, and ingrained cultural preferences for food preparation and preservation continue to have a significant influence on storage methods.

Respondent 201, for instance, simply noted, “*Meat*,” underscoring how freezing is associated with preserving protein-rich items that might otherwise spoil quickly. Similarly, Respondent 204 explained, “*Only milk and red meat*,” reflecting selective usage of freezing for items that are both perishable and high-value. These accounts suggest that urban households employ freezing as a pragmatic strategy for extending the shelf life of particular foods, balancing modern storage practices with selective traditional consumption.

Aizawl Urban demonstrates a slightly stronger integration of freezing practices and is strongly associated with meat and vegetables. Respondent 208 remarked, “*Meat*,” aligning with the broader tendency in urban spaces to use freezing to stabilize protein consumption in a busy lifestyle. Meanwhile, Respondent 222 expanded this range, saying, “*Bamboo shoots, Meat*,” which reveals how traditional food items like bamboo shoots are now incorporated into modern freezing practices. The blending of new and old suggests an adaptive approach, where traditional foods are re-contextualized within urban household technologies.

In sharp contrast, Kolasib Rural households showed far lower adoption. Respondent 223 shared, “*Bamboo shoots*,” while another, Respondent 228, noted, “*Alocasia fornicata*.” These responses point to selective freezing of traditional vegetables, often seasonal and prone to spoilage, though the overall practice remains limited. The limited use here may reflect less reliable electricity, cost barriers to owning refrigerators, or a preference for daily preparation using fresh produce gathered from fields and homesteads.

The lowest adoption of freezing was found in Aizawl Rural, where Respondent 229 explained that they freeze “*Stink Bean, Bamboo shoots*,” while Respondent 356

added, “*Alocasia fornicata*, *Fresh Chilli*.” These examples reveal that even when freezing is practiced, it is directed toward distinctly local produce with strong seasonal cycles and pungent flavors. The overall rarity of freezing suggests that Aizawl Rural households prioritize freshness, daily cooking, and culturally embedded preservation methods such as smoking, fermenting, or sun-drying over mechanical storage.

Taken together, the findings underscore that freezing has begun to enter urban households as a practical supplement to food management, especially for meat and select vegetables, but remains limited in rural areas. The qualitative voices from respondents give texture to the numbers: meat, milk, bamboo shoots, alocasia, and even fresh chili emerge as the foods most likely to be frozen. This shows how Mizo households, when given access to refrigeration, selectively adapt it to preserve both traditional and modern foods.

In conclusion, the divergence between urban and rural practices highlights the intersection of material infrastructure and cultural habit. Urban settings, with their lifestyle pressures and easier access to appliances, normalize freezing as a routine practice. Rural households, however, continue to value immediacy, freshness, and indigenous preservation knowledge. Thus, freezing as a method of food preservation is not just about access to technology but about cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity.

Table 5.19. Family pickling usage frequency

Pickling usage	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	1	1	6	3	7 (3.5)	4 (2)	13 (3.25)
Often	16	7	20	8	36 (18)	15 (7.5)	51 (12.75)
Occasionally	16	6	17	11	33 (16.5)	17 (8.5)	50 (12.5)
Rarely	22	22	26	9	48 (24)	31 (15.5)	79 (19.75)
Never	45	64	31	69	76 (38)	133 (66.5)	209 (52.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall pattern in the table shows that pickling is not a dominant preservation method among the households surveyed, with more than half of all respondents (52.25%) reporting they never use it. Only 3.25% use pickling every time and 12.75% often, indicating that frequent pickling is uncommon and largely situational. When

comparing urban and rural households, usage is noticeably higher in urban areas. Total urban households record 3.5% using pickling every time and 18% often, whereas rural households show lower figures at 2% every time and 7.5% often. The contrast becomes especially clear in the “never” category as 38% of urban households report never using pickling compared to 66.5% in rural areas, showing that pickling practices are far more limited or less valued in rural contexts.

Comparing the two urban locations, Aizawl Urban stands out with the highest usage as 6% using it every time and 20% often suggesting that urban Aizawl households are more likely to pickle foods either for convenience, taste, or storage. Kolasib Urban shows far less frequent use, with only 1% every time and 16% often, indicating variation even within urban lifestyles. Among rural locations, Aizawl Rural has the lowest consistent usage (with 69% never using it), while Kolasib Rural, although still low, shows slightly more engagement with 64% reporting “never” and 7% reporting “often.”

Pickling practices have clearly decreased in all regions, particularly in rural areas, according to the data. The practice is more prevalent in urban households, especially in Aizawl, although even there, a sizable percentage of households have abandoned it. The availability of commercially prepared pickles, changing consumer preferences, changes in lifestyle, or the diminished significance of pickled foods in modern Mizo cuisine could all be contributing factors to this trend. One respondent explained, “*We mostly pickle chilli and bitter gourd*” (Respondent 201), while another noted, “*Sometimes we make mango pickle, but only during the season*” (Respondent 205). Such responses highlight that pickling is no longer a routine practice but often tied to specific ingredients or seasonal availability.

Aizawl Urban households demonstrate relatively higher participation. The greater urban engagement may be linked to both preference and accessibility, as one household shared,

“We prepare chilli pickle at home because it tastes better than store-bought ones” (Respondent 204).

Another described,

“We make Chilli pickle and sometimes use bitter berries”
(Respondent 236),

suggesting that while the practice has reduced overall, some households sustain it for cultural or taste preferences. A small fraction continues to preserve bamboo shoots or local vegetables, as one respondent shared,

*“We sometimes make bamboo shoots pickle or Alocasia
forficata, but not regularly”* (Respondent 324).

These scattered practices suggest that rural households, which historically depended more on such methods, now largely rely on fresh foods or alternative preservation techniques.

Together, these trends indicate that pickling remains a minor preservation method and is practiced more in urban than rural areas, especially in Aizawl Urban. The clear dominance of the “never” category across all regions suggests that pickling is no longer viewed as essential and may be gradually losing relevance with increasing access to refrigeration, packaged condiments, and other modern food storage options. Where it survives, it is tied to specific ingredients like chilli, bitter gourd, mango, or bamboo shoots, often prepared seasonally or as a taste preference rather than a necessity. The rise of commercially available pickles and changing household routines, especially in urban settings, has likely contributed to this decline. Yet, the continued preparation of chilli or bamboo shoot pickles indicates that the practice, while diminished, still holds cultural and culinary value.

Overview

This section shows how Mizo households move between older, labour-intensive methods of preservation and newer, appliance-based ones, depending on location, resources, and habit. Traditionally, families relied on techniques such as drying, smoking and fermenting to extend the life of meat, vegetables and condiments. Practices like *sa-um*, *bekang-um*, *chhi-um*, dried roselle and leafy greens, smoked meat (*sarep*), fermented crab and mustard, and sun-dried roots such as *telhawng* illustrate a rich repertoire of indigenous preservation knowledge rooted in the hearth, bamboo devices, leaves and ash filtrate. These techniques were not only about survival. They shaped taste, texture and identity, giving Mizo food its distinctive smoky, sour, and fermented profiles.

The survey data, however, indicate that many of these traditional methods are now used less frequently or only for specific items. Drying remains familiar but has declined to an occasional or seasonal practice, with sizeable proportions of households

especially in rural Kolasib and Aizawl reporting that they rarely or never dry food. Fermentation shows a more differentiated pattern, it is strongly maintained and even re-energised in Aizawl Urban, where half of households report regular use, but is weaker in Kolasib (both urban and rural), and more situational in Aizawl Rural. Smoking continues to be central in Aizawl Rural, where the vast majority of households' smoke meat and vegetables at varying frequencies, while in urban areas it has shifted towards occasional or taste-driven use rather than an everyday necessity. By contrast, modern techniques particularly refrigeration, and to a lesser extent freezing have become central to food management in urban households. Refrigeration is now the dominant method in Aizawl and Kolasib Urban, where most households use it daily for vegetables, meat, leftovers and even traditional items such as fermented chilli. Freezing is less universal but clearly associated with urban life, used to store meat, milk, bamboo shoots and other perishable or high-value foods. Rural households show a mixed picture: some have adopted refrigerators and freezers, but a substantial share either lack these appliances or use them irregularly because of cost, electricity issues, or a preference for fresh cooking. Pickling, once an important way to preserve and flavour vegetables, emerges as a minor and declining practice across all regions, surviving mostly in urban Aizawl and largely tied to specific items such as chilli, bitter gourd or bamboo shoots, often prepared seasonally or for taste rather than necessity. Taken together, the findings portray a food system in transition where preservation practices sit at the intersection of tradition, infrastructure, and changing lifestyles. Older methods such as drying, fermenting and smoking have not disappeared, but they have been repositioned. From daily, necessity-based strategies to more selective, ingredient-specific and sometimes identity-laden practices. They are increasingly used to maintain cherished flavours (smoked meat, fermented pork fat, dried roselle) or to handle seasonal surpluses, rather than to secure year-round food supply. At the same time, refrigeration and freezing have become the backbone of urban household food management, allowing families to align weekly shopping, wage labour, and time-saving routines with the Mizo ethic of thrift and non-wastage by storing leftovers and bulk purchases.

The urban-rural and Kolasib-Aizawl contrasts show that access to preservation technologies alone does not fully determine practice; cultural preference, taste, and generational attitudes also matter. Aizawl Urban, for instance, illustrates how

traditional fermentation can coexist with heavy reliance on refrigeration, while Aizawl Rural demonstrates the continued centrality of smoking despite limited appliance use. Rural households that still value fresh, daily cooking may be slower to integrate mechanical preservation, even when refrigerators are present. Overall, food preservation in contemporary Mizo households reflects not a simple replacement of “old” by “new,” but a layered pattern in which indigenous techniques and modern appliances are combined, reworked, or selectively abandoned. This evolving mixture reveals how Mizos negotiate convenience, economy, health, and cultural memory through everyday decisions about how food is stored, transformed, and made to last.

5.6. Health-Conscious Eating and Food Choice in Mizo Households

Food and health are deeply intertwined, and in contemporary Mizoram this relationship is becoming increasingly visible in everyday household food decisions. Rather than being shaped solely by tradition or habit, food practices today are influenced by emerging health awareness, economic considerations, access to information, and changing lifestyles. As scholars such as Beardsworth & Keil (1997) note, attitudes toward healthy eating evolve alongside shifts in knowledge, media influence, and social expectations. This pattern is evident among Mizo households, where health consciousness and food choice coexist as negotiation rather than replacement balancing long-standing food traditions with new ideas about nutrition, moderation, and wellbeing.

This section brings together two interconnected themes i.e. health-conscious food practices and food choice decision-making. The first part examines how households adopt healthier eating habits intentionally or in response to illness, including reduced intake of oil, processed food, sugary products, and heavy meats. Here, behaviours range from proactive lifestyle-based decisions to reactive changes prompted by medical advice or health conditions. The analysis explores how households interpret health, where some view it as a modern responsibility tied to knowledge and discipline, while others consider their existing diets inherently “healthy” because they rely on fresh, minimally processed foods.

The second part focuses on how Mizo households make choices about what they consume, shaped not only by health concerns but also by availability, cost, taste, cultural

familiarity, and trust in local producers. The findings reveal a distinct pattern: while some respondents actively prioritise nutrition and locally sourced organic food, many others base their decisions on affordability, convenience, and what is seasonally accessible. Food budgeting also emerges as an important consideration, reflecting how economic realities influence the ability to adopt recommended dietary practices. Across regions, preference for local food demonstrates the value placed on perceived freshness, safety from chemicals, and social trust in producers.

Together, these two areas, health practice and food choice illustrate how Mizo food behaviour reflects both continuity and transition. Traditional values of simplicity, freshness, and moderation remain deeply embedded, while new dietary logics grounded in biomedical knowledge, media messaging, and lifestyle aspirations are increasingly shaping attitudes. The analysis highlights how households navigate these influences in different ways: some embrace structured health practices, some adapt selectively, and others maintain long-standing routines without perceiving a need for change.

Interpretation of Health-Conscious Eating Patterns: Patterns emerging from the field show that health-conscious eating in Mizoram is not yet a stable or widespread lifestyle, but rather an uneven and evolving practice influenced by geography, exposure to information, and lived health experience. Many respondents described themselves as already eating “healthy,” yet what counts as *healthy* varies significantly across regions. In rural areas particularly in Kolasib and Aizawl villages, health is strongly associated with freshness and naturalness rather than dietary rules or medical guidance. As one respondent put it simply,

“We have always eaten vegetables from our field.so our food is already health.”

Here, traditional dietary logic substitutes for nutritional literacy, and cultural familiarity shapes food judgement more than scientific discourse.

Urban households especially in Aizawl express health consciousness in a more intentional and medicalised form. Respondents described including more vegetables, reducing oil, or limiting sugary foods because they had been advised to do so or because they believed it improved digestion, strength, or energy. As one woman explained,

“We avoid oily and sweet things now; the doctor warned us about pressure and sugar.”

These reflections indicate a shift from instinctive eating to a more regulated approach where food is understood as part of illness management and prevention.

However, even within health-aware households, change is not always continuous. In Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Urban, many respondents noted that dietary adjustments occur only when someone in the household falls ill. One participant captured this conditional approach clearly,

“We reduce meat and spices when someone is unwell, but otherwise, we eat normally.”

This suggests that health consciousness is reactive rather than preventive, activated only when the body signals distress.

Across regions, increasing awareness of processed foods, sugary drinks, and packaged snacks was evident, yet responses varied. Urban participants described actively avoiding these foods,

“We stopped buying packet snacks,”

one mother noted while several rural respondents framed the absence of processed items not as health choice but circumstance,

“We don’t buy packet food, so we don’t eat it.”

Affordability, access, and habit, rather than deliberate health intention, influence their food environment.

Urban respondents also mentioned portion control and balancing food groups. Practices such as *“not too much rice,” “less meat, more greens,”* and *“smaller meals”* appeared in cities, whereas these concepts were almost absent in rural areas, where eating “enough” rather than eating “correctly” remains the norm.

Across households, the strongest trigger for dietary change is illness, not awareness, education, or health messaging. Many respondents described that they only began modifying food *“after someone had BP,”* or when *“diabetes entered the house.”* Food shifts, therefore, function as a form of care rather than a routine preventive choice. A respondent from Aizawl Urban summarised this shift effectively,

“We didn’t think about these things before...but now we have to be careful because someone has pressure.”

In rural settings particularly Kolasib, many believed their diet required no change, even when health conditions were present. Statements such as,

“Our food is simple, so it is already healthy,”

reflect the perception that traditional diets are inherently balanced and safe.

Even those who express concern do not always act on it. One Kolasib resident admitted,

“We know too much oil is bad, but we still cook the same way...this is how we grew up.”

This gap between concern and practice reflects an early stage of health awareness where knowledge exists but does not consistently translate into behaviour.

Formal nutrition knowledge such as reading labels, consulting health professionals, or planning food scientifically remains limited. Most respondents described choosing food based on memory, trust, taste, and habit rather than instruction, one woman in Aizawl Rural said,

“We choose food by looking at it...not reading the small writings.”

Households often expressed tension between knowing what is healthy and doing what is convenient. Rapid urbanisation, work routines, and busy schedules mean many families eat quickly, without planning, *“Sometimes we just eat whatever is fast,”* shared a young professional. Similarly, branded food especially in Aizawl Urban was equated with hygiene and safety, while rural areas trusted locally produced or homemade items instead. Both logics reflect different forms of food literacy.

Thus, Mizos increasingly recognise the connection between food and health but health rarely guides everyday food decisions unless illness demands change. Many households believe they are health-conscious, yet daily choices are driven more by habit, taste, convenience, and cultural identity than by preventive dietary logic. As one respondent reflected thoughtfully,

“We are learning. Our parents ate for survival....now we are slowly eating for health.”

These findings support the argument in food studies that food choices are not purely nutritional decisions but socially and culturally embedded practices shaped by habit, identity, and lived experience (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). The tendency among Mizo households to become health-conscious primarily when illness occurs reflects what

Rozin (1996) describes as a reactive rather than preventive food-health model, where medical meaning emerges only when the body signals disruption.

Food Choice: Food choice refers to the process through which individuals and households decide what to eat, influenced not only by availability but also by culture, habit, taste, cost, and circumstance. It is not a random act, but a patterned behaviour where preferences, social values, market access, and everyday household realities intersect to determine what is bought, prepared, and consumed. In this section, food choice is examined through four themes: preference for local organic food, importance of budget-friendly meals, factors considered when purchasing food, and the determinants guiding final food selection.

Table 5.20. Preference for local organic food

Preference	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total urban (%)	Total rural (%)	Total (%)
Always	55	40	42	78	97 (48.5)	118 (59)	215 (53.75)
Often	31	33	38	14	69 (34.5)	47 (23.5)	116 (29)
Sometimes	12	15	17	7	29 (14.5)	22 (11)	51 (12.75)
Rarely	2	5	3	1	5 (2.5)	6 (3)	11 (2.75)
Never	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table reveals that preference for locally sourced organic food is strong and widely shared across Mizoram. Out of 400 respondents, more than half, 53.75% reported they *always* choose locally grown organic food, and another 29% reported doing so *often*. Together, this means that 82.75% of the total sample regularly choose local organic produce, suggesting that this is not merely a preference but a dominant food behaviour. Only 12.75% reported choosing local food only sometimes and 2.75% rarely did so and notably, no respondent selected “never.”

When examining urban households, nearly half 48.5% stated they always opt for local, and 34.5% said they often do so. This results in 83% of all urban respondents showing a consistent preference. Occasional use was reported by 14.5%, while only 2.5% rarely chose local produce.

In rural areas, the preference is even stronger. 59% reported always choosing local and 23.5% often doing so. This totals 82.5% with regular preference patterns. Only

11% reported choosing it sometimes, and 3% did so rarely. Again, no respondents reported never choosing local produce.

An important insight that emerged during fieldwork is that the common assumption especially in academic and popular discourse that Mizos consume fermented, smoked, and dried foods frequently is not accurate in everyday practice. While such foods exist and hold cultural significance, respondents consistently emphasized that fresh produce is always prioritised, and preserved forms are eaten only when fresh options are unavailable. Respondent 124, Aizawl Rural stated,

“People think we eat fermented food every day, but that is not true. We only use those when we have no fresh vegetables. Fresh tastes better, and we grow it here.”

Respondent 77, Kolasib Rural said,

“Fresh vegetables and meat are always first. Fermented or dried food is just something to keep for emergencies or rainy days, not something we prefer.”

Respondent 198, Aizawl Urban also said,

“Smoked and fermented food is a backup...not a favourite. If we have fresh, we will always choose fresh.”

Thus, the dominant food choice in Mizoram is fresh, locally sourced organic food, driven by cultural trust, sensory quality, perceived health value, and community ties. Field data also challenges external assumptions that Mizos primarily consume smoked or fermented foods instead, such foods are secondary and situational, while fresh food is the cultural default and preferred norm.

Table 5.21. Importance of budget-friendly Meal

Importance	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Important	91	92	79	89	170 (85)	181 (90.5)	351 (87.75)
Neutral	9	4	14	11	23 (11.5)	15 (7.5)	38 (9.5)
Unimportant	0	4	7	0	7 (3.5)	4 (2)	11 (2.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The significance of studying meal budgeting lies in its direct impact on household well-being. Budgeting for meals is not only a way to save money but also a means of ensuring that families can eat healthy, balanced and culturally appropriate food within their available resources. It helps reduce unnecessary expenses, minimizes food waste and promotes better planning in both grocery shopping and cooking practices. In the context of Mizo households, where food holds cultural as well as social value, understanding budgeting also reflects how families negotiate between tradition, health and changing lifestyles.

In the study, the researcher specifically asked respondents whether they considered meal budgeting important or not. This question is essential because it helps reveal how households perceive the role of budgeting in their everyday food practices. The need for this study stems from the fact that meal budgeting is not just an economic activity but also a cultural and social practice that shapes what is eaten, how it is prepared and how resources are shared within the family. By examining this, we gain insights into how families manage both tradition and modern demands while ensuring food security at the household level.

The table illustrates the significance that Mizo households place on budgeting in their meal preparation indicating that cost considerations significantly influence their daily food choices. The vast majority of respondents regardless of whether they were from urban or rural areas rated meal budgeting as an essential component of their household's food practices. 76% of people in Kolasib Urban regarded it as "very important," followed by 71% in Aizawl Rural, 61% in Aizawl Urban and 58% in Kolasib Rural. In both rural and urban areas, these numbers make it clear that Mizo households are very aware of how the food they eat affects their finances. The fact that there is such a strong emphasis placed on meals that are easy on budgets suggests that the type of food that is consumed is closely related to the income level of the household as well as their ability to make purchases. A family's food choices are often limited by what they can afford based on the money each member makes. This shows how meal planning also depends on calculated decision based on resources, not just preference or tradition alone.

A significant percentage of respondents in rural areas, specifically in Kolasib (34%) and Aizawl (18%) rated budgeting as "somewhat important," suggesting a somewhat more accommodating position. This could mean that there are other food sources like

kitchen gardens, chickens raised at home or wild plants that make people less reliant on buying food which helps them save money. On the other hand, the fact that some people in cities chose “neutral” or “unimportant” could mean that lifestyles are changing and that convenience, taste or brand preferences may sometimes be more important than cost. The responses to the question on the importance of meal budgeting clearly show that Mizo households connect food choices with financial discipline, health and survival. In Kolasib Urban, for instance, Respondent 23 remarked that budgeting is important “*to save money*,” while Respondent 57 emphasized “*cutting down on expenses*,” reflecting an urban reality where food must largely be purchased. In Kolasib Rural, budgeting is often tied to sustenance itself, with Respondent 118 stating that it is vital “*to keep us alive*,” pointing to the reliance on daily planning where resources are limited. In Aizawl Urban, a broader view emerges as Respondent 213 linked budgeting to “*health and good habits*,” while Respondent 249 stressed “*money management*,” showing how cost and nutrition are negotiated together. In Aizawl Rural, respondents often highlighted household limits, with Respondent 333 saying that budgeting matters because “*we prepare whatever is available*,” underlining resilience and adaptation to scarcity. Taken together, these responses illustrate that for Mizo households, budgeting is not only an economic strategy but also a cultural practice, one that secures survival, ensures family cohesion and sustains health within the bounds of limited resources. For many households in Mizoram, we can say that cost continues to be a primary concern which can either hinder or facilitate the adoption of recommended food habits. Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of supporting local food systems such as home gardens, community farming and easily accessible local markets. These types of food systems not only help reduce the cost of food but also contribute to the preservation of traditional dietary patterns. The reduction of the economic burden while simultaneously protecting the Mizo food heritage can be accomplished through the implementation of initiatives that are centred on food security, particularly those that are community-based and culturally grounded.

The findings, taken as a whole highlight the fact that economic factors continue to be a primary determinant of food consumption in Mizoram. As a result, meal budgeting is not only a cultural practice but also a practical necessity. Further evidence suggests that there is a pressing requirement to strengthen local food systems. This can be

accomplished through community farming, home gardens and local markets. These systems have the potential to reduce household expenses while simultaneously preserving traditional food ways and improving food security. Low cost naturally leads us to consider family meal frequency, another important aspect of household food culture.

As we move on to the following section which investigates the frequency with which families eat together on a weekly basis, it is essential to have a solid understanding of the ways in which financial considerations, work schedules and shifting lifestyles influence the practices of shared mealtimes. Studying how often families eat together not only shows patterns of social cohesion and household routines, but it also shows how larger social and cultural factors affect how Mizo families eat together.

Table 5.22. Factors considered when purchasing food

Factors	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Cost	5	14	1	50	6 (3)	64 (32)	70 (17.5)
Availability	47	74	58	47	105 (52.5)	121 (60.5)	226 (56.5)
Likes/Dislikes	39	6	31	3	70 (30)	9 (4.5)	79 (19.75)
Nutrition value	4	6	7	0	11 (5.5)	6 (3)	17 (4.25)
Health	5	0	3	0	8 (4)	0	8 (2)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Food purchasing patterns in Mizoram reveal that availability is the strongest factor guiding food choice, shaping behaviour across both rural and urban households. With 56.5% (n=226) of respondents identifying availability as their primary consideration, this pattern emerges not merely as a practical constraint but as a defining cultural characteristic of Mizo foodways. In Kolasib Rural, availability influences 74% of respondents, followed by 58% in Aizawl Urban and 47% each in Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Rural. This consistency across landscapes reflects how deeply embedded availability is in everyday decision-making. Respondents expressed this reliance plainly,

“We buy whatever is there”

and

“It depends on what is available at the market that day.”

The dominance of this factor points to more than convenience, it underscores a food system historically shaped by geography, seasonality, and limited external access.

This pattern resonates strongly with the historical context of Mizoram, where food culture evolved under the constraints of mountainous terrain, shifting cultivation, and limited transport infrastructure. Traditionally, the Mizo diet was shaped by what the land could provide such as wild leaves, seasonal vegetables, bamboo shoots, and locally reared livestock rather than imported or distant resources. Despite modernisation and increased market access, this historical pattern continues to structure consumption. Mizo food culture remains rooted in the logic of “eat what is available.” Even in urban spaces, where food diversity is visibly higher, availability, not novelty or trend still determines what is brought home and eaten. As one respondent from Aizawl Urban expressed,

“We only eat what is sold nearby. Even if we know other foods, we don’t go searching.”

Thus, even when exposed to global food influences, Mizos rarely go out of their way to procure unfamiliar items. Instead, they adapt, experiment, or substitute only within the boundaries of what the local market offers. Availability, therefore, does not merely reflect economic condition. It functions as a cultural logic and an inherited habit rooted in self-reliance and place-based food identity.

Cost appears as the second most influential factor, especially in rural regions, reflecting how affordability shapes the boundaries of choice. Thirty-two percent (n=64) of rural respondents identified cost as their deciding factor, compared to only 3% in urban areas. This aligns closely with the earlier findings on meal-budget importance, where 87.75% (n=351) of households rated budgeting as either important or very important. Food budgeting is not merely an economic task, but a culturally embedded routine that determines what can be consumed and how often. As Respondent 118 from Kolasib Rural put it,

“Budgeting is important to keep us alive.”

Urban households show a stronger inclination toward taste-based choices with 39% in Kolasib Urban and 31% in Aizawl Urban prioritising “likes and dislikes,” compared to only 6% and 3% in rural areas. This reflects a slow but visible emergence of consumer preference as a factor, driven by increased exposure to supermarket culture, food media, and commercial food systems. Still, preference remains conditional,

frequently followed by phrases such as “*when we can afford it*” or “*if it is available.*” Taste, in other words, remains a secondary luxury, not a primary determinant.

Health and nutritional concerns are the least considered influences, appearing only in two to four percent of responses across regions. Their low ranking indicates that while health consciousness is growing as seen in earlier sections, it has not yet translated into consistent purchasing patterns. Rather than reflecting apathy, this may signal that health knowledge remains abstract, whereas availability and affordability remain immediate, tangible realities.

Taken together, the data suggests that food choice in Mizoram is guided by a pragmatic logic rooted in historical subsistence patterns, economic realities, and structural constraints. Availability forms the cultural baseline, what exists becomes what is eaten and cost shapes the boundaries of that choice. Urban exposure may diversify options, but it does not override the deeply embedded habit of relying on locally accessible sources.

In this way, food choice is not merely a household decision but a reflection of cultural continuity, environmental adaptation, and lived experience. As one participant summarised with unmistakable clarity,

“We don’t chase food. . . . we eat what we have.”

Table 5.23. Factors determining food choice

Factors	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Mood	7	8	4	1	11 (5.5)	9 (4.5)	20 (5)
Convenience	26	47	5	44	31 (15.5)	91 (45.5)	122 (30.5)
Sensory appeal	4	11	24	10	28 (14)	21 (10.5)	49 (12.25)
Natural content	4	2	2	2	6 (3)	4 (2)	10 (2.5)
Weight control	2	1	1	6	3 (1.5)	7 (3.5)	10 (2.5)
Familiarity	4	3	1	4	5 (2.5)	7 (3.5)	12 (3)
Hunger	53	28	63	33	116 (58)	61 (30.5)	177 (44.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The findings reveal that food choice among Mizo households is shaped far more by practical realities and lived experience than by conscious dietary planning or nutritional awareness. At the overall level, hunger emerges as the most influential

determinant (177 households, 44.25%). This factor is especially dominant in urban households 63% in Aizawl Urban and 53% in Kolasib Urban indicating that eating is closely aligned with work routines and fluctuating appetite rather than fixed mealtimes. The pattern reflects a lifestyle where food is consumed as and when required, shaped by urgency, schedule, and availability.

In rural areas, however, convenience governs food decision-making (91 households, 45.5%), particularly in Kolasib Rural (47%) and Aizawl Rural (44%). Here, food selection is tied to what can be prepared quickly using readily accessible ingredients, reflecting the demands of agricultural labour and time-bound seasonal household tasks. Cooking remains functional, responsive to workload, and oriented toward ease and efficiency.

A smaller yet emerging determinant is sensory appeal (49 households, 12.25%), with the highest concentration in Aizawl Urban (24%). This suggests a growing influence of diverse cuisines, food aesthetics, and global food trends among urban populations, likely shaped by exposure to cafés, packaged food, and changing consumption values. Other factors including mood, familiarity, weight control, and preference for natural content remain comparatively low across all regions. Their marginal presence indicates that emotional eating, dietary regulation, and ingredient awareness are still developing and are not yet central to everyday food behaviour. These quantitative patterns resonate with qualitative accounts. As one Aizawl Urban respondent shared,

“We eat when we feel hungry; our meal time depends on work.”

Similarly, a Kolasib Rural respondent explained,

“We cook whatever is easy and available.”

Beyond functional behaviour, the Mizo understanding of hunger is deeply shaped by collective memory. The historical experience of famine (Mautam and Thingtam) and prolonged periods of food scarcity during the times of hardship and conflict (Rambuai) has created a cultural relationship with hunger grounded in caution, preparedness, and emotional memory. Many members of the older generation who lived through these difficult periods retain a lingering fear of not having enough food. As a result, the dominance of hunger as a factor in food choice is not merely behavioural but symbolic, reflecting the psychological residue of scarcity.

This cultural memory also explains the widespread practice of preparing rice, the staple food in excess. Households intentionally cook more rice than needed, ensuring food is available if an unexpected guest arrives or if someone becomes hungry later. The presence of cooked rice in the household serves as a form of security, hospitality, and stability, demonstrating that food is not only sustenance but reassurance.

In this context, leftovers, particularly rice carry meaning. While other cultures may consider leftover food as waste, in Mizo households such food is understood as insurance against hunger. It represents safety, preparedness, and care for others, reinforcing the cultural principle *“No one who enters the house should leave hungry.”* Overall, these findings show that Mizo food choice is guided by necessity, accessibility, and deeply rooted cultural memory rather than external food trends or nutritional reasoning. The patterns reflect continuity between past subsistence-based living and the present, where food behaviour remains grounded in availability, habit, and emotional security more than preference or planned dietary structure.

5.7. Gendered Patterns in Domestic Food Responsibilities

Food practices are never neutral; they are deeply embedded in the social fabric of everyday life and often mirror broader structures of power, identity, and hierarchy. Among these, gender remains one of the most significant axes along which food-related roles are organized and reproduced. Scholars have long noted that culinary practices are not only about sustenance but also about sustaining social meanings whether through who prepares, serves, or consumes particular foods, or through the symbolic weight attached to certain eating behaviours (Counihan, 1999; Das & Mishra, 2021). In the context of Mizo households, food becomes a site where gendered expectations are enacted, negotiated, and at times challenged, reflecting the interplay of tradition and modernity in domestic spaces.

This section explores how everyday food practices in Mizoram intersect with gendered divisions of labour and responsibility. It examines who assumes the role of primary cook, who prepares the dining setup, and who is responsible for clearing and washing. Beyond domestic chores, the analysis extends to decisions around grocery shopping and budgeting as well as the criteria used in purchasing food and making dietary choices.

Importantly, this section does not limit itself to food preparation and provisioning, but also considers consumption patterns and behavioural differences across gender. It

addresses how decisions about food intake and preferences are gendered, It also examines differences in meat and beverage consumption, situating these within broader cultural expectations about masculinity, femininity, health, and household responsibility.

By weaving together statistical patterns with respondents' voices, the section aims to show how the domestic food sphere is a lived site where gender roles are performed, reinforced, and sometimes renegotiated. The goal is not only to describe who does what within the household, but also to highlight how these practices reflect larger sociological processes of continuity and change in Mizo society.

Table 5.24. Grocery buyer in the household

Grocery buyer	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	1	2	3	1	4 (2)	3 (1.5)	7 (1.75)
Grandmother	4	1	6	1	10 (5)	2 (1)	12 (3)
Father	4	17	5	2	9 (4.5)	19 (9.5)	28 (7)
Mother	83	75	80	91	163 (81.5)	166 (83)	329 (82.25)
Son	2	4	2	2	4 (2)	6 (3)	10 (2.5)
Daughter	6	1	4	3	10 (5)	4 (2)	14 (3.5)
Maid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data in Table 5.24 shows a clear gendered pattern in grocery-buying responsibilities across all four regions, with mothers overwhelmingly identified as the primary grocery buyers (82.25% overall). This trend is consistent in both urban and rural settings, reaching its highest proportion in Aizawl Rural (91%). This confirms that household food procurement in Mizo society remains strongly associated with women's domestic role and responsibility.

Male involvement is relatively low, though slightly higher in Kolasib Rural (17%), suggesting that men may participate when market access aligns with outdoor work or errands. In comparison, fathers play a much smaller role in urban spaces, where grocery work appears more firmly entrenched as a women's task. Grandparents and children contribute minimally, with no category exceeding 6%. Where grandmothers or children assist, their participation appears supportive rather than primary, reflecting

an intergenerational labour pattern where the mother remains the central figure in food-related decision-making.

These findings demonstrate that grocery procurement in Mizoram is not merely a practical duty but a culturally embedded expression of domestic care, competence, and authority. Mothers hold responsibility not only for purchasing food but also for shaping dietary choices, budgeting, and ensuring household sustenance. Respondent narratives reinforce this pattern, with most referring to “myself” or “my mother,” while deviations occurred only in cases of illness, proximity, or necessity.

While urbanisation and social change may be reshaping some household roles, this aspect of foodwork remains remarkably stable, reflecting continuity in gender expectations. Grocery shopping thus serves as a meaningful site where cultural norms around femininity, responsibility, and household care continue to be performed and reinforced.

Table 5.25. Grocery decision maker in the household

Grocery decision maker	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	2	1	1	1	3 (1.5)	2 (1)	5 (1.25)
Grandmother	6	5	9	1	15 (7.5)	6 (3)	21 (5.25)
Father	19	10	5	8	24 (12)	18 (9)	42 (10.5)
Mother	71	82	84	89	155 (77.5)	171 (85.5)	326 (81.5)
Son	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Daughter	2	2	1	1	3 (1.5)	3 (1.5)	6
Maid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400 (100)

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The results from Table 5.25 show that mothers are the primary decision-makers for grocery purchases in Mizo households, with 81.5% of respondents indicating that mothers decide what groceries enter the household. This trend is consistent across all regions and highest in Aizawl Rural (89%). These findings mirror the earlier pattern in grocery buying, demonstrating that women perform both the physical and cognitive labour of food provisioning.

Fathers participate to a lesser extent, ranging from 5-19%, with the highest share in Kolasib Urban. Their involvement appears more circumstantial than authoritative,

often dependent on availability or proximity to markets. As one respondent from Aizawl Urban explained, “*Male adults*”, implying participation without final decision-making power.

Grandmothers continue to play a symbolic or advisory role, especially in multigenerational households, though their involvement remains small (5.25% overall). In a few cases, decision-making is shared across generations, as expressed by a Kolasib Rural respondent, “*Grandmother.*” Respondent narratives reinforce maternal authority. Many simply stated “*My mother*” (Respondent 215) indicating that the role is assumed rather than negotiated. Even when tasks shift due to health constraints such as “*Because the mother suffers from a nerve condition*” (Respondent 242), the expectation remains that the mother is the default decision-maker.

Overall, the data illustrate that grocery decision-making remains a strongly gendered domain in Mizo households. Mothers hold responsibility not only for buying food but also for planning, budgeting, and shaping household dietary norms. While men and other family members may contribute occasionally, maternal authority remains central, suggesting that food governance continues to be one of the most persistent and culturally embedded forms of gendered household labour.

Responsible for planning food items at home: The study regarding the one responsible for planning food items at home reveal a strong and consistent pattern in how food planning is organised within Mizo households. In both urban and rural areas, mothers overwhelmingly assume responsibility for deciding what meals will be prepared, placing them at the centre of household food organisation. Grandmothers play a supportive role, especially in multigenerational urban families, reflecting continuity of shared female authority. Fathers and grandfathers, however, are only occasionally involved, and typically in contexts where practical circumstances require it rather than through a shared or negotiated role.

Urban households, especially in Aizawl, show signs of gradual transition, where daughters increasingly participate in planning meals, often when mothers are employed or occupied with other responsibilities. As one urban respondent explained at length,

“Since both my parents work full time, I have gradually taken responsibility for planning the meals at home. At first it was just helping occasionally, but now they trust me to decide

what to cook and when. On Sundays we cook together, and we discuss what we need for the week. Even though my mother still guides me, especially with traditional dishes, the responsibility is slowly shifting to me.”

This reflects the emerging intergenerational adjustment taking place in more urban settings, where time constraints and changing routines encourage shared responsibilities among women across age groups.

In contrast, rural households continue to uphold a more traditional and centralised structure, where meal planning remains firmly within the mother’s domain. One rural respondent captured this cultural expectation clearly,

“I alone decide what to cook every day because it has always been my role. Everyone waits for me to tell them what the meal will be, and I try to cook something everyone will eat. Even if others help with cooking sometimes, the final decision is mine because it has always been seen as the mother’s duty.”

This demonstrates that while minor practical adjustments occur in specific households, the overall pattern of gendered responsibility remains deeply rooted.

Alongside the responsibility for planning meals, the findings also show that most households design their meals around the preferences of family members, viewing food not only as nourishment but as an emotional and relational practice. Respondents across regions emphasised that adjusting menus helps maintain peace, affection, and togetherness within the family.

One participant described this meaningfully,

“We plan meals based on what everyone likes because food is the easiest way to make the household peaceful. If I cook something they dislike, there are complaints, and people eat unhappily or skip the meal. But when I consider their preferences especially the children’s and elders’...everyone sits together willingly, enjoys the meal, and talks more happily. For us, adjusting to each other’s tastes is not a burden, it is a way of showing care and keeping the family close.”

However, a small minority do not plan meals around individual preferences, either because doing so is impractical or because one standardised meal is viewed as more efficient. For these households, preference-based planning may be perceived as an added burden rather than a necessity. Thus, the findings indicate that meal planning in Mizo households is both gendered and relational. While mothers remain the central decision-makers, urban contexts demonstrate early signs of shared responsibility among younger women. At the same time, preference-based planning reinforces food as a site of emotional connection used to maintain harmony, demonstrate care, and reinforce family unity. Even as lifestyles change, the cultural understanding of food as both responsibility and relationship remains deeply embedded.

Table 5.26. Household member cooks most frequently

Member cooks	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grandmother	2	3	1	3	3 (1.5)	6 (3)	9 (2.25)
Father	1	6	2	1	3 (1.5)	7 (3.5)	10 (2.5)
Mother	53	63	37	71	90 (45)	134 (67)	224 (56)
Daughter	26	24	9	24	35 (17.5)	48 (24)	83 (20.75)
Son	15	4	5	1	20 (10)	5 (2.5)	25 (6.25)
Maid	3	0	46	0	49 (24.5)	0	49 (12.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data from Table 5.26 shows a clear gendered pattern in cooking responsibilities across the study regions. Mothers make up the majority of primary cooks (56%), with the highest proportion in Aizawl Rural (71%), followed by Kolasib Rural (63%), Kolasib Urban (53%), and Aizawl Urban (37%). This confirms a persistent cultural expectation that cooking is primarily a maternal responsibility, tied to care, duty, and household stability. A mother respondent from Kolasib Rural explained,

“I cook every day, even when I am unwell, because everyone waits for me. Cooking is the mother’s responsibility. . . if I don’t do it, the family cannot function.”

This sentiment illustrates how food work is internalised not only as routine labour but as an essential expression of care and commitment.

Daughters form the second largest group of primary cooks (20.75% overall), with the highest involvement in rural households (24% in both Kolasib and Aizawl Rural) and Kolasib Urban (26%). Their participation appears closely linked to household need, mothers' work schedules, and the cultural expectation that cooking skills mark maturity and readiness. A daughter respondent from Aizawl Urban captured this transition,

"I began helping because my mother returned home late from work, but gradually the responsibility shifted to me and my sister. Cooking became something we just knew we had to do."

This reflects how daughters often step in as secondary cooks, ensuring continuity in food work across generations.

Sons' involvement remains limited (6.25% overall), though more visible in Kolasib Urban (15%). Their participation appears necessity-driven rather than gender-neutral. One male respondent from Aizawl Rural described his role as temporary,

"I cooked only when my wife was admitted to the hospital. After she recovered, things went back to normal. . .she decides and cooks."

Such responses suggest that male involvement occurs mainly during interruptions in normative domestic routines.

Fathers also cook infrequently (2.5% overall), with the highest figures in Kolasib Rural (6%). Their cooking tends to be viewed as voluntary or occasional rather than expected. As one father in Aizawl Urban stated,

"We help when needed like weekends or if someone is busy but everyone knows the kitchen belongs to the women."

Grandmothers fulfil a supportive rather than central role (2.25% overall), especially in extended households. Their involvement reflects continuity of knowledge rather than daily obligation.

A distinct pattern emerges in Aizawl Urban, where maids cook in 46% of households, representing the highest share among all categories in that region. This reliance on domestic help reflects socio-economic shifts, especially among working women. However, hiring help does not reset gender expectations. Instead, labour is

redistributed among women (mothers, daughters-in-law, or maids). A respondent summarised this dynamic,

“We hired a maid because both of us work, but if she doesn't come, cooking automatically returns to us women. . . .the responsibility never shifts to the men.”

A respondent from Aizawl Urban expressed this dynamic clearly,

“Earlier, my mother and I cooked every day, but once both my parents began working full-time, a maid was hired. Even now, if the maid is absent, the responsibility returns to us women.....me, my mother, or my sister-in-law. The men help occasionally, especially on weekends, but everyone expects the kitchen to remain under women's control. Cooking may be done by different people now, but it is still seen as our duty.”

This narrative reflects how socio-economic change prompts adjustments in practice not transformation of roles.

Thus, the data and narratives show that cooking remains one of the most deeply gendered domestic roles in Mizo households. Whether performed by mothers, daughters, grandmothers, or paid domestic workers, food preparation remains strongly associated with the female domain. Men may assist occasionally, but their involvement is framed as help, not responsibility. Even where modern work structures necessitate flexibility, the symbolic connection between cooking, caregiving, and womanhood continues to hold strong. As one respondent from Aizawl Rural expressed succinctly,

“Cooking is part of who we are as women. . . it keeps the family together.”

The fact that female respondents speak not merely as observers but as *actors* within the domestic system of food preparation, strengthens the authenticity of these findings. Urban patterns indicate a partial reconfiguration of labour through paid domestic help, while rural practices continue to reflect traditional gender divisions. Thus, the kitchen remains a powerful site of gender identity formation in Mizo society where women sustain the moral and practical centre of the household through food.

Table 5.27. Family member most involved in meal preparation

Meal Preparation	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Male	1	7	6	0	7 (3.5)	7 (3.5)	14 (3.5)
Female	83	77	77	95	160 (80)	172 (86)	332 (83)
Both	15	8	2	4	17 (8.5)	12 (6)	29 (7.25)
None	1	8	15	1	16 (8)	9 (4.5)	25 (6.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

***Note:** *KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 5.27 highlights a strong gendered pattern in meal preparation across the study areas. Women, particularly mothers and daughters account for the vast majority of those responsible for meal preparation, with 83% of households identifying a female member as the one most involved. This trend is especially pronounced in Aizawl Rural, where women are responsible in 95% of households, marking the highest regional concentration. Kolasib Urban (83%) and both Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Rural (77%) follow closely, demonstrating the consistency of women's central role across both rural and urban contexts.

Male involvement remains minimal overall at only 3.5%, with slightly higher participation reported in Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Urban. Their participation tends to be situational rather than routine, often prompted by temporary household disruptions, work schedules, or practical necessity rather than shared responsibility. As one male respondent from Kolasib Rural explained,

"I learned to cook only because my wife was in the hospital. Once she recovered, things returned to normal. I still help sometimes, but cooking is not really seen as my duty."

A small share of households, 7.25% reported that both men and women share cooking responsibilities. This pattern is most visible in Kolasib Urban, where 15% described joint involvement. Such arrangements appear linked to dual-income households, shifting work patterns, and gradual exposure to changing gender norms. One respondent from Aizawl Urban reflected on this transitional shift,

"In our home, whoever reaches first starts cooking. It has become a shared routine because of work schedules, not

because roles changed completely....but it feels more equal than before.”

Another notable category is households where no single member is responsible for cooking (6.25% overall), with Aizawl Urban reporting the highest proportion (15%). This suggests a reliance on eating out, tiffin services, food delivery, or domestic help features more closely associated with urban lifestyles, time scarcity, and changing family structures.

Despite these emerging variations, the data continues to reflect a deeply embedded cultural expectation, food preparation is perceived as women’s work. Many respondents, especially in rural areas, framed cooking not as a task to be negotiated, but as a naturalised role tied to identity, responsibility, and tradition. One rural woman expressed this plainly,

“I cook every day because it has always been the woman’s work. If I don’t cook, no one will. It is part of taking care of the family.”

Meanwhile, another respondent speaking to a widely shared cultural pattern described men’s cooking as occasional and ceremonial,

“Everyday meals are prepared by women, but during community feasts or big occasions, men take charge. That is how it has always been.”

Thus, the findings demonstrate that meal preparation remains one of the most strongly gendered domestic roles in Mizo households. Mothers serve as the primary cooks, daughters support or increasingly assume the role when household routines require it, and domestic helpers are more common in urban settings not as replacements for women, but as extensions of their responsibility. Men’s involvement remains rare, largely episodic, and framed as assistance rather than obligation. The small number of households reporting shared cooking or outsourced labour indicates subtle but emerging transformations driven by urban living, employment, and shifting time demands. At present, however, the cultural link between cooking, femininity, and caregiving remains firmly intact, illustrating both continuity and slow-moving change in domestic gender practices in Mizoram.

Table 5.28. Table clearing responsibility

Table clearing	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	1	1	1	3	2 (1)	4 (2)	6 (1.5)
Grandmother	1	1	2	10	3 (1.5)	11 (5.5)	14 (3.5)
Father	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother	44	20	32	44	76 (38)	64 (32)	140 (35)
Son	19	27	2	1	21 (10.5)	28 (14)	49 (12.25)
Daughter	32	51	34	42	66 (33)	93 (46.5)	159 (39.75)
Maid	3	0	29	0	32 (16)	0	32 (8)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data shows that clearing the dining table is a predominantly feminised task across all four study regions. Overall, women and girls account for nearly four-fifths of responsibility (74.75%), indicating a strong continuity of gendered domestic norms. Mothers and daughters together form the core group performing this task, with daughters taking the lead in many households, especially in rural areas. In Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural, clearing the table is closely integrated into everyday rhythm, strongly associated with discipline, respect, and social order.

In urban households, especially in Aizawl Urban, the presence of maids (29%) introduces a layer of labour outsourcing linked to time scarcity and dual-income lifestyles. However, this outsourcing does not challenge the gendered association of the task. Rather, it shifts the work from mothers and daughters to hired female workers. Even where respondents described shared labour, the language implied that the expectation remains feminine: the task circulates among women rather than across all family members.

Rural households illustrate a slightly more inclusive pattern, particularly in Kolasib Rural, where sons (27%) participate more frequently than in urban contexts. Yet despite these contributions, the structure remains deeply gender-coded, with women still performing most of the invisible routine work. The rural data also reveal stronger intergenerational participation, with grandmothers actively engaged (especially in Aizawl Rural), indicating how domestic tasks are tied to household continuity and caregiving roles rather than age alone.

Symbolically, table clearing marks the closure of the meal and reinforces moral responsibilities tied to orderliness and respect. In some households, the act is explicitly linked to hierarchy, where clearing the table is completed before the father or male elders leave the dining space reflecting the continued intersection of gender, respectability, and domestic etiquette.

Respondent narratives reinforce these cultural logics. One woman from Aizawl Rural expressed,

“We always clear the table before father leaves his seat; it is part of our duty and how we were raised. Even if we are tired or busy, we do it because it shows respect and keeps the home orderly. We do not have to discuss it. . . .everyone already knows who should do it.”

Similarly, in Aizawl Urban, a working mother noted,

“Our maid usually helps because we both work, but when she is not here, it falls back to us women. It is not something the men think about. . . .we just do it without needing to be reminded.”

These accounts demonstrate how responsibility is both internalised and relational, carried by women as an expected moral obligation rather than negotiated family work. Thus, small variations in participation exist across regions, with urban outsourcing and rural family-sharing patterns, the underlying structure of responsibility remains firmly gendered. Table clearing, much like cooking and table setting, continues to operate as part of women’s domestic identity, forming one of the routine practices through which care, family order, and social hierarchy are enacted in everyday Mizo household life.

Table 5.29. Dish washing responsibility

Dish washing	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Grandfather	3	8	4	3	7 (3.5)	11 (5.5)	18 (4.5)
Grandmother	2	6	2	2	4 (2)	8 (4)	12 (3)
Father	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother	23	18	17	49	40 (20)	67 (33.5)	107 (26.75)
Son	15	25	17	3	32 (16)	28 (14)	60 (15)
Daughter	14	43	23	43	37 (18.5)	86 (43)	123 (30.75)
Maid	43	0	37	0	80 (40)	0	80 (20)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data shows that dishwashing remains one of the most gendered domestic responsibilities in Mizo households. Across all four regions, women and girls together account for the overwhelming majority of this task, with daughters forming the single most consistent group performing it. Mothers also contribute significantly, particularly in Aizawl Rural where nearly half of respondents (49%) report mothers as the primary person responsible.

A noticeable urban-rural distinction emerges. In urban households, especially Kolasib Urban (43%) and Aizawl Urban (37%), domestic helpers constitute the most active group involved in dishwashing. This reflects the increasing outsourcing of routine household labour due to urban lifestyle changes, dual-income families, and time scarcity. Yet, even within this shift, dishwashing remains framed as female responsibility, merely transferred from mothers and daughters to hired women.

In rural households, dishwashing remains almost entirely family-based. Daughters take the lead, especially in Kolasib Rural (43%) and Aizawl Rural (43%), followed closely by mothers. Sons participate in rural settings more than in urban, most notably in Kolasib Rural where a quarter of households (25%) report boys contributing. This suggests a more cooperative household model in agrarian settings, although such participation is still framed as help, not shared obligation.

Grandparents participate minimally across regions, though slightly more in rural Aizawl (3%-10%), indicating the ongoing role of extended family structures.

Despite regional variations, the overall pattern remains clear. Dishwashing is understood as part of a broader continuum of women's food work completing the meal cycle and restoring order after eating. A respondent from Aizawl Rural summarised this expectation,

"I wash the dishes every day because it is part of maintaining the home. We all know who should do it. . . .even when we are tired or busy, the work doesn't wait. It is something we women have always done, something passed down, and it feels incomplete if the dishes are left undone."

This narrative aligns with the quantitative trends, highlighting how dishwashing is tied to notions of discipline, respect, and feminine responsibility within the domestic sphere.

The distribution of kitchen-related responsibilities across the study regions reveals a clear contrast between urban and rural households in Mizoram. In urban settings, especially in Aizawl and Kolasib, kitchen work is more commonly shared among family members rather than assigned to a single individual. Many urban households described rotating responsibilities or dividing tasks according to availability, work schedules, or personal convenience. This reflects a gradual restructuring of domestic roles influenced by modern lifestyles, dual-income households, and greater exposure to ideas of gender equality and shared labour.

In contrast, most rural households continue to follow traditional household structures where kitchen responsibilities are primarily carried out by women, particularly mothers and daughters. The organisation of labour in these homes appears more hierarchical and inherited, where duties are learned, expected, and reproduced across generations.

Urban households described their arrangements deliberately and consciously. Respondents used expressions such as *"in rotation," "for fairness,"* or *"to avoid resentment"* indicating that shared chore systems are often negotiated and mutually agreed upon rather than assumed. Some even described structured internal rules, as reflected in one respondent's explanation,

"The cook will be exempt from washing dishes and tidying up."

Another added a parallel practice,

“The person who washes dishes never cleans up the table.”

These accounts reflect a rational organisation of domestic work, shaped by negotiation, personal convenience, and mutual consideration. For some families, sharing chores is also framed as emotional maintenance and relational balance. One respondent explained,

“We take turns so that no one feels overburdened.”

Several responses also highlight kitchen-sharing as a value system rather than just practicality. As one participant expressed,

“It promotes teamwork, efficiency, and a harmonious living environment.”

Such statements illustrate how domestic labour in urban areas is increasingly framed as cooperative and ethical rather than gendered. Many described arrangements where women handle the majority of kitchen tasks while men participate minimally or only occasionally. One respondent summarized the system clearly,

“The mother cooks, and the tidying up is done by the daughter.”

Even when rural families acknowledged shared responsibilities, they often remained gender-bound. For instance, one household reported,

“Mother cooks, father likes to wash dishes, daughter wipes tables.”

This suggests cooperation, but still within a gendered framework where each task is symbolically aligned with gender roles rather than equally interchangeable.

Across all regions, the narratives reveal that kitchen labour is both practical and symbolic. Shared responsibilities in urban households reflect not just convenience, but emerging shifts in values around equality, fairness, and cooperation. In rural households, however, the persistence of traditional patterns highlights how kitchen work continues to embody gendered expectations linked to care, responsibility, and identity.

Table 5.30. Family member who consumes meat more

Meat consumption	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Male	55	57	45	83	100 (50)	140 (70)	240 (60)
Female	7	10	13	1	20 (10)	11 (5.5)	31 (7.75)
Both	36	19	25	8	61 (35.5)	27 (13.5)	88 (22)
None	2	14	17	8	19 (9.5)	22 (11)	41 (10.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 5.30 reveals a clear gendered pattern in meat consumption across the four study regions. Overall, men are overwhelmingly identified as the primary consumers of meat (60%), and this trend is more pronounced in rural areas, where seven out of ten households (70%) associate higher meat intake with male members. The strongest expression of this pattern is seen in Aizawl Rural, where 83% of respondents selected men as the dominant meat consumers, followed closely by Kolasib Rural (57%). These findings reinforce the continuing association of meat particularly pork, beef, and regionally valued items such as dog meat with masculinity, strength, and physical labour.

Urban households show a similar but somewhat moderated trend, 55% in Kolasib Urban and 45% in Aizawl Urban identify male members as consuming more meat. Here, the gap narrows due to increasing dietary diversification, weakening of rigid gender norms, and greater availability of processed, convenience, and fusion meat products that appeal across gender and age. Yet, despite this shift, the symbolic link between masculinity and meat remains largely intact.

Female-dominant meat consumption is rare across all regions, recorded at just 7-13% in urban areas and 1-10% in rural areas. This distribution suggests that women's intake is shaped not only by preference but by normative restraint, resource prioritisation, and caregiving-driven food distribution. In many households, women choose smaller shares of meat or consume fewer desirable cuts, often after serving others. A growing number of households particularly in urban settings reported equal meat consumption, 36% in Kolasib Urban and 25% in Aizawl Urban acknowledge parity, compared to much lower rates in rural areas (19% in Kolasib Rural and 8% in Aizawl Rural). This

shift reflects broader lifestyle changes, emerging egalitarian household practices, and a weakening of symbolic food hierarchies. A small share of respondents (10.25%) indicated low or no meat consumption, reflecting either economic limitation, health concerns, or changing preferences influenced by wellness trends and age-related restrictions.

Respondent narratives mirror these statistical patterns. One respondent from Kolasib Urban remarked,

“Men eat more meat in our house because they are said to need strength, especially the older men and boys. We women usually take less, or sometimes wait until everyone has taken their share. It is not a rule, but something we all grew up doing.”

This statement reveals how meat consumption is structured not by explicit instruction but through routine practice, where hierarchy is normalised rather than negotiated. In contrast, a younger respondent from Aizawl Urban described a shifting dynamic,

“Nowadays we all eat the same. No one waits or gives the good pieces only to the men. Everyone takes what they like...sometimes my mother eats more meat than my father.”

This represents the emerging pattern of shared access and individualised food choice, particularly among younger urban households. A rural respondent from Aizawl Rural offered yet another perspective rooted in agricultural labour,

“My husband works in the field, so he eats more meat. We give him extra pieces because he needs the energy. We women don’t mind...we are used to eating less.”

Here, meat becomes a symbolic acknowledgment of work contribution, reinforcing gendered economic roles within the household.

The findings confirm that meat remains a gendered food category within Mizo households. While consumption patterns show signs of change particularly in urban areas, meat continues to operate as a symbol of masculine entitlement, labour value, and household hierarchy. Women’s reduced intake is shaped by cultural expectations linked to care, sacrifice, and restraint rather than simple food preference.

5.8. Overview

This chapter examines everyday food culture in Mizo households across rural and urban settings, treating the home as a key site where food is produced, shared, and experienced as identity, memory, and social connection. Drawing on data from selected localities in two districts, it explores how household food practices are shaped by physical environment, resource availability, migration, exposure to outside cuisines, and shifting socio-economic conditions. Food is approached not only as nourishment but as a culturally constructed practice through which people acquire, prepare, eat and interpret food, revealing wider values, power relations, and meanings embedded in Mizo society. Organised thematically, the chapter analyses: (1) dietary habits and eating practices; (2) culinary practices within the household; (3) food norms, rituals and cultural meaning; (4) household food preservation techniques; (5) health-conscious eating and food choice and (6) Gendered Patterns in Domestic Food Responsibilities. Together, these sections show how predominantly non-vegetarian dietary patterns, everyday decisions about what to cook and buy, and gendered kitchen roles express both continuity and gradual change in contemporary Mizo foodways. Through this lens, the chapter demonstrates that Mizo homes are not just places where food is cooked and consumed, but crucial spaces where cultural resilience, adaptation and hybridisation are negotiated in daily life.

- 1) Section 5.2 examines Mizo household food behaviours, detailing regular dietary habits, staple foods, and frequently consumed items essential to daily meals. It also analyses mealtime practices, including routines, serving styles, timing, and social dynamics of shared eating. This exploration highlights how these factors influence the food culture of Mizos in rural and urban areas. Overall, the dietary habits of the Mizo people are predominantly meat-based, highly communal, and structured around a stable rice-centric meal framework. An overwhelming 94.75% of households consider themselves non-vegetarian, with vegetarianism appearing primarily among a small minority due to health concerns rather than religious or ideological reasons. There is considerable dietary uniformity within households, as 94% of families adhere to the same diet, fostering a strong sense of collectivism where meals are prepared and shared collectively, often prioritizing family cohesion over individual tastes. Both urban and rural meals typically center on rice, complemented by leafy

vegetables and small portions of meat or fermented foods, with rice comprising the largest share (82.5%). Urban households are more reliant on markets and processed foods, often incorporating restaurant meals and seafood into their diets, while rural households depend on local agricultural resources, cooking based on seasonal availability, and focusing on food sufficiency. Fast food is more prevalent in urban areas, particularly among families in Aizawl, where consumption is influenced by children's preferences and global food trends. In contrast, rural households maintain a more traditional three-meal structure with minimal snacking. Religious influence on dietary practices is limited, with only about 10% of households observing faith-based restrictions predominantly amongst Seventh-day Adventists and some Catholics. Most dietary choices are influenced by cultural norms, food availability, health considerations, and economic factors rather than strict religious doctrines. Collectively, these findings illustrate a traditional and ecological Mizo food culture that is evolving to incorporate new foods and consumption practices, particularly in urban settings.

The analysis of eating practices in Mizo households highlights a culturally intricate system where food consumption is socially organized and holds significant symbolic meaning. Meals follow a traditional three-meal pattern, Tukthuan (morning), Chaw-chhun (midday), and Zanriah (evening) with rice as the staple. Despite increasing exposure to modern food options, particularly in urban areas, full rice-based meals are still viewed as a “proper” eating occasion. While the morning and evening meals remain culturally stable, the midday meal reflects adaptation to modern work patterns, especially in urban settings, where shop-bought meals and skipped lunches are more common. In contrast, rural households continue to favor fresh, home-cooked rice meals. Dinner is regarded as the most symbolic meal, representing family reunification and relaxation. Commensality, or shared dining, is a vital aspect of household life, with 64.25% of households dining together nine or more times a week; this is more pronounced in rural areas (74%) compared to urban ones (54.5%). Participants emphasized shared meals as a cultural value that strengthens emotional bonds and communication. The practice of Kil, which involves coordinated eating, is prevalent, particularly in rural homes, with

women typically serving rice, symbolizing care and responsibility, though modern households show some flexibility. Eating by hand remains a common practice across regions, though urban youth increasingly use cutlery, which reflects modernity rather than a disregard for tradition. Meal timing illustrates significant differences between rural and urban patterns, with 72% of households keeping consistent meal times; rural households are notably more stable (81.5%) than urban (62.5%). Urban variability is influenced by work and school routines, while rural predictability aligns with agricultural cycles. Overall, Mizo eating practices exemplify a dynamic interplay between cultural traditions and modern adaptations. Commensality, rice-centric meals, and communal serving traditions persist, even as urban lifestyles introduce flexibility. Eating goes beyond nutrition; it serves as a profound expression of identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity across generations.

- 2) Section 5.3. examines culinary practices in Mizo households which are shaped by a strong preference for simple, ingredient-centred cooking, supported by a mix of traditional knowledge and selective adoption of modern tools. Across the sample, boiling (53%) and frying (44.75%) are the primary cooking methods, with grilling and baking almost absent. A clear rural-urban contrast emerges: rural households overwhelmingly favour boiling (83%), sustaining dishes such as *bai* and *tlak*, while urban households lean more towards frying (74%), often combining both methods in a single dish to achieve flavour without excessive heaviness. Respondents describe boiling and light frying as a learned, almost instinctive routine, passed down from mothers and grandmothers rather than formally articulated, reflecting how culinary skill is embodied rather than verbalised. The emphasis on *freshness* is equally strong. Over 94% of households report cooking “always” or “most of the time” with fresh ingredients, drawing heavily on seasonal vegetables, leafy greens and home-grown produce. Ready-made or processed foods are frequently rejected on grounds of health, taste, and authenticity, with many respondents explicitly stating that they “absolutely do not eat readymade foods.” At the same time, recipe-based cooking remains marginal: nearly two-thirds (64.25%) never use written or online recipes. Urban households, especially in Aizawl, show slightly higher engagement with YouTube and social media recipes, but even

there, recipes function as occasional aids for unfamiliar dishes rather than everyday guides. Everyday cooking is still anchored in memory, observation, and “whatever my mother taught me.” Seasoning practices highlight both continuity and change. Ajinomoto is widely used, with 74% of households reporting “always” using it, particularly in rural areas (85.5%). Many rural respondents describe it as “a must” and add it to almost all dishes, indicating that it has become part of the expected flavour profile of Mizo food. Urban households are more ambivalent: some avoid Ajinomoto due to health concerns or replace it with alternatives like chicken powder, signalling a slowly emerging negotiation between taste, habit and health-awareness. This tension illustrates how flavour preferences are tightly bound to memory and social endorsement, even as new dietary ideas circulate. In terms of tools and vessels, Mizo kitchens combine practicality with gradual modernisation. Aluminium and stainless-steel pots (*bel/dekchi*), pressure cookers and metal frying pans form the basic equipment everywhere, with pressure cookers widely used for rice and pots preferred for traditional stews and boiled dishes. Rural homes rely more on traditional cookware and manual tools, while urban homes are more likely to incorporate non-stick pans and branded cookware. Electrical appliances especially rice cookers, microwaves, blenders are used mainly in urban areas but remain supplemental rather than central; many households still prefer the taste and feel of stove-cooked food and emphasise freshly cooked meals over reheated leftovers. Finally, tableware shows a layering of old and new: banana leaves survive mainly in special or symbolic contexts, while everyday meals are now served on stainless steel, melamine, ceramic and branded plastic sets, with “special” plates reserved for guests. Overall, culinary practices in Mizo households reveal a kitchen that is modernising at the edges but remains firmly grounded in fresh ingredients, boiled and lightly fried dishes, inherited know-how and culturally shaped ideas of “proper” taste.

- 3) Section 5.4 looks at the food norms, rituals and its cultural meaning. In Mizo households, food is governed by strong social norms and ritual practices that turn everyday meals into meaningful cultural acts. Pre-meal rituals are widespread: 77.25% of households observe some form of ritual, with

particularly high participation in Aizawl Urban and Rural. The core practice is *chhung-inkhawm*, a family devotional gathering before eating that usually includes prayer, Bible reading, brief reflection, and sometimes gentle correction or advice. Leadership often rotates among family members, making it both a religious and educational space where responsibility, confidence, and moral orientation are cultivated. Through this, the family meal is framed as an act of unity, gratitude, and shared identity rather than a purely practical routine. Mealtimes function as a social institution where communication, instruction, and emotional bonding are concentrated. Conversations during meals are used to review the day, teach manners and values, plan responsibilities, and share worries or humour. Hierarchy is present but increasingly soft. While elders or fathers may once have been served first as a sign of respect, most households now emphasise eating together without a fixed serving order. Respect is instead expressed through praying together, waiting until everyone is seated, and allowing elders to guide conversations. This marks a shift from rigid patriarchal ordering toward more egalitarian, relational forms of respect, showing how traditional authority adapts to contemporary family life. Dog-meat consumption illustrates a food norm in transition. Historically accepted by many especially older men and rural households as ordinary meat linked to hunting memories, masculinity, strength, and even medicinal value, it is now increasingly contested. Younger, urban respondents and women more often view dogs as companions rather than livestock, influenced by pet culture, global media, and animal-welfare sensibilities. Clear moral boundaries exist: even those who consume dog meat consider it inappropriate near church spaces or at church events, reflecting Christian ethical influence. Overall, food norms and rituals in Mizoram remain powerful organisers of domestic life, but they are also sites of negotiation where generational change, urbanisation, and religious values reshape what is considered proper, respectful, or acceptable to eat.

- 4) Section 5.5. delves into the food preservation techniques adopted by Mizo Household. Food preservation in Mizo households sits at a crossroads between rich indigenous knowledge and modern appliance-based methods. Historically, families relied on fermenting, drying and smoking to keep food

through periods of scarcity and to build the characteristic flavours of Mizo cuisine. Practices such as *sa-um* (fermented pig fat), *bekang-um* (fermented soybean), *chhi-um* (fermented sesame), ash filtrate (*chingal*), dried roselle and leafy greens, smoked meats (*sarep*), fermented crabs and mustard, and sun-dried roots like *telhawng* show how households used fire, bamboo, leaves and ash not only to store food but to create distinctive tastes that still define “traditional” Mizo food. Survey data, however, show these older techniques are now used more selectively. Drying is widely known but often occasional or rare, with over a third of households never using it. Fermentation is strongly maintained in Aizawl Urban about half of households’ ferment regularly yet is weaker in Kolasib (urban and rural) and more seasonal or situational in Aizawl Rural. Smoking remains central in Aizawl Rural, where most households still smoke meat and vegetables at varying frequencies, but in towns it has shifted from an everyday necessity to an occasional, flavour-driven practice. Overall, traditional methods are no longer the main backbone of preservation, but they persist for specific items (smoked meat, fermented pork fat, dried roselle, bamboo shoots) and for maintaining valued flavours and identities. Modern technologies now structure most urban food storage. Refrigeration is the dominant method in Aizawl and Kolasib Urban, with the majority of households using fridges daily to keep vegetables, meat, leftovers, and even traditional condiments like fermented chilli. Freezing is less universal but clearly urban, used mainly for meat, milk, bamboo shoots and other high-value or seasonal foods; in rural areas more than two-thirds of households never freeze food. Pickling emerges as the weakest of all methods: over half of all households never pickle, and where it survives especially in Aizawl Urban it is tied to specific ingredients such as chilli, bitter gourd or bamboo shoots, usually for taste or seasonal use rather than long-term storage. Taken together, the findings depict a preservation system in transition rather than rupture. Rural-urban and Kolasib-Aizawl contrasts show that infrastructure alone does not dictate practice: taste, habit and generational attitudes also shape choices. Aizawl Urban demonstrates how intensive refrigeration can coexist with active fermentation, while Aizawl Rural shows continuing reliance on smoking despite limited appliance use. Overall, Mizo

households combine old and new methods in layered ways using fridges and freezers for convenience and thrift, while retaining selected traditional techniques for their sensory and cultural value. Preservation today is thus a site where Mizos negotiate convenience, economy, health and cultural memory in everyday decisions about how food is stored and made to last.

- 5) Section 5.6 explores health conscious eating and food choices in Mizo household. Health-conscious eating in Mizo households is emerging, but uneven and largely reactive rather than a stable lifestyle. Many respondents, especially in rural areas, feel they already eat “healthy” because their diets rely on home-grown vegetables, simple cooking and minimal processed food, so they see little need to change. In urban areas, particularly Aizawl, health is interpreted more through a medicalised lens: families report cutting down on oil, sugar, meat or packet snacks after being advised by doctors or when conditions like hypertension and diabetes appear. Dietary change is therefore most often triggered by illness rather than prevention. Even where people “know” that certain foods are unhealthy, work pressure, convenience and ingrained habits mean that everyday choices are still guided more by routine, taste and time than by formal nutritional knowledge. Food choice is strongly anchored in fresh, local produce. More than four-fifths of all households regularly choose locally grown “organic” food, and not a single respondent said they never prefer local produce. Rural families are particularly committed to food from their own fields or nearby farmers, while urban households also express strong trust in local vegetables and meat sold through familiar channels. Field narratives challenge the outsider assumption that Mizos live mainly on smoked or fermented foods: respondents repeatedly stressed that these are backup or seasonal options, used when fresh vegetables are unavailable, not every day favourites. Fresh food is the cultural default and moral ideal. Economic realities run alongside this preference. Almost nine in ten households say that budgeting for meals is important, making cost a central structuring force in what is cooked and how often preferred items are purchased. For poorer or rural families, budgeting is tied directly to survival (“to keep us alive”), while urban families frame it as both money management and a way to maintain health within their means. This links closely with

purchasing behaviour: the single strongest factor when buying food is availability (over half of all respondents), followed by cost especially in rural areas while taste and personal likes are more prominent in urban households. Health and nutrition value are mentioned, but only by a small minority, showing that abstract health concerns have not yet displaced the pragmatic logics of “what is there” and “what we can afford.” When it comes to the final decision about what to eat, the most powerful determinant is hunger itself (44.25% overall, and especially high in urban areas), followed by convenience in rural regions, where people cook what can be prepared quickly with ingredients at hand. Sensory appeal and mood matter for some, particularly younger urban respondents, but factors such as weight control or “natural content” remain marginal. Underneath these patterns lies a deeper cultural memory: older generations who lived through famine years and *Rambuai* carry a persistent fear of scarcity, which helps explain why households often cook extra rice and treat leftovers as a form of security rather than waste. Taken together, the section shows that Mizo food behaviour is shaped by a layered mix of tradition, fresh-food preference, economic constraint and remembered hunger, with health consciousness slowly being added into the decision-making process but not yet fully guiding it.

- 6) Section 5.7 examines the Gendered Patterns in Domestic Food Responsibilities. Section 5.7 shows that food work in Mizo households is strongly gendered, with women occupying the centre of almost every stage of domestic food responsibility. Across all four regions, mothers are the primary grocery buyers (82.25%) and main decision-makers about what is purchased (81.5%), placing them in charge of both the physical and cognitive work of provisioning. They also lead meal planning, with grandmothers and, in some urban homes, daughters providing support when mothers are employed or overstretched. Cooking follows the same pattern: over half of all households identify mothers as the main cooks, with daughters as the second largest group. In Aizawl Urban, paid maids frequently take over day-to-day cooking and cleaning, yet this outsourced labour remains female and does not fundamentally shift expectations of men’s responsibilities. Men, including fathers and sons, cook only occasionally or in exceptional situations (illness,

absence of women), and their contribution is framed as “help” rather than obligation. Cleaning-related tasks further reinforce this feminised division of labour. Table clearing and dishwashing are done mainly by mothers and daughters, with sons playing a more visible but still secondary role in some rural households. Grandparents participate modestly, especially grandmothers in rural areas, pointing to an intergenerational female chain of domestic work. Urban households show more experimentation with shared or rotational systems described in terms of “fairness,” “teamwork,” and avoiding resentment but even here the kitchen is still symbolically marked as women’s space, and if helpers or maids are absent, responsibility reverts to women. Consumption patterns are also gendered, men are overwhelmingly identified as the heavier meat eaters (60% overall, 70% in rural areas), reflecting enduring links between meat, masculinity, labour strength, and entitlement, while women often eat smaller portions or less desirable cuts. Altogether, the section reveals that although urbanisation, paid domestic help, and changing work routines are nudging some households toward shared practices, domestic food responsibilities in Mizoram remain one of the most stable sites where femininity, care, and household authority are enacted and reproduced.

The next chapter builds on these findings by exploring how food relates to identity construction and processes of intercultural adaptation.

CHAPTER VI

IDENTITY AND INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION ISSUES

- 6.1 Introduction**
- 6.2 Traditional Food as a Cultural Symbol**
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CHAPTER VI

IDENTITY AND INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION ISSUES

6.1 Introduction

Food plays a critical role in the formation and expression of identity in everyday life. Beyond providing sustenance, it serves as a medium through which individuals articulate cultural affiliation, personal values, and a sense of social belonging. As Cohen (2025) observes, *food identity* refers to the ways in which dietary practices shape both self-perception and collective identity. Intercultural understanding, in this sense, requires not only recognition and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences but also critical reflection on one's own cultural background in relation to others. Cultural identities and behaviours are dynamic, constantly reshaped by shifting power dynamics, social contexts, and lived experiences (Habecon, 2014).

Within this framework, Mizo food practices emerge as a space where cultural identity is both preserved and renegotiated in response to outside influences. These negotiations reveal the continuous interplay between tradition and change in everyday family life. Food thus becomes an essential site where innovation and continuity coexist. In Mizoram, culinary customs from cooking methods to daily meals and ceremonial feasts embody cultural values while simultaneously absorbing external influences. Such evolving practices illustrate how individuals express, question, and reinterpret their identities in response to wider social and cultural transformations.

This chapter explores how Mizo eating practices function as both markers of identity and arenas of intercultural adaptation. It examines the role of local ingredients, naming of dishes, and the entire cycle of production to consumption in shaping understandings of "Mizo cuisine." At the same time, it considers how cooking styles, mealtime routines, and taste preferences in both rural and urban households are being reshaped by global food cultures. While these changes may appear purely gastronomic, they represent deeper cultural negotiations that address questions of continuity, adaptation, and transformation in Mizo society.

The following thematic sections provide a framework for investigating these dynamics, 1) Traditional Food as a Cultural Symbol, 2) Food As a Cultural Language, 3) Food Heritage Transmission, 4) Intercultural Adaption, 5) Food As Fashion Commodity, 6) The Limits On Domestic Foodways.

Together, these sections establish a comprehensive framework for examining how food in Mizo households simultaneously expresses cultural identity and negotiates intercultural adaptation. The chapter begins by exploring how traditional and global food preferences interact, and how such choices shape the symbolic meanings and practices of everyday food consumption.

6.2 Traditional Food as a Cultural Symbol

Traditional food as a cultural symbol foregrounds the dish itself, the final, tangible expression of culinary practice. More than nourishment, traditional food operates as a powerful non-verbal medium that embodies and communicates collective identity, memory, values, and social order. It functions as a living connection to the past while simultaneously serving as an active cultural marker in the present.

Food preferences are deeply embedded in cultural identity, acting as symbolic expressions of individuals' belonging to a specific social or ethnic group. Choosing foods that are culturally significant enhances one's sense of identity and community, as noted by Cantarero et al. (2013). Just as food serves as a bridge between tradition and modern lifestyle, it also serves as a marker of cultural heritage (Owen Jones, 2007). Food preferences show how people and communities negotiate the space between cultural continuity and change, whether they are influenced by outside factors or have their roots in long-standing traditions.

Dietary decisions are powerful markers of identity in the Mizo context exposing both underlying cultural values and new adaptation patterns. Food plays a crucial role in the daily enactment of cultural belonging, as evidenced by the choices made by individuals and families regarding what to eat and how they evaluate those choices in terms of tradition versus modernity. Rather than being neutral, these choices often reveal something about the person's place in changing social and cultural environments.

This section looks at the existence of traditional food in Mizo households. It looks at how these preferences are affecting the cultures. By looking at these, we can see how Mizo foodways work as more than just food. They are also living symbols of cultural identity and social alignment.

Table 6.1. Food as a marker of Mizo cultural identity

Food as marker	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	98	93	62	91	160 (80)	184 (92)	344 (86)
No	2	7	38	9	40 (20)	16 (8)	56 (14)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data in Table 6.1 show a strong agreement across most regions that food acts as a marker of Mizo cultural identity, with 86 percent showing strong agreement. The highest affirmation in Kolasib Urban (98%), followed by Kolasib Rural (93%) and Aizawl Rural (91%). Although Aizawl Urban reflects a comparatively lower response (62%), the overall pattern demonstrates that food continues to hold symbolic meaning as an identity anchor across Mizoram. What becomes clear, however, is that the meaning of food as identity differs in intensity and form depending on geographical location, lifestyle, and generational influence. Where smaller towns and rural areas exhibit a deep-rooted, lived connection to traditional food practices, metropolitan respondents show signs of shifting relationships shaped by modernity, global exposure, and changing food environments.

When asked to name specific food items they associate with Mizo culture, a large majority across the dataset listed distinctly traditional dishes. Respondents repeatedly referred to *bai* (vegetable stew), *bekang* (fermented soyabean), *sa-um* (fermented pork fat), *vawksa rep* (smoked pork), *sawhchiar* (rice porridge), *maian bai*, *sachek*, *rawtuai/mautuai* (bamboo shoot) and *tlak* (boiled greens) as foods that define Mizoness. These dishes serve not only as everyday meals but as culturally embedded symbols of belonging, memory, and shared heritage. One respondent stated,

“Bai, bekang, and rep smell like home. I feel Mizo when I eat them.”

Another added,

“When I taste traditional Mizo bai or bekang, it reminds me of who we are, because it is not just food...we grew up with it.”

Such expressions reveal how these foods act as cultural signifiers that evoke identity through taste, smell, memory, and emotional attachment.

Yet, the most striking insight comes from rural voices, where identity is not only linked to the dish itself but to the land from which the ingredients are taken. While many urban respondents emphasised the prepared foods, rural respondents spoke of the process, not just the product. For them, food begins in the field and not in the kitchen. They described identity not as something located in a name-able recipe, but in the soils where edible leaves, roots, and vegetables are cultivated or inherited through generations. Respondents from rural areas consistently framed their identity in relation to *the field, the land*, the material and ancestral landscape from which their daily sustenance originates. In these contexts, food as identity is inseparable from labour, land, memory, and ecological knowledge.

As one Aizawl Rural respondent expressed in detail,

“When we say Mizo food, it is not only bai or sa-um or be kang. For us, Mizo food starts from the field...what grows there, what the land gives us. When we go to the jhum land, we pick leaves, wild vegetables, herbs, bamboo shoots. That is where our food begins. The land reminds us who we are. Even before cooking, when we touch the soil, collect the vegetables, wash them, and prepare them, we already feel connected to our culture. The taste of bai or boiled vegetables is important, yes, but more important is where it comes from....our own land. So, for us, food identity is not only the dish name, it is the whole journey of food from the earth to the plate.”

This sentiment was echoed repeatedly in rural testimonies, where identity is expressed as a process rather than a single object. Traditional food, therefore, functions not simply as a culinary marker but as a cultural continuum, linking ancestral labour, environmental knowledge, seasonal cycle and daily consumption. While other cultures may anchor identity primarily in iconic dishes or culinary labels, Mizo food identity appears more deeply tied to place, to the land that produces the food and the labour processes that sustain life.

This pattern became clear in repeated statements that emphasised land over product. One rural respondent explained,

“What makes us Mizo is not the food on the plate, but the land that gives it. The field is our identity.”

Another described the process in terms of belonging and continuity,

“We are connected to whatever we grow. . . . pumpkin leaves, mustard leaves, cowpea leaves, wild vegetables, anything that comes from our land and from our work.”

These responses suggest that for many, the meaning of Mizo food identity rests not only in traditional recipes but in the relationship between people, land, and labour. Such reflections also reveal that traditional Mizo food culture is process-based rather than solely dish-based. The significance lies in the cycle, from planting, tending, harvesting, preparing, eating and in the memories and values embedded in that cycle. As one respondent articulated,

“When we cook bai from our own field, it is not just a meal. It reminds us of our parents, our grandparents, our village.”

Another explained,

“Even if the dish is simple, if it comes from our land and is cooked in our way, then it is Mizo.”

Urban respondents, while more likely to name specific dishes, echoed similar emotional dimensions. Some described traditional foods as symbols of comfort, belonging, and home, especially when eaten outside Mizoram or in fast-paced urban settings. One respondent stated,

“Even when we live in the city, the taste of bai or bawl immediately reminds us of where we come from.”

Another added,

“Bai, simple but honest...that is what makes us Mizo.”

Even among respondents from Aizawl Urban where modern food systems introduce global cuisines, the emotional connection remains intact. One respondent noted,

“We now eat many different foods, but even just the smell of vawksa rep, just the smell alone wakes up something inside us. . . we remember how our grandparents would prepare

such dishes for us on special occasions, it makes us recall even grandpa's home and village."

What becomes clear across both rural and urban testimonies is that food identity in Mizo culture is not merely a matter of taste, nor is it reducible to iconic dishes in isolation. Rather, food becomes a marker of identity because it embodies history, belonging, and continuity. The values embedded in simplicity, freshness, cultivation, boiling rather than frying, and the use of wild and seasonal plants reflect older worldviews shaped by agrarian life, collective memory, and ecological knowledge. In this way, Mizo food functions not only as a cultural symbol but as a lived archive, one carried through land, labour, preparation, and memory. Traditional food operates as one of the most enduring cultural symbols among the Mizo people. However, the cultural meaning is layered. Even though identity lies in the finished dish, Identity is also tied to the journey of food, especially in rural households, the identity lies in the field, the soil, the cultivation and the lived relationship with land. Thus, Food becomes a cultural marker not simply because it is eaten, but because it embodies a history of place, labour, memory, and belonging. In Mizoram, to say that food is identity is to acknowledge that identity is rooted not on the plate alone, but in the entire life cycle of food i.e. from the land that produces it to the communal act of consuming it.

Table 6.2. Family taste preferences

Taste preferences	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Traditional	75	85	61	92	136 (68)	177 (88.5)	313 (78.25)
Western	2	2	8	1	10 (5)	3 (1.5)	13 (3.25)
Indian	2	6	12	6	14 (7)	12 (6)	26 (6.5)
Mix of cuisines	21	7	19	1	40 (20)	8 (4)	48 (12)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.2 shows that 78.25% of all respondents across the four study regions report that their household primarily prefers traditional Mizo cuisine, demonstrating that traditional taste continues to dominate the culinary landscape of Mizo families. Only 6.5% favour Indian food, 3.25% prefer Western cuisines, and 12% enjoy a mix of

multiple food cultures suggesting that external culinary influences remain secondary rather than foundational to household meals.

When the total figures are disaggregated, the urban-rural contrast becomes clearer. In urban areas, 68% of respondents reported traditional food as their main preference, while 20% preferred mixed food habits, reflecting a growing trend toward hybrid taste patterns. Urban respondents also showed higher tendencies toward Indian (7%) and Western (5%) cuisines, aligning with broader themes of increased access, exposure, and experimentation among city households.

In rural households, however, the dominance of traditional cuisine is even more pronounced, with 88.5% identifying traditional food as their primary preference. In these regions, Indian cuisine accounts for only 6%, Western food 1.5%, and mixed cuisines just 8%. These patterns reflect strong cultural continuity and limited penetration of global or national culinary influences in rural contexts.

A comparison of both spheres suggests that while urban areas are increasingly experimenting with diverse cuisines likely due to exposure to cafés, online recipes, food delivery, and migration, rural spaces continue to preserve traditional culinary boundaries with remarkable stability. The rural preference is not just a matter of habit or resource availability. It functions as a cultural reaffirmation of belonging, memory, and identity.

Across all regions, traditional taste is often described not merely as a preference but as a condition of comfort, habit, and emotional familiarity. As one respondent expressed,

“What we are accustomed to eating fits our palate”
(Respondent 264).

Another elaborated,

“Traditional food is easier to digest and feels right”
(Respondent 112),

suggesting that the sensory memory of taste is deeply connected to embodied experience. Many respondents linked traditional food with upbringing and generational continuity,

“What has been eaten habitually since childhood is likely being preferred even into adulthood” (Respondent 89).

These voices illustrate how familiarity evolves into cultural expectation and later becomes identity.

Yet, even among those who enjoy external cuisines, traditional food remains central.

Respondent 214 articulated this layered identity clearly,

“Even if we try other foods such as pasta, noodles, masala or anything trendy, we always come back to our own food. We may enjoy those foods for taste or excitement, but in the end, it is only rice with bai that truly satisfies us. When we eat other foods, we feel full, but not fulfilled. It is only when we eat our own food that the body feels settled and the heart feels content. It feels like home. We grew up with this taste, and no matter how much we explore new food, our appetite returns to what we are rooted in. Bai and rice are not just everyday meals... they are what make us Mizo.”

This sentiment appears repeatedly in the data, suggesting that non-traditional cuisines serve as occasional novelty rather than identity-forming practice.

In rural areas, the tone differs. Rather than navigating between options, respondents framed traditional taste as inherent and morally correct. One respondent declared,

“Mizo side dishes, truly are the best...not just because they taste good, but because they feel right. When we eat our own food, especially the boiled dishes made from fresh vegetables, herbs, and saum, there is a sense of comfort and familiarity that other cuisines cannot give. Maybe other foods are tasty for a moment, but when hunger returns, we long for our own flavours, the simple way our mothers and grandmothers have cooked for generations. That is why for us, nothing compares to Mizo side dishes...they are part of who we are.”
(Respondent 23).

Here, preference is not simply aesthetic, it holds cultural weight and reflects values such as simplicity, purity, and rootedness.

Interestingly, even when respondents acknowledged outside dishes, they framed them as temporary or external to cultural identity. One rural participant said,

“We may try other foods sometimes, things like noodles, pasta, pizza, snacks or whatever but those foods are never the ones we depend on. They are just for change, something to enjoy once in a while when we feel like having a different taste. But they are not the food we live on. They don’t satisfy us in the way our real Mizo food does. For us, food means rice with bai, sa-um bawl, boiled vegetables, the kind of food we grew up eating, the food our parents and grandparents cooked every day. Those foods fill the stomach and also give comfort, strength, and a feeling that we are home. When I eat traditional food, I feel complete, and I know who I am. So yes, we may try other things occasionally, but those are only for variety, not something that replaces what we truly consider our food for life.”

suggesting that culinary identity is not easily altered by exposure.

Traditional cuisine remains the dominant centre of identity, especially in rural households, urban zones are increasingly engaging in hybrid culinary practices. These patterns reflect not a loss of cultural meaning, but rather a negotiation between continuity and experimentation, a cultural adaptation process rather than displacement.

Food, therefore, emerges not merely as a matter of taste but as a site where identity, belonging, memory, and change intersect. Traditional cuisine continues to serve as an anchor, while external culinary influences function as extensions of curiosity and modern experience, particularly among younger and urban households.

Traditional Food as Everyday Cultural Preservation: To fully understand how traditional food practices persist in everyday life, it is important to clarify the meaning and cultural function of *eirawngbawl*, a term that carries far more meaning than its surface translation. Although on the simplest level *eirawngbawl* may refer to “preparing food,” its social meaning extends into the realm of meal-making, routine and cultural responsibility. In everyday language, *eirawngbawl* is used to describe the act of preparing a full household meal, particularly the two most important meals of the Mizo day i.e. tukthuan (the morning meal) and *Zanriah* (the evening dinner). Thus, when Mizo says “*Ka haw hma a ngai, eirawngbawl ka ngai a*” (“I have to go home

early, I have to prepare meal for my family”), they are not merely expressing the need to cook, they are signalling the responsibility of preparing a proper, complete meal for the household.

This stands in meaningful contrast to the term *eitur siam*, which simply means “to make food,” often referring to lighter, quicker, or non-traditional dishes such as noodles, bread-based snacks, or experimental recipes influenced by outside cuisine. Unlike *eirawngbawl*, *eitur siam* does not carry cultural weight, moral expectation, or the obligation of feeding the family in the traditional sense. One respondent from Aizawl Urban explained this distinction vividly,

“If I fry noodles or make pasta, that is not cooking in the real sense... that is just eitur siam. But when I say I need to eirawngbawl, it means I am preparing rice, vegetables, maybe bai, and everything needed for the meal. Eirawngbawl is what feeds the home.”

Through this linguistic difference, the Mizo worldview reveals itself i.e. food becomes culturally significant not only in what is eaten but in how it is prepared, for whom, and under what expectation. The act of *eirawngbawl* reflects patience, intention, and cultural continuity, a reminder that tradition is preserved not only in ceremonial dishes, but in ordinary cooking routines repeated day after day.

In rural areas especially, the meaning of *eirawngbawl* extends further, linking food preparation to agricultural practice, seasonal availability and intergenerational knowledge. An elderly respondent from Aizawl Rural expressed this beautifully,

“Eirawngbawl begins from the field....first we grow the vegetables, then we bring them home, then we cook them slowly. It is not just food, it is the work of our hands and the memory of our parents.”

Even younger respondents in urban spaces, despite exposure to modern cuisines and kitchen shortcuts, acknowledged the emotional and cultural resonance of the term. As one participant from Kolasib Urban shared,

“We may enjoy new foods, but the feeling of a real meal only comes when we do eirawngbawl. It reminds us that we are still Mizo.”

Thus, *eirawngbawl* is not merely a technique, it is a cultural act aiding in the preservation of shared identity that differentiates everyday nourishment from meaningful, communal eating. It is here, in the seemingly ordinary daily repetition of boiling, preparing, and serving rice and side dishes, that Mizo culinary heritage continues to survive quietly but powerfully.

Traditional Food in Ritual and Celebration: Traditional food remains one of the most enduring cultural markers in Mizo society, particularly during ritual and festive occasions where the meanings attached to food extend far beyond taste or nourishment. Within these contexts, traditional dishes are not merely consumed, they are displayed, narrated, and reaffirmed as cultural symbols.

Table 6.3. Traditional meals on festive occasions

Festive meals	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Everytime	76	63	80	87	156 (78)	150 (75)	306 (76.5)
Often	14	32	14	10	28 (14)	42 (21)	70 (17.5)
Occasionally	6	5	3	3	9 (4.5)	8 (4)	17 (4.25)
Rarely	4	0	3	0	7 (3.5)	0	7 (1.75)
Never	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.3 provides insight into how often traditional Mizo meals are incorporated during festive occasions and collective celebrations such as Christmas, Chapchar Kut, birthdays, church feasts, weddings, and community gatherings. The overall pattern reveals strong cultural continuity: out of 400 households, 306 respondents reported that traditional meals were served every time a festive occasion occurred, while an additional 70 indicated that they did so often. This means that 94% of households across Mizoram continue to serve traditional food during festive events, highlighting that festivities remain one of the strongest cultural spaces where traditional cuisine maintains symbolic value and ritual authority.

A minimal portion (17 respondents) reported serving traditional dishes only occasionally, and just 7 respondents cited doing so rarely. Notably, no respondent across the four regions selected “never,” reinforcing the idea that celebrations in Mizoram are not culturally complete without traditional food. The absence of a

“never” category is significant as it illustrates that even households who seldom prepare traditional dishes in everyday routines still return to them during ritual and celebratory contexts, where cultural meaning becomes publicly expressed and reaffirmed.

In urban settings, a large majority continue to incorporate traditional meals during festive moments. 156 respondents in urban households reported that they prepare traditional meals every time, and another 28 said often. Together, this indicates that urban cultural practice remains deeply tied to traditional food symbolism, even if the everyday pattern reflects more hybrid or convenient meal choices.

The presence of respondents who selected occasionally (9) or rarely (7) suggests that urban settings are slowly witnessing shifts driven by lifestyle pace, convenience foods, and exposure to global cuisines. However, because no respondent selected “never,” it appears that traditional dishes retain what anthropologists term a ritual indispensability, a food category that cannot be removed from ceremonial meaning without socially disrupting the event’s cultural legitimacy.

Rural households show slightly stronger adherence, 150 respondents said they serve traditional foods every time, and 42 said often. This suggests that in rural Mizoram, traditional meals are not only performed ritualistically but continue to function as normative practice embedded in collective identity and rhythm of life. The very low numbers under occasional (8) and zero under rarely confirm that festive food practices remain largely unchanged from inherited cultural patterns.

Where urban festival cooking is increasingly negotiated between traditional and outside influences, rural festival cooking reflects continuity, obligation, and a sense of rootedness in ancestral practice, what many respondents described as “ways passed down.”

Urban families describe incorporating restaurant food, pan-Indian dishes, fast food, or bakery items alongside traditional staples due to convenience, diverse taste preferences, and the influence of children and youth culture. Yet even within this hybrid context, the symbolic position of traditional cuisine persists.

As one Aizawl urban respondent explained with a hint of practicality and sentiment,

“Food from outside can make the celebration easier, but without our own dish without bai or bawl, the celebration feels unfinished. It is not about rejecting other food. It is

because one traditional dish is enough to remind us where we come from.”

Meanwhile, another rural participant emphasised the collective element of preparation,

“Preparing food for celebrations is something the whole family takes part in...cutting vegetables, washing meat, preparing rice. The work itself becomes part of the celebration.”

Such reflections resonate with anthropological understandings of ritual food as embodied practice, where meaning is located not only in ingredients but in labour, seasonality, preparation sequences, and communal participation. Food becomes ritual not only when served, but when made.

Festive contexts remain culturally protected spaces in which traditional foods are expected and symbolically necessary. As one participant from Aizawl Rural stated,

“When it is festival time, it cannot be something random. We always prepare our own food because that is when everyone gathers, and it reminds us that we are still Mizo...even if every day we eat differently.”

This narrative demonstrates how festive food functions not merely as a meal, but as a moment of cultural self-recognition and reaffirmation. The emphasis is not on taste alone, but on the social memory that festivals activate, belonging is performed materially through food.

Urban voices showed a negotiation rather than abandonment of meaning. A respondent from Aizawl Urban explained,

“We order food from outside for birthdays. But if it is a funeral or a big church event, then traditional food is cooked and everyone helps.”

This response shows a shifting hierarchy where personal or casual celebrations accept newer food trends, while collective, sacred, or public celebrations demand traditional forms. Even where lifestyles shift, cultural boundaries around appropriateness remain intact.

Another respondent expressed the role of festive food in intergenerational transmission saying,

“We may eat many kinds of food now, but cultural food must remain in celebrations so that the children do not forget.”

This statement reflects the growing awareness that cultural reproduction is now intentional rather than automatic. Festive cuisine is also perceived as a site of cultural transmission. As one participant emphasised,

“We may eat many kinds of food now, but cultural food must remain in celebrations so that the children do not forget.”

Aizawl Urban respondents presented a more hybrid approach to festive cooking, reflecting the influence of modernity without abandoning tradition. One respondent explained,

“During Christmas, we cook pork in our Mizo way, but at the same time we also order pizza for the children.” (Respondent 214)

This statement illustrates how urban families are negotiating between inherited culinary expectations and contemporary preferences shaped by exposure, convenience, and changing generational tastes. The inclusion of pizza specifically “for the children” highlights how globalised food choices are often introduced not as a rejection of tradition, but as an accommodation to younger family members whose food experiences are shaped by school, media, and city lifestyles. Yet the commitment to preparing pork “in our Mizo way” shows that the symbolic core of festive meals remains rooted in tradition. The quote embodies a layered form of cultural adaptation where modern dishes supplement, rather than displace, traditional festive food.

A similar negotiation is visible in another urban narrative,

“Now, many families add bakery items or fast food alongside our dishes, but we don’t abandon our traditional food completely.” (Respondent 37)

Here, the idea of adding rather than replacing signals an evolving but intentional cultural boundary. The respondent’s phrasing “we don’t abandon our traditional food completely” carries an implicit awareness of cultural vulnerability but also a firm stance of continuity. Fast food and bakery items function as symbols of convenience and cosmopolitan identity, yet their presence remains secondary. Traditional food occupies an irreplaceable cultural position, tied not only to taste but to memory,

propriety, and belonging. The language of *not abandoning* reflects conscious cultural maintenance i.e. a form of agency in navigating modern food landscapes.

In contrast, voices from rural settings reveal a very different tone, less negotiation and more assertion of continuity. One respondent stated firmly,

“In our village, it is expected that every celebration has traditional dishes. Without that, people feel it is not a proper event.” (Respondent 203)

Unlike the urban responses, this quote demonstrates a normative, almost moral expectation embedded in rural festive practice. The phrasing “*expected*” and “*not a proper event*” shows that traditional festive cooking holds ritual authority rather than being a matter of personal preference. Food here is not only symbolic but socially regulated, a shared standard against which belonging and cultural correctness are measured. This reflects a stronger adherence to traditional rhythms of life, where community cohesion, ancestral memory, and collective identity are enacted through food. The quote also suggests that festive meals are public cultural performances, where deviation may not only feel incomplete but socially inappropriate.

Thus, festive food in Mizoram operates as far more than a culinary preference. It is a living cultural institution. The statistical strength of continued practice, alongside the layered narratives of respondents, shows that traditional festive meals remain a deeply embedded symbolic system through which identity, memory, and belonging are enacted. Festive cooking serves as a mechanism of continuity linking present communities to ancestral knowledge, inherited taste, and collective memory. It functions simultaneously as ethical responsibility, sensory inheritance, and cultural performance, marking the threshold between everyday routine and ceremonial time. Although urban households reveal greater flexibility and adaptation in their everyday foodways, both urban and rural communities continue to anchor celebrations in traditional cuisine, demonstrating that meaning and not frequency governs cultural persistence. Rather than a sign of decline, the selective and context-specific preparation of traditional festive meals reflects the dynamic ways Mizo identity is being renegotiated and reaffirmed under modern pressures. In this sense, festive cuisine has evolved into a cultural anchor and maintain symbolic coherence in an increasingly globalised food landscape. Thus, even as cooking practices transform,

the ritual significance of traditional festive food endures as one of the most resilient expressions of what it means to be Mizo.

6.3. Food as a Cultural Language

The idea of food as a cultural language positions food practices as a system of non-verbal communication. Studying food as a cultural language understands food practices as a form of communication. Rather than viewing food solely for its nutritional value, this approach interprets the social meanings, historical contexts, and symbolic messages embedded in food-related behaviours. When examining the intangible dimensions of food culture, the focus shifts away from the ingredients or the final dish and instead centres on the knowledge systems, embodied skills, rituals, and shared social conventions that shape how food is prepared, served, and experienced. In this way, the section investigates how everyday food practices become sites of belonging, sentiment, and identity-making.

Table 6.4. Nostalgic Mizo food

Nostalgia	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	50	36	75	28	125 (62.5)	64 (32)	189 (47.25)
No	50	64	25	72	75 (37.5)	136 (68)	211 (52.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The emotional bond between Mizo cuisine and nostalgia is examined in this table, especially when people are living or travelling outside of Mizoram. In this sense, food serves as a storehouse of cultural identity, comfort, and memory in addition to being a source of nourishment. The total pattern reveals that out of 400 respondents, 189 people (47.25%) reported feeling nostalgic about Mizo traditional food, while 211 respondents (52.75%) stated they do not experience nostalgia when away from their home food environment. This suggests that while nostalgia is not universal, it remains a deeply meaningful sentiment for a significant number of individuals, particularly those whose everyday diet is shaped by cosmopolitan or hybrid food experiences. When comparing across urban and rural spaces, a clear divide emerges. Urban respondents showed a notably higher degree of nostalgia: 62.5% of urban respondents reported nostalgia, while only 37.5% did not. By contrast, among rural households,

only 32% reported nostalgia, with the majority 68% stating they do not experience such longing. These figures reflect not a lack of attachment in rural areas, but the continued everyday accessibility of traditional food making nostalgia unnecessary. In rural spaces, traditional dishes are not memories, they are daily reality.

Urban regions illustrate the strongest emotional intensity. Aizawl Urban presents the highest frequency, with 75% respondents reporting nostalgia, followed by Kolasib Urban at 50%. The findings imply that the more individuals interact with non-Mizo foods and global foodscapes, the more emotionally salient traditional cuisine becomes. Here, nostalgia emerges through contrast, what is absent becomes what is missed, and what is missed becomes emotionally magnified. Traditional food thus becomes a cultural anchor, something that stabilises identity when faced with unfamiliar environments.

Conversely, in rural households, nostalgia remains low not due to indifference, but because the cuisine is continuously lived, cooked, grown, and shared. In Aizawl Rural, only 28% expressed nostalgia, while in Kolasib Rural the figure rises modestly to 36%. In both cases, traditional food remains embedded as a habitual practice, not an emotional memory. This suggests that nostalgia is triggered not merely by preference, but by *absence, distance, and contrast with the unfamiliar*. In rural life where *bai, sa-um, chhum han*, wild greens, bamboo shoot-based dishes, and smoked pork are still regular components of meals, nostalgia does not emerge as a category of emotional experience.

A strong emotional relationship between food and cultural memory among Mizo households, particularly in urban regions is vividly expressed in respondents' voices, especially from urban areas where culinary displacement occurs more frequently. A recurrent theme is the longing for *bai*, one of the simplest yet most symbolically loaded Mizo dishes. Respondent 3 shared simply, "*Bai*," and Respondent 10 echoed, "*Mizo Bai*." Though brief, the repetition of this single dish across responses reveals how an everyday meal transforms into a memory-carrier once removed from routine access. *Mizo Bai* here is more than food, it is an emotional shorthand for home, kinship, familiarity, and comfort. The aroma of boiling pork with mustard leaves, the consistency of the broth and the shared act of eating mark *Bai* as an edible archive of memory.

Other respondents articulated nostalgia for seemingly ordinary foods that carry the sensorial intimacy of home cooking. Respondent 17 mentioned, “*Sawhchiar*,” while Respondent 81 recalled “*Vawksa chhum*,” and Respondent 85 stated, “*Bai*, any Mizo dish.” These responses reveal how nostalgia is often attached to foods linked with early life, caregiving, and routine domesticity. The taste and smell of such meals evoke memories of kitchens, households, and the everyday routine of communal eating.

Ingredients tied to ecological pattern also surfaced as emotional triggers. Respondent 70 remembered “Bamboo shoots, mustard leaves,” while Respondent 48 stated, “Climbing wattle, pumpkin leaves.” These foods are seasonal, locally grown, and often gathered or cultivated rather than purchased. Their memory, therefore, is not just gastronomic, it represents the landscape, agriculture, and embodied labour associated with rural domestic life. In this way, nostalgia becomes tied to a geography of belonging i.e. the fields, forests, and terrains where these plants grow.

Particularly strong expressions of identity emerged around *bawl*. Respondent 5 stated,

“Fermented pork fat, sa-um is highly place-specific and rarely found outside Mizoram. Its smell is pungent, its flavour distinct, and its preparation culturally specific. Because of this, it becomes a sensory boundary marker, something that signals Mizo-ness through distinctive taste and smell that cannot be replicated elsewhere.”

Similarly, smoked and preserved meats hold emotional value. Respondent 157 wrote, “*Smoked pork*,” and Respondent 229 repeated, “*Smoked pork*.” Smoking meat is not just a cooking process, it is a practice rooted in preservation, seasonality, and tradition. The smoky aroma is tied to kitchens with hearths, winter months, and communal gatherings. Thus, these foods operate as carriers of memory shaped by smell, texture, and embodied familiarity.

The emotional depth of nostalgia was perhaps expressed by Respondent 291, who stated,

“Any type of Mizo Bai has held a special place in my heart. As there is no greater vessel for nostalgia than the smell and tastes of the past.”

This statement encapsulates the sensory basis of memory. Smell and taste, unlike visual memory, bypass logical processing and evoke emotional recall instantly. In this sense, food acts as an involuntary trigger of belonging, resurfacing memories tied to place, people, and identity.

In contrast, many rural respondents expressed little nostalgia, not because food lacks meaning, but because it remains continuously present. Respondent 21 stated,

“I haven’t been outside Mizoram,”

For them, *Bai*, smoked pork, leafy greens, and seasonal vegetables are not distant memories. They are part of daily life, uninterrupted and unromanticised. This aligns with the significantly lower nostalgia rates in rural areas. Here, food is understood through continuity rather than longing, it is lived, not remembered.

Thus, in urban contexts, nostalgia intensifies because food becomes a site of emotional attachment when absent. Traditional dishes gain symbolic weight and act as anchors of identity amid cosmopolitan influence and changing food habits. In rural contexts, traditional food remains accessible and habitual, embedded within ecological cycles, household labour, and community practice. Because it is ever-present, it does not require longing. The statistical findings and respondents’ narratives reveal that Mizo food functions simultaneously as everyday sustenance and an emotional archive. When present, it sustains daily life and cultural continuity. When absent, it becomes a powerful channel for memory, belonging, and cultural identity. Nostalgia for Mizo cuisine is thus shaped by distance, sensory memory, and exposure to cultural difference transforming *bai* (stew), smoked pork, fermented flavours, and seasonal vegetables into more than meals, they become edible expressions of who one is, where one comes from, and what one remembers.

Table 6.5. Meat as main dish on Sundays

Meat on Sundays	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	49	34	69	62	118 (59)	96 (48)	214 (53.5)
No	51	66	31	38	82 (41)	104 (52)	186 (46.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

This table explores the enduring Mizo practice of designating meat as the primary dish on Sundays, a tradition deeply rooted in historical context and shaped by religious, cultural, and socio-economic transformations. The custom draws from a time when meat was not frequently available, often purchased only once a week, particularly on Saturdays from local markets. Sunday, already a sacred day within the Christian calendar became associated with shared leisure, worship, kinship gatherings, and, symbolically, a richer meal. Meat therefore became intertwined with ideas of blessing, celebration, family unity, and community life.

The statistical patterns indicate that this practice continues, although the intensity varies across regions. Aizawl Urban shows the highest continuation, with 69% reporting that meat is served as the main dish every Sunday. This persistence reflects both ease of access through established markets and continued alignment with cultural expectations. Similarly, 62% in Aizawl Rural maintain the practice, revealing that both tradition and religious value continue to shape what constitutes a “proper” Sunday meal.

In Kolasib Urban, the response is nearly halved (49% yes vs. 51% no), suggesting that the tradition is present but subject to negotiation which is likely influenced by fluctuating household income, shifting consumption patterns, and lifestyle changes. Kolasib Rural reports the lowest adherence (34%), which may be linked to economic limitations, availability of livestock, broader acceptance of vegetable-based alternatives, or evolving dietary priorities such as health concerns. These variations do not indicate cultural abandonment, but rather reflect the interplay between tradition, practicality, accessibility, and change.

For many households, Sunday meat consumption is not merely habitual, it is ritualised. Serving meat marks the threshold between the ordinary and the sacred. Preparations are often more intentional and elaborate on Sundays, and the meal becomes a site for reinforcing spiritual identity and family intimacy. Historically, meat symbolised privilege and celebration. But today, it continues to embody gratitude, abundance and tradition.

The ethnographic responses mirror the pattern revealed in the numbers. A recurring theme is a sense of obligation rooted in custom. Respondent 12 stated simply,

“We usually consume pork on Sundays because it’s the custom/tradition.”

Several responses captured the emotional tone attached to the practice. Respondent 62 expressed,

“It doesn’t feel like Sunday without meat on the dining table.”

In Aizawl Rural, Respondent 337 added,

“Eating boiled pork on Sundays brings out the true spirit of the day.”

These responses position meat as a symbolic and cultural signifier rather than just a dietary preference.

In Aizawl Urban, where the practice is strongest, some framed the act as a form of unwritten rule. As Respondent 209 noted,

“Throughout the week we have vegetables as a side dish, and Sunday is meat side dish day. In Mizo custom, that is like a law of nature.”

Children emerge as active carriers of expectation. Respondent 190 reflected humorously,

“If there’s no (meat) dish, the children keep asking, ‘Aren’t we going to have meat?’”

Respondent 249 reinforced this,

“The children regard it as obligatory.”

These responses show how cultural meaning is reproduced within families, not only through tradition, but through children’s anticipation and perception of what a Sunday meal should feel like.

In Kolasib Urban, where the practice has weakened, respondents framed the shift as circumstantial rather than ideological. Respondent 93 remarked,

“It’s something we do since a long time ago.”

Respondent 231 added,

“It became a family tradition at this point. Passed on from generation to generation.”

Thus, across both rural and urban households, meat continues to function not merely as food but as a weekly cultural emblem, an edible ritual through which Mizos perform identity, memory, and belonging. Sunday meat tradition remains symbolically powerful among the Mizos. The practice of preparing meat as the main dish on Sundays continues to hold strong cultural relevance in Mizo households as

shown above. Although the extent of adherence differs regionally, being more consistent in Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural and less uniform in Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural, the meaning attached to the practice remains deeply rooted. For many households, Sunday meat is not simply a meal choice. It represents continuity, care, and a weekly reaffirmation of tradition. Several respondents described the day as incomplete or lacking without meat highlighting that the expectation has become embedded in collective understanding. Even in homes where financial constraints or changing lifestyles occasionally disrupt the routine, the emotional value and perceived necessity of meat on Sundays remain intact, especially among younger family members who reinforce the expectation.

Thus, the custom persists not because it is convenient, but because it carries symbolic weight i.e. marking Sunday as a day of togetherness, familiarity, and cultural grounding. The continued observance of this practice demonstrates how food can function as a stabilising cultural anchor, preserving identity through ordinary domestic settings. In this sense, Sunday meat remains more than nourishment. It is a weekly affirmation of belonging, memory, and cultural continuity within Mizo life.

Table 6.6. Expressing gratitude through food

Expressing gratitude	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	60	38	83	53	143 (71.5)	91 (45.5)	234 (58.5)
No	40	62	17	47	57 (28.5)	109 (54.5)	166 (41.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The findings from Table 6.6 reveal how food operates not only as nourishment but also as a medium of emotional communication and social etiquette within Mizo households. Out of the total 400 respondents, 234 (58.5%) agreed that expressing gratitude through food is still practiced, while 166 (41.5%) stated that they do not engage in this act. This indicates that while the tradition continues to hold cultural

relevance, it is not universally practiced and is gradually shifting depending on lifestyle, environment, and generational change.

Looking at the total Urban responses, 143 respondents (71.5%) reported that food continues to serve as a deliberate gesture of gratitude. This percentage is significantly higher than the total average, demonstrating that despite exposure to diverse food habits and modern lifestyles, urban households continue to view food-sharing as a culturally meaningful act. The emotional and symbolic value attached to offering food remains especially prominent in cities like Aizawl and Kolasib, where individuals are more likely to incorporate food into expressions of appreciation during occasions, visits, or social interactions.

In contrast, the total Rural responses display a more divided scenario, 91 respondents (45.5%) agreed with the statement, while 109 respondents (54.5%) did not. The majority response of “No” among rural communities suggests a shift in how gratitude is performed or communicated, possibly reflecting a greater emphasis on practicality rather than ritualized or symbolic gestures. In rural contexts where food is more commonly shared through communal meals, everyday hospitality, and agricultural exchange, the act of giving food may no longer be perceived as a formal expression of gratitude but rather as an ordinary pattern of life embedded in routine social relations.

When comparing the two settings, a clear contrast emerges, urban respondents appear more likely to use food intentionally and symbolically to express gratitude, whereas rural respondents may express gratitude through other forms of behaviour, or may see food-sharing as too commonplace to be coded specifically as gratitude. The practice is therefore not disappearing, rather, its meaning appears to shift depending on the context. In cities, food becomes a more conscious symbolic gesture. In villages, sharing food is normalised and may not carry explicit verbal meaning, even though it still functions relationally.

Historically, offering food particularly meat, eggs, or a cooked dish was a deeply embedded cultural responsibility in Mizo society. In pre-Christian and early post-Christian Mizo communities, food-sharing was not only an act of generosity but also a demonstration of *tlawmngaihna*, the moral ethos emphasizing selflessness, humility, and communal responsibility. Elders recall a time when offering food to neighbours, helpers, visitors, or anyone who contributed labour was almost obligatory. This was

especially observed during harvest seasons, construction of houses, or significant life events such as childbirth, illness, weddings, and funerals. Exchanging food in these contexts functioned as a tangible acknowledgment of cooperation and reciprocity, values central to Mizo social life.

The urban responses reflect a contemporary revival of this symbolic role. A total of 143 respondents (71.5%) living in urban areas reported that food continues to be intentionally used to show appreciation. For many, gratitude expressed through food is not simply habitual, it is deliberate and emotionally meaningful. Respondent voices reveal this clearly. One participant elaborated,

“Baking cake, preparing meat is my way of showing appreciation. I don’t always say thank you in words, but when I cook something special and give it to someone, it is my way of showing that I am grateful for what they have done for me.”

Another respondent explained a similar sentiment but extended it into relationships and hospitality,

“I usually share meat with the people I care about...sometimes I invite them over for a meal, and that is how I show my gratitude. It feels more meaningful than just saying thank you. Sharing food makes the feeling more real.”

To further illustrate the emotional weight attached to food as a medium of gratitude, one respondent offered a particularly meaningful reflection,

“My grandmother always boiled eggs for us whenever our school results were announced. Boiled eggs are nothing fancy, but the act itself showed how proud she was of our achievement. Even now, when an elder gift me eggs or cooks them for me, I take it as a meaningful gesture, a compliment that carries love, pride, and blessing.”

This statement demonstrates how certain foods particularly simple or humble items carry symbolic emotional value that extends beyond taste or material worth. The respondent’s memory reveals how food becomes tied to affection, generational care, and recognition. The boiled egg, though modest, functions as a deeply personal cultural signifier. It embodies pride, affection, and approval in a way that spoken

words may not fully capture. In this sense, food becomes a carrier of memory, relational meaning, and cultural emotion, reinforcing the idea that expressing gratitude through food is not merely about the item offered but about the sentiment embedded within the gesture.

Urban testimonies also highlight how modernization has reshaped older practices. The presence of newer foods such as cakes, sweets, chocolates, and bakery items demonstrate how the practice has adapted to contemporary preferences. Respondent 39 stated,

“Chocolate. Sometimes giving a piece of chocolate or sweets is enough to say thank you. Nowadays people understand it, and it feels nice, especially for younger ones.”

Respondent 47 similarly described,

“Cake. Before, it was always meat or eggs, but now cake has become a way to show thanks, especially during small gatherings or when someone helped us.”

The narrative from Kolasib Urban also confirms continuity with older forms. Respondent 29 shared,

“Chicken. If someone helps us or if I feel grateful, I give them chicken. It is something meaningful because it is not cheap, and it shows effort and sincerity.”

In rural areas, where only 91 respondents (45.5%) recognised the act as a form of expressing gratitude, the responses reveal an important pattern i.e. food-sharing remains common, but it has become so integrated into everyday social life that many no longer interpret it as a distinct or symbolic gesture. A participant explained,

“Bringing over our dishes to others to show favour and affection is normal. We don't think of it as expressing gratitude because this is already our way of living.”

Another respondent from Aizawl Rural described the practice in relation to larger cultural occasions,

“When we slaughter our own pig or during big events, we share food with neighbours and relatives. It is part of who we are, not something we think of as a separate way of thanking someone.”

Thus, expressing gratitude through food remains an important cultural practice. Yet its form, meaning, and recognition have shifted depending on context. In urban, the act has become more intentional, symbolic, and at times formalised, even adapting to include new food types shaped by globalization. In rural environments, food-sharing is normalized to the extent that it no longer stands out as a labelled expression of thanks, but rather as an expected social pattern embedded in everyday life.

Overall, the practice persists but it is evolving. Whether through pork shared at a family feast, a plate of *bai* delivered to a neighbour, or a store-bought cake gifted on a special occasion, food continues to serve as an emotional and cultural medium carrying gratitude, relational care, and the enduring values of Mizo identity.

Table 6.7. Sharing homemade food to neighbours and loved ones

Sharing	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	89	89	78	91	167 (83.5)	180 (90)	347 (86.75)
No	11	11	22	9	33 (16.5)	20 (10)	53 (13.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.7. demonstrates that the long-standing Mizo cultural practice of sharing homemade food, *chawhmeh in-suah* remains widely sustained across the four study regions. Out of 400 respondents, a large majority (86.75%) reported that they still engage in this practice, while only a small minority (13.25%) stated that they no longer share food in this way. This high figure underscores that food continues to operate as a primary cultural medium through which relationships, reciprocity, and emotional connection are enacted within Mizo society.

When broken down by settlement type, the findings reveal strong continuity in both settings, though with slightly different dynamics. Total rural responses indicate the highest adherence, with 180 respondents (90%) reporting that they still share homemade food with neighbours and extended kin. This reflects the embeddedness of *chawhmeh in-suah* within everyday social life in rural communities, where proximity, interdependence, and shared subsistence norms continue to shape social relations. Total urban responses, while slightly lower remain high at 83.5% (167 respondents), indicating that the practice has not diminished but has instead adapted to contemporary changes in lifestyle, food access, and social organisation.

Comparatively, rural regions particularly Aizawl Rural (91%) show the strongest sustained continuity, reflecting dense kin networks and daily communal living. Kolasib Rural follows closely (89%). Urban regions show slightly lower adherence, especially in Aizawl Urban (78%), suggesting that modernity, time constraints, apartment living, and individualised routines may influence frequency rather than cultural value. However, even in urban spaces, the practice persists as a symbolic act rather than a habitual one, shifting from everyday exchange to intentional gestures tied to social visits, holidays, or emotional connection.

The qualitative narratives deepen the quantitative findings by showing how respondents attach emotional, cultural, and symbolic meaning to shared food. Some respondents emphasised continuity of traditional dishes, highlighting how sharing reinforces cultural flavours and identity. For instance, Respondent 1 listed, “*Bai* (Stew), *bawl* (mixed with fermented pork fat)”, while Respondent 5 similarly recalled, “Stew, bawl, *vaipaden*”. These responses reflect the persistence of classic dishes as the most recognised vehicles for sharing foods not merely eaten, but culturally performed. The act of serving these dishes reinforces culinary memory and demonstrates care.

Others described sharing food as an emotional gesture that sustains bonds. Urban respondents illustrate how food sharing has evolved in form, though not in purpose. Respondent 11 described, “*Cake, inviting them over for a meal,*” while Respondent 39 stated simply, “*Chocolate.*” These examples suggest that in cities, where time constraints and market access shape routines, commercially prepared items may supplement or replace homemade food, yet the symbolic gesture remains intact. Food thus becomes a blended repertoire of traditional cooking and global influences.

For some respondents, sharing food affirms kinship and relational belonging. Respondent 119 expressed,

“It enhances our bond with relatives,”

and Respondent 290 echoed,

“Keeps us connected with one another. The special recipes of each family are cherished.”

These interpretations illuminate how food-sharing acts as an interpersonal archive preserving family identity through recipes, taste memory, and embodied practice.

In rural settings, the practice is embedded in daily life rather than reserved for special occasions. A small number reveal a shifting dynamic. Respondent 187 noted,

“We used to do that quite a lot before, but now we do it less frequently. We only serve our own direct grandchildren.”

This shift suggests selective continuation framed by generational intimacy. Meanwhile, Respondent 324 acknowledged changing social boundaries,

“It’s not liked the old days anymore. Even serving food to others has become more awkward/restrained now.”

Such reflections reveal the tension between cultural memory and modern social structure.

Gendered dimensions also appeared, with several respondents emphasising that women, particularly grandmothers and mothers, continue to carry the responsibility of maintaining this relational exchange. Respondent 310 stated, *“The matriarch enjoys cooking, and we serve/dish out a lot,”* while Respondent 133 added, *“We dish out food with our children,”* suggesting that food sharing is a pedagogical act, transmitting values of generosity and kinship to younger generations.

Thus, *chawhmeh in-suah* remains a vibrant and adaptive cultural practice across Mizoram. In rural households, it is woven into everyday life and reciprocal living, while in urban households, it becomes a more intentional gesture tied to hospitality, affection, and cultural continuity. Regardless of form whether stew, fermented pork, cake, chocolate, or restaurant food, the act of sharing remains a deeply meaningful expression of generosity, kinship, and cultural identity. In this way, the exchange of homemade food continues to operate not only as nourishment, but as an embodied language of belonging, memory, and shared social life.

Hospitality as Cultural Practice in Mizo Households: Hospitality expressed through food remains one of the most enduring values in Mizo life. It is more than a habit or formality, it is a way of showing respect, warmth, and connection. Preparing a separate or more elaborate meal for a guest, rather than serving everyday food, has long been part of what it means to welcome someone properly. Even though the way this practice appears today has changed due to urban lifestyles, busy schedules, and shifting food habits, the meaning attached to it remains deeply felt. Across Mizo households, the act of cooking differently for a guest continues to signal care, honour, and the belief that visitors should be treated with the best one can offer.

Households in Aizawl Urban report the highest level of consistency, indicating that preparing a distinct or elevated menu for guests has become an expected feature of hospitality in the state's capital. The pattern suggests that in urban settings where formal gatherings, church events, and increased exposure to structured forms of hosting are more common, the expectation to serve guests "properly" may feel even stronger today than in the past.

Kolasib Rural follows closely behind, reflecting how deeply rooted the ethic of generosity remains in rural moral life. Here, preparing special food for guests is not merely a choice but feels tied to values of warmth, honour, and communal dignity. Kolasib Urban also continues this practice with considerable adherence, pointing to a blend of emerging modernity and enduring traditional norms.

Aizawl Rural, however, shows the most variation in responses. While many households still maintain the practice, a sizeable number note that serving guests the same food as the family is increasingly common. This shift may reflect practical realities, limited access to ingredients, agricultural demands shaping daily routines, or economic considerations. In many rural settings, treating a visitor like household kin, sharing whatever is being cooked rather than preparing something separate can itself be seen as meaningful, intimate hospitality.

Ethnographic accounts bring these numerical patterns to life. Many respondents framed guest hospitality through meat, the most valued food category in Mizo cuisine. Respondent 23 noted,

"We prepare various kinds of meat and other food items for guests,"

reaffirming that meat is the culinary marker of respect and priority. Respondent 24 further emphasized,

"Meat must absolutely be the main accompaniment,"

signalling cultural expectation rather than preference.

Beyond the type of food served, respondents described changes in *quantity and variety* as key elements of guest honouring. Respondent 40 observed, *"Amount of food increase,"* and Respondent 61 added, *"Increase in variety of dishes."* These accounts reveal that hospitality is communicated not only through ingredients, but through abundance, a visual and material expression of generosity. Respondent 102 echoed

this sentiment, *“Amount is more,”* suggesting that excess itself becomes a signifier of care.

Some respondents described more subtle forms of elevation where the everyday meal is modified rather than entirely replaced. Respondent 158 explained, *“The method of preparation is different,”* while Respondent 204 elaborated, *“We prefer it plain, so when we have guests, we make it a bit less plain (or more elaborate).”* These responses highlight the culturally understood scale of “specialness,” which need not be extravagant, it must simply exceed the ordinary.

In several cases, the perceived status of the guest shaped the menu. Respondent 175 noted,

“When we have city guests for a meal, we don’t usually make stew.... we typically prepare boiled dishes and fried dishes.”

Here, Mizo culinary hierarchy becomes visible, with certain preparations seen as more suitable for formal or non-local guests.

Many respondents framed guest-related cooking as moral responsibility. Respondent 189 asserted,

“In Mizo culture, it’s our duty to feed others the very best we have, and we take as much care as we can to do so.”

This articulation reflects the deeper cultural foundation of hospitality, tied to *tlawmngaihna* i.e. the Mizo ethical principle of selflessness, humility, and service. Respondent 291 echoed this emotional dimension, stating,

“Serving a special menu to our guests is a thoughtful way to show hospitality and make them feel valued.”

Yet a few responses acknowledged constraints or moderated practice. Respondent 338 remarked,

“The dishes don’t really change much. If there’s no meat already prepared, it’s simply added.”

This illustrates a pragmatic approach where hospitality remains valued, but is negotiated within material realities, shifting schedules, and household routines. Complementing the preparation of a formal guest meal is the everyday expectation of offering refreshments to visitors, a practice nearly universal across households. Serving tea, biscuits, or light snacks marks not only politeness but relational recognition. Respondent 1 reported simply, *“Biscuits and tea,”* while Respondent 4

noted, “*Green tea (phan)*.” Respondent 182 articulated the cultural meaning of this act,

“*Tea is our primary way of welcoming guests or visitors.*”

Urban households tend to offer milk tea alongside packaged snacks, chocolates, or bakery items, markers of modern consumption. Respondent 239 illustrates this shift, “*Cake, tea, cool drinks (juice)*.” In contrast, rural households often rely on red tea (sometimes boiled with jaggery), emphasising readiness rather than formality. Respondent 165 described this practice, “*Tea with jaggery*,” and others noted that red tea remained available at all times in rural homes reflecting a form of organic hospitality shaped by communal proximity.

Despite these contextual differences, the underlying cultural logic remains consistent i.e. guests must not leave empty-handed, unserved, or unacknowledged. Food thus functions as a relational bridge, expressing respect, building trust, and reaffirming belonging in ways that transcend language.

The act of serving food to guests in Mizo households is far more than culinary gesture, it is a cultural performance imbued with social meaning, emotional labour, and moral responsibility. Whether expressed through a full table of meat dishes, a carefully expanded menu, or a simple yet intentional serving of tea and biscuits, hospitality remains a deeply embedded value that continues to organise social relations and signal respect. Even where the form shifts, urban households substituting bakery items or ordering take-out, and rural households relying on available red tea or freshly cooked dishes, the purpose remains constant that is to acknowledge presence, affirm belonging, and enact care.

These practices demonstrate that hospitality is not merely reactive but anticipatory. Households prepare for the possibility of guests not because they expect them, but because the readiness to host reflects cultural integrity. As respondents described, what matters is not extravagance but attentiveness, the willingness to “*give the best of what is available*.” Through these acts, guests are not only fed, they are recognised, honoured, and temporarily woven into the kinship fabric of the home.

Thus, even under the pressures of modernity, changing lifestyles, and shifting food systems, the cultural logic of hospitality persists not as rigid tradition, but as adaptive continuity. Food remains the medium through which relationships are affirmed, gratitude is materialised, hierarchy is softened, and strangers become momentary kin.

In Mizo culture, therefore, food is the language of hospitality. The amount, type, and manner in which it is offered determine the sincerity of the welcome and the host's adherence to the fundamental moral codes of the community.

Food as a Medium of Belonging: In Mizo families, food does more than nourish the body, it creates sense of belonging, feeling of acceptance, inclusion, and emotional connection to one another. The act of cooking, serving, and eating together forms an emotional and cultural ecosystem where family members recognise themselves as part of a shared unit. Belonging is felt not only through presence but through participation including tasting the same dish, sharing from the same pot, passing dishes across the table, and preparing food according to memory and mutual care. In this sense, food becomes a relational symbol, something that marks who is included, who is cared for, and who belongs.

This sentiment echoes across respondent narratives. For many, belonging is tied to the predictable pattern of shared meals. Respondent 242 expressed this directly,

“What shows we are a family is eating meals together.”

Such statements reveal how the act of sitting down at the same table is not simply routine but a cultural affirmation of connection. It signals continuity, familiarity, and a shared identity. To eat differently or separately is, for some, to step outside the emotional boundaries of family.

Belonging is also constructed through memory. Certain foods are associated with family history, lineage, or shared experience. A particular dish, cooked in a particular way, becomes a marker of identity. For example, foods like *saum* or *hmarcha rawt* are not just ingredients, they are affective objects tied to childhood, elders, and the sensory memories of home. As one respondent reflected,

“Food brings people together through shared experience...”

Preparing food for my family would be my love language.”

Here, belonging takes shape not through words but through taste, texture, and care.

Shared meals further provide a structured space where roles are affirmed. The head of the household may lead prayer, elders may share stories, younger members may take responsibility for serving, and children learn to wait, listen, and participate. These relational patterns cultivate a sense of place where each person knows where they fit. Respondent 340 highlighted this when stating,

“The head of the family can use this time to teach and reinforce good behaviour and table manners during meals.”

Such practices embed belonging into bodily habit and relational expectation.

Even conflict or correction reinforces belonging, not as exclusion but as guidance. Respondent 66 described mealtime as *“a suitable time for giving a reprimand,”* and Respondent 82 referred to it simply as *“reprimandation.”* These moments though disciplinary take place within an environment of care, signalling that guidance happens because one belongs, not because one is outside the family structure.

Belonging also emerges through emotional safety and ritual. Respondent 187 described meals as,

“Mealtime is a good time to let our grandchildren experience encouragement, love/affection, and lasting harmony.”

Here, food becomes a medium through which affection is made visible. The warmth of a shared pot, the act of adding more meat for a child, or serving someone’s favourite dish is equates to saying *“You matter here. You are part of us.”*

In rural households, belonging is strengthened through labour. Children observe, assist, and eventually inherit the techniques from washing vegetables to preparing *bai* or peeling bamboo shoots. This embodied learning, subtle yet powerful, connects generations. The kitchen becomes a lineage site where family identity is carried not through written instruction but through participation and repetition.

Across both contexts, belonging is not defined by food alone but by what food makes possible, presence, exchange, memory, instruction, comfort, and emotional recognition. In this way, food in Mizo society is not merely eaten, it is lived. It is a cultural script that teaches inclusion, performs care, and reminds each family member that they are part of something larger than themselves. Through shared meals, belonging becomes tangible, tasted, and felt bite after bite, generation after generation.

6.4. Food Heritage Transmission

Food functions as an important form of intangible cultural heritage, carrying not only flavours and ingredients but also the skills, meanings, and rituals attached to them. Within this process, the kitchen becomes a key site of cultural transmission. It is not merely a place for cooking but a space where identity, memory, and tradition are enacted and preserved.

In many households, recipes are passed down not through written instructions but through embodied knowledge watching, tasting, and practising alongside elders. Ingredients, preparation methods, and timing are learned through sensory experience rather than measurement, linking present generations to ancestral foodways. Knowledge of seasonal produce, preservation techniques, and culturally meaningful dishes further reinforces connections to land, history, and community.

The kitchen also operates as a space of teaching and storytelling. Here, children learn not only how to prepare food but why certain dishes matter whether tied to festivals, mourning, celebration, or hospitality. Meals carry symbolic meaning, and dining etiquette communicates values such as respect, care, and belonging.

Thus, the everyday work of cooking becomes a form of cultural inheritance. Through repeated participation in kitchen routines, families ensure that culinary knowledge, memory, and identity continue across generations, making food a living archive of heritage. This section examines how food operates as a vessel of cultural continuity within Mizo households by exploring four interconnected themes: preparing meals together as a family, learning to cook traditional Mizo dishes, transmitting culinary knowledge and cooking techniques across generations, and cultivating pride in the foods and dishes that form part of Mizo cultural heritage.

Cooking as Shared Practice: Across Mizo households, the act of cooking together continues to carry deep cultural meaning. It is understood not merely as domestic labour but as a shared experience where relationships are strengthened, memories are formed, and cultural knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. Although the extent to which families cook together varies across regions, a significant majority of respondents overall expressed that preparing meals together is important, with many also reporting that they actively participate in shared cooking within their households.

Respondents from rural Aizawl expressed the strongest belief in the importance of cooking together, where more than four-fifths affirmed its value. Rural Kolasib follows closely with a similarly strong endorsement. This pattern reflects how rural kitchens remain deeply communal spaces where collective labour, shared decision-making, and intergenerational exchange shape daily life. In these settings, preparing rice, vegetables, wild herbs, or meat is rarely an individual task. Instead, it is a coordinated effort involving peeling vegetables, grinding chillies, fermenting

ingredients, and tending the fire together. As one respondent described, *“We become closer.”* Another explained, *“It creates a strong bond,”* while someone else put it simply, *“It brings joy to life.”*

Urban households also retain this value, though to a more negotiated degree. In Urban, just over half of families said that cooking is practiced collectively in everyday life, while many others expressed that although they believe it is meaningful, it is difficult to sustain due to work schedules, schooling, and changing lifestyles. For some households, shared cooking now happens primarily on weekends, church gathering days, visits from relatives, or special occasions rather than as a daily routine. One respondent explained,

“Cooking is typically done together on Sundays,”

while another expressed a common sentiment,

“It’s good to cook together if it’s possible, but we don’t have time.”

Alongside these affirmations, a smaller portion of families expressed reluctance or disinterest toward collective cooking. Their responses often reflected practicality rather than rejection of values saying, *“It’s troublesome,”* one respondent remarked and another said, *“I prefer to prepare food alone.”* These views more common in urban contexts suggest a gradual shift toward individualized food preparation shaped by time scarcity, workplace schedules, and the rising availability of ready-made foods. Despite this variation in practice, the meaning attached to cooking together remains remarkably consistent across households. Many respondents understood shared cooking as a form of cooperation and mutual support, as explained,

“It would be difficult if one were to do everything by oneself,”

and

“It’s good to help one another.”

Within these statements lies an ethic deeply tied to *tlawmngaihna*, the Mizo value of selfless service and willingness to assist without expectation. Cooking together thus becomes an expression of moral duty and relational care, not merely a functional task. Just as importantly, cooking together plays a central role in passing down food heritage. Many respondents described the kitchen as a place where children learn traditional recipes, ingredients, table manners, and the cultural meaning of certain

dishes. Learning happens naturally, through watching, helping, tasting, and repeating and not through formal teaching. One respondent explained,

“It promotes bonding and is a time for learning about food,”

while another said,

“It teaches us how to prepare dishes.”

Shared cooking is also a time for storytelling. As ingredients are chopped or simmered, elders often share memories of earlier food practices, special occasions, hardship periods, or community feasts. Through these stories, food becomes connected to history, identity, and belonging, not just flavour.

Thus, even as lifestyles change, preparing meals together still carries cultural, emotional, and educational importance in Mizo households. For many, it remains a way to care for one another, stay connected, and ensure that traditional food knowledge continues into the next generation. Cooking together, therefore, is not just about making food, it is about maintaining family bonds and keeping cultural identity alive.

Kitchen as Cultural Memory: Across Mizoram, learning to cook traditional dishes remains a meaningful cultural practice that continues to shape identity and belonging. Out of four hundred respondents, three hundred and eighteen shared that they had learnt how to cook traditional Mizo dishes, while only eighty-two reported they had not. This strong majority highlights that food knowledge is still deeply rooted in domestic life and continues to be transferred across generations.

Rural households expressed the strongest continuity. In Rural, where most of the respondents confirmed learning traditional cooking, the kitchen is still central to family life, a place where recipes are not only taught but *lived* suggesting that in rural settings, food knowledge moves naturally from one generation to another through daily participation rather than explicit instruction.

Urban households also showed significant learning, traditional recipes continue to circulate, though with signs of emerging gaps due to changing lifestyles, convenience foods, and shrinking intergenerational living.

Cooking is woven into emotional, relational, and sensory learning. One respondent reflected,

*“My parents taught me everything...how to cut vegetables,
how to boil rice, and when to add salt or spices. I learnt by*

standing beside them, watching and doing, not because they told me to sit and learn but because I grew up inside the kitchen with them.”

This quote reveals the relational and implicit nature of transmission, learning happens through presence rather than instruction. The respondent highlights an embodied form of knowledge where skill is acquired through repetition, attention, and immersion rather than formal teaching.

Another respondent described the learning process more concretely,

“Bai, bawl, tauh, I learnt each one over time. First, I watched, then I helped, and only after many attempts I could do it properly on my own.”

This progression, from observation, to assistance, to mastery mirrors hands-on learning and reflects how culinary knowledge is accumulated slowly, not instantly.

When asked whether traditional cooking techniques and recipes were being handed down, two hundred and ninety-two respondents said yes. Only one hundred and eight shared that such knowledge had not been passed on. Again, Aizawl Rural demonstrated the strongest continuity, where nearly every household reported transmission. One respondent said,

“It is a knowledge passed down from generation to generation. We don’t write it down, but it lives in us because we cook it again and again.”

Here, cooking is described as a living form of memory, renewed through repetition rather than documentation. Through everyday practices, food heritage remains fluid, performed, and continuously embodied. Another respondent said,

“A dish with bamboo shoots, garlic, chilli, salt, hot oil...this one my mother learnt from her mother, and now we still cook it the same way. It feels wrong to change it because it belongs to our family.”

This quote reveals that certain dishes hold lineage value, carrying emotional, historical, and symbolic meaning that discourages alteration. Statements like these shows how recipes are treated as inherited knowledge with value, not merely instructions for a meal. They carry stories of kitchens where flavours took hours to develop. Through these stories, food becomes history.

Finally, one respondent expressed a sense of pride,

“We continue to find it delicious, and we continue to cook it because it reminds us of who we are. When I teach my children these dishes, I feel happy because I am giving them something that cannot be bought.”

Here, traditional cooking is framed not only as knowledge transmission but as an inheritance of identity, something priceless and deeply personal. In this way, food functions as cultural memory and inheritance. It is a language older than writing kept alive through taste, repetition, and care. Even where modernity reshapes routines, the act of learning traditional dishes remains one of the most meaningful ways in which family, identity, and heritage are preserved.

Thus, the kitchen, therefore, is more than a cooking space, it is a living archive. When a mother teaches a daughter how to wash rice until the water runs clear, or when a grandmother shows a grandchild how to scrape bamboo shoot to reduce bitterness, what is being shared is not only technique, but belonging. Cooking together becomes a way of saying, “This is who we are. This is where we come from.”

6.5. Intercultural Adaptation

Food is a big part of cultural identity, but it can also be a source of conflict when people from different cultures come together. Intercultural interactions in Mizo society have caused some people to misunderstand, devalue, or push aside traditional ways of cooking. On the other hand, these interactions also provide chances for cultural identity to be changed, confirmed, and discussed through food. This part is about looking into how Mizos deal with outside forces that try to change their traditional food habits and how they remind others of how important their food culture is, both at home and in public places.

This section begins by exploring the broader influence of outside cultures on Mizo cuisine and food habits, building from this, the analysis then focuses on the growing normalisation of fast food, takeaways, and delivery-based meals, alongside the increasing tendency to supplement or replace home-cooked food with commercially prepared alternatives. The section also considers how the expanding availability of outside ingredients in local shops and markets reflects shifting consumption patterns and enables new forms of cooking at home. Finally, it discusses how these influences have transformed domestic cooking and eating practices, shaping the types of dishes

families prepare, introducing new household favourites, altering the popularity of traditional foods, and fostering intercultural exchange through everyday meals. Together, these themes illustrate how Mizo households adapt to, negotiate, and reinterpret external influences, revealing a dynamic interplay between cultural continuity and change.

Table 6.8. Perception of external influence

Perception	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes-new trend	78	67	88	70	166 (83)	137 (68.5)	303 (75.75)
No- not new	22	33	12	30	34 (17)	63 (31.5)	97 (24.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.8 shows how respondents perceive the growing presence of external food cultures in Mizoram and whether this influence is viewed as a new trend or something that has existed longer within local foodways.

Across all four regions, the majority identified these influences as relatively new. In Aizawl Urban, this sentiment is the strongest, with 88% of respondents reporting that external food influence feels recent, likely connected to café culture, restaurant expansion, online food delivery, and exposure through media and global consumer platforms. Kolasib Urban follows closely, where 78% similarly recognise foreign cuisines as a modern phenomenon shaping everyday meals.

A comparable pattern appears in rural areas but with slightly more nuance. In Aizawl Rural, 70% believe this trend is new, while 30% feel it is not. In Kolasib Rural, 67% describe it as new, whereas 33% argue that external influences have existed longer, only becoming more visible in recent years. Taken together, the overall picture shows that three-quarters of all respondents (76%) perceive external culinary influence as a recent shift, while roughly one-quarter (24%) do not.

This minority response found more strongly in rural areas indicates cultural memory of earlier informal exchanges such as Burmese influence, missionary diets, and Indian foodways through trade and migration. This suggests that for some households, external influence is not seen as a rupture but as part of a longer trajectory of intercultural contact.

The responses indicate varying perceptions regarding whether the influence of external food cultures in Mizoram is perceived as a recent trend or part of older food practices shaped by migration, trade, and long-standing cross-cultural contact.

Among urban households, particularly in Aizawl, a larger number identify external food influence as a new and rapidly spreading phenomenon connected to fast-food culture, youth identity, and digital exposure (via media, YouTube cooking channels, K-dramas, and restaurant culture).

In contrast, rural respondents are more divided. Some recognise new influences, particularly East Asian and Indian-style dishes, but others argue that outside influence is not entirely new, noting earlier culinary borrowings from Burma/Myanmar, Assam, and colonial encounters.

The responses, therefore, reveal that external influence is not perceived uniformly but framed through generational experience, locality, exposure, and cultural memory. This perception also reflects differing emotional responses toward change. For some, external cuisines represent modernity, convenience, and variety. For others, they evoke concerns about cultural dilution, changing meal structures, and the fading of traditional food knowledge. Here, the idea of “newness” is not only about the food itself, but about how Mizos negotiate and interpret cultural change whether as continuity, disruption, or transformation.

The perception that external cuisines represent a “new” and rapidly emerging trend provides an important foundation for understanding how food practices in Mizoram are currently shifting. If earlier cultural influences entered gradually through migration, border trade, or shared regional histories, the present wave of culinary change is experienced as faster, more visible, and more commercially driven. This shift is especially evident in the growing adoption of fast food, ready-made meals, restaurant dining, and home delivery practices that were once rare but are now increasingly woven into everyday routines. As external cuisines move from occasional tasting to habitual consumption, foodways become a key site where convenience, novelty, identity, and cultural negotiation intersect. The next section explores this shift in detail, focusing on how fast-food culture and takeaway consumption are reshaping household eating patterns, meal structure, and the meaning of food in contemporary Mizo society.

Table 6.9. Fast food as a daily intake

Takeaway food	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	2	2	18	6	20 (10)	8 (4)	28 (7)
No	98	98	82	94	180 (90)	192 (96)	372 (93)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Across the regions, the figures show that fast food has not yet taken root as a daily dietary norm in Mizo households. Out of the full sample, only 7% reported eating fast food every day, while 93% stated they do not, a strong indication that traditional meals continue to anchor everyday food practices. This pattern is especially visible in rural areas, where only 4% reported daily consumption compared to 10% in urban households. The highest proportion appears in Aizawl Urban, where 18% reported eating takeaway food daily, hinting at a shift tied to city life, greater access to food services, and the influence of digital exposure, delivery platforms, and fast-changing work patterns. In contrast, both Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural show extremely low levels only 2% in each locality reflecting limited infrastructure and a stronger adherence to traditional family-based food routines. Even in Aizawl Rural, where modern influences are more visible, only 6% reported daily intake, reinforcing that convenience food remains occasional rather than habitual.

Of all the areas that were surveyed, 18% of people in Aizawl Urban said they ate fast food every day, which is the highest percentage of any region. Even though this number is still small, it shows a big change from traditional eating habits, which is probably caused by a number of factors related to living in a city. These could include how easy it is to get to fast food restaurants, how many food delivery apps there are, how busy working adults and students are, and how much cultural capital global food brands have gained. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that even in the capital city, 82% of those surveyed still do not eat fast food every day, showing that traditional and home-cooked meals are still the standard.

In both Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural, very few people eat fast food. Only 2% of people who answered the survey said they ate it every day. The fact that 98% of people did not take fast food show that there is not a lot of infrastructure for fast food delivery in these areas, and there may be a stronger cultural attachment to traditional food

norms. The food culture in these towns seems to be less affected by globalisation, with cooking and eating done by families and groups.

Data shows that a slightly higher 6% of people in Aizawl Rural eat fast food every day, but 94% of households still do not eat fast food every day. This means that rural areas, even those close to cities, are not as affected by the fast-paced food culture that is common in more globalised places. This resistance is probably caused by things like price, distance from stores, and different generations' eating habits.

Overall, the data show that fast food is still not a big part of everyday life in Mizoram. People do eat it sometimes, maybe as a treat, but home-cooked meals are still the mainstay of most households. However, the 18% number in Aizawl Urban is interesting because it suggests that people's eating habits may be changing, especially younger people who are influenced by social media, the corporate work culture, or cosmopolitan food aesthetics. If this isn't fixed, it could cause a bigger change in how people eat, especially in urban homes.

Even so, Mizoram still has a strong food culture that is based on home cooking and community values. People do not eat a lot of fast food, even in cities. This is a great starting point for campaigns that raise awareness about public health, teach people how to cook, and emphasise the importance of traditional food practices. All of these results support the idea that even though global food exposure is growing, it has not yet ruined local cooking traditions.

It is thus clear that fast food has not yet become a daily part of Mizo households, even though exposure to global food trends is steadily increasing. Across both urban and rural regions, the majority of respondents reported that they do not consume fast food on a daily basis, reaffirming the persistence of traditional food habits and home-cooked meals as the foundation of everyday dietary practices. The most notable departure from this trend is in Aizawl Urban, where few households admitted to consuming fast food daily. Although still a minority, this reveals a significant cultural shift in the capital, one that likely stems from easier access to fast-food outlets, widespread use of delivery services, and the lifestyle of busy students and professionals who turn to quick meals as a matter of convenience.

Despite increasing exposure to global food trends, fast food in Mizoram is still treated as something occasional rather than a regular part of daily eating. Many respondents

described takeaway food as a treat or something used only when needed. One person explained,

“We take fast food on Special occasions only....not for everyday eating,”

while another said it happens *“one or two times a month from family restaurants.”* Others mentioned that takeaway fits into very specific routines, with one respondent noting simply, *“For lunch only.”* Even among younger participants, who are usually seen as early adopters of new trends, home-cooked food continues to hold meaning. As one respondent put it,

“We prefer eating as a family at home.”

This shows that dinner remains connected to family time and shared identity rather than convenience.

Urban households, especially in Aizawl, are beginning to show small signs of change due to greater access to delivery services and restaurants. One parent shared,

“Sometimes my son just wants tea and fast food for lunch and it’s becoming normal.”

However, even in these settings, takeaway food has not replaced the central role of cooking at home. Another respondent explained,

“We like to prepare for ourselves just the way we want...it feels more like home.”

Fat food in Mizoram is more of an addition than a replacement, it is used for convenience, enjoyment rather than as a daily staple. Traditional cooking remains the foundation of food life, carrying the emotional and cultural meanings that takeaway food does not yet hold. At this stage, global food influence exists, but it sits alongside, not in place of established food practices and shared family meals.

Across households, takeaway food appears not as a replacement for home cooking, but as something used sparingly and with intention. Many respondents described takeaway as something occasional rather than habitual. One participant explained simply,

“Special days only...not for everyday eating.”

The short sentence reflects the broader pattern wherein takeaways are framed more as treats, tied to leisure, mood, or celebration, rather than necessity.

Others gave glimpses into how takeaway fits within family routines. Respondent 203 shared, *“One or two times a month from family restaurants,”* suggesting that even when takeaways are consumed, they are woven gently into life rather than altering its rhythm. Similarly, another participant clarified, *“For lunch only,”* indicating that takeaways rarely enter dinner, which continues to hold deep cultural weight as a shared household meal.

Even in urban areas, where global food access and delivery services are more common, takeaway is approached with restraint. A respondent from Aizawl explained that while takeaway is present, it does not replace the family meal, *“For lunch, family dinner.”* In that single pairing, “lunch” and “family dinner,” one sees how takeaway is positioned, acceptable for convenience, but not permitted to disturb the symbolic role of dinner as a time of connection.

In rural areas, the tone is even clearer. Some respondents treated takeaway almost as unnecessary. Cooking at home is not only preferred, it is expected. The idea of replacing a family-prepared dinner with something purchased was described as unimaginable for many, not because takeaway is disliked, but because meals carry meanings tied to identity, belonging, and routine.

Takeaway food in Mizoram exists at the margins, not rejected, but carefully controlled. It enters life softly, without threatening the cultural centrality of shared cooking and eating. As one participant put it, *“We prefer eating as a family at home.”* That preference is not just practical, it reflects a continuing emotional relationship with meals that are cooked together, served at home, and eaten as part of a collective practice. For now, takeaway remains a convenience, not a replacement, a sign of changing times, but not yet a change in meaning.

Food delivery and takeaway options are present across Mizoram, but their use remains selective and shaped by mood, occasion, and convenience rather than routine dependence. Instead of speaking in terms of fixed schedules like “once a week,” many respondents described takeaway through examples including specific cravings, restaurant preferences, or situational needs. One respondent casually shared, *“Pizza and cake,”* while another mentioned, *“Noodles,”* and someone else said, *“Fried rice.”* These short phrases reveal how takeaway aligns mostly with familiar, easy-to-eat foods rather than full meals meant to replace home cooking.

For many respondents, takeaway is linked to particular mealtimes rather than the whole day. One participant simply noted, “*For lunch,*” while another echoed, “*For lunch only,*” suggesting that takeaway slips into the middle of the day where flexibility and individual schedules are more common. Others extended this reasoning slightly, “*For lunch, to accompany tea,*” one said, hinting that takeaway can also function as a social food, something eaten while spending time together rather than just feeding hunger.

Brand references also surfaced, signalling the growing visibility of global food culture. One respondent admitted, “*KFC, apart from what I prepare at home,*” while another specified, “*KFC for lunch.*” These responses show that both international franchises and local eateries such as the respondent who simply wrote “*Tea shop*” are part of the evolving food landscape.

Some respondents described takeaway not by food type or timing, but as a general practice. Comments like “*Restaurant food*” or “*Fast foods*” imply familiarity but not dependence. All these suggest that takeaway has entered everyday possibilities without yet becoming an everyday habit. It remains a flexible, optional choice shaped by taste, convenience while home-cooked meals continue to define the emotional and cultural core of eating in Mizo households.

Thus, the findings show that fast food in Mizoram is not yet a dominant or routine part of everyday eating but exists as a small, negotiated layer within a much older system of shared home-cooked meals. While exposure to global food culture through restaurants, delivery apps, youth media, and urban convenience is gradually reshaping preferences, this influence remains strongest in Aizawl and weakest in rural areas. Across regions, respondents consistently framed takeaway food as something occasional used for convenience, cravings, or “special days” rather than a replacement for home cooking. Even when households do order in, it is often limited to lunch, snacks, or specific items like *noodles*, *momo*, *pizza*, or *KFC*, rather than full family dinners. The dinner meal, in particular, continues to hold symbolic and emotional weight, tied to family presence, routine, and cultural belonging. These patterns suggest that while fast food reflects modernity, aspiration, it remains peripheral rather than transformative. Instead of replacing tradition, it sits alongside it showing that Mizo food culture is adapting selectively and slowly, maintaining continuity even as new tastes enter the household.

While fast food is making inroads into Mizoram, particularly in Aizawl Urban, it has not yet overtaken the cultural centrality of home-cooked meals. Dinner tables continue to symbolize family, cultural pride, and shared belonging, even as younger people explore new tastes. For now, fast food is more likely to be consumed occasionally, framed as a treat or symbol of modernity, rather than as a daily necessity. This balance suggests that Mizoram's food culture is at a crossroads: modern influences are visible, but traditional practices still dominate the everyday, making this a critical moment to reinforce cultural pride through awareness campaigns, storytelling, and intergenerational education around Mizo food.

Table 6.10. Outside cultural influence adding variety to your household cuisine

Adding variety	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	26	7	73	21	99 (49.5)	28 (14)	127 (31.75)
No	74	93	27	79	101 (50.5)	172 (66)	273 (68.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The table reveals a noticeable divide in how outside cultural influences are perceived within Mizo households, particularly when it comes to whether such influences add variety to everyday home cooking. Overall, a large majority of respondents, approximately 68% (273 households) believe that external food culture does not add variety to their cuisine, while 32% (127 households) feel that it does.

Urban areas show more openness toward incorporating external foods. In Aizawl Urban, nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) acknowledge that outside cultural influences have expanded their household food repertoire. This suggests that the capital acts as a gateway for new culinary ideas, shaped by exposure to restaurants, packaged food markets, media, and increased mobility. Kolasib Urban, however, presents a different picture, where only 26% report added culinary variety indicating that even within urban spaces, attitudes are not uniform. This points to a transitional space where external influences exist but have not yet reshaped household food habits to the same extent.

In contrast, rural areas remain strongly rooted in tradition. In Kolasib Rural, an overwhelming 93% of respondents report that outside influences do not add variety to

their household meals, while in Aizawl Rural, 79% express the same sentiment. Rural kitchens appear to preserve food identity with greater resistance, valuing continuity over experimentation. The few rural households that do acknowledge change likely reflect proximity to semi-urban centres, schooling, migration, or increased access to packaged foods.

In Aizawl Urban, where nearly three-quarters of households acknowledged that external influence has expanded their cuisine, the shift is often described with a sense of curiosity and excitement. One participant reflected,

“Now we have more varieties available, and it makes cooking more interesting,”

suggesting that food is not just practical nourishment but a space for creativity and experimentation. Another urban respondent described trying new dishes as *“a way to enjoy something different from time to time,”* revealing how novelty itself has become part of the culinary appeal.

However, this openness is far less evident elsewhere. In Kolasib Urban, where only a minority agreed that outside cultures add variety, narratives suggested hesitation rather than rejection. One participant quietly admitted,

“Sometimes we try frozen foods or bread, but mostly we stay with our own food,”

reflecting a selective approach rather than full adoption. This region appears to be in a transitional phase, aware of global food options, but still anchored in traditional flavours.

In rural households, resistance was far more pronounced, and respondents articulated their stance with clarity and pride. One person stated firmly,

“Outside food influence does not affect our household . . . we prefer Mizo foods,”

presenting food preference as a statement of identity rather than convenience.

Even among those who acknowledged exposure, the tone suggested occasional experimentation rather than integration, as one rural participant explained simply,

“Occasionally...but our main food remains the same.”

Together, these responses reveal that acceptance of external food influences is tied to exposure, lifestyle, and cultural meaning. In cities especially Aizawl, outside cuisines are increasingly woven into everyday meals and associated with modern living, social

mobility, and openness. In rural areas, however, food remains closely tied to cultural identity, memory, and continuity as change is viewed not as enrichment, but as potential dilution.

In this way, the Mizo kitchen becomes more than a physical space, it is a cultural boundary where global influence is filtered, negotiated, or paused. External cuisines may enter, but they do so slowly, selectively, and often with emotional and cultural hesitation.

Table 6.11. Outside cultural influence & its impact on traditional cuisine popularity

Cuisine popularity	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	27	18	60	16	87 (43.5)	34 (17)	121 (30.25)
No	73	82	40	84	113 (56.5)	166 (83)	299 (74.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200 (100)	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.11 shows a clear urban-rural contrast in how people perceive the effect of outside food cultures on the popularity of traditional Mizo cuisine. Out of the total 400 households, 30.25 percent (121 households) feel that external cultural influences are reducing the popularity of Mizo dishes, while 74.75 percent (299 households) say this is not the case.

The concern is strongest in Aizawl Urban. Here, 60% of respondents (60 out of 100) believe that outside cultures are making traditional food less popular, and 40% do not. Kolasib Urban shows a milder version of this pattern, 27% (27 households) feel that traditional cuisine is losing ground, while 73% (73 households) disagree. When we combine both urban areas, almost half of urban households (87 out of 200, 43.5%) perceive a decline in the popularity of traditional dishes due to outside influence, compared with 113 out of 200 (56.5%) who do not.

In rural regions, the pattern reverses strongly.,17% feel that outside cultures have reduced the popularity of Mizo food, while a large majority 83% reject this idea. Overall, rural households (166 out of 200) show a high level of confidence in the continuing popularity of traditional cuisine.

Urban narratives, especially from Aizawl, express a sense of unease about cultural change. One respondent observed that some people now see other ethnic cuisines as “advanced/modern” and therefore “promote it,” suggesting that global or Indian dishes are treated as symbols of progress and sophistication. Another explained,

“We persistently view it as progress/sophistication,”

indicating that eating non-Mizo food can function as a marker of modern identity. A third respondent linked this directly to youth culture,

“Youngsters who consider themselves very modern are firmly looking down on Mizo food now.”

Others pointed to the public foodscape, “In restaurants and such, Mizo dishes are scarce,” one person noted. These accounts show how city dwellers read the reduced visibility of Mizo food in restaurants and among youth as a sign that their cuisine is losing status.

In Kolasib Urban, the mood is more mixed. While some respondents acknowledged that frozen foods, rotis or other outside items have entered their kitchens, others insisted that their “food preference stay the same,” framing traditional dishes as sufficient and satisfying. One person summarised this ethos by saying, “Because it is said that eating just enough is sufficient,” stressing moderation and everyday practicality over novelty.

Rural respondents, by contrast, expressed strong confidence that outside influences have not displaced traditional food. One household stated,

“Despite the overflowing of other food, Mizo cuisines are still well celebrated,”

making clear that even with new foods available, Mizo dishes remain central. Another said,

“Outside culture influence does not affect our household. We prefer Mizo foods,”

positioning adherence to local cuisine as a conscious choice. Importantly, some rural voices also described selective mixing,

“Depending on the occasion, we consume traditional foods and outside culture foods,”

one respondent explained, showing that outside dishes may appear at certain events without threatening the everyday centrality of rice, bai and other staples. Another

added that “*the children like Mizo dishes,*” suggesting that even younger family members in villages still find traditional food appealing.

Thus, intercultural adaptation around food is uneven and negotiated. In Aizawl Urban, where external cuisines are most visible in restaurants, media and youth culture, many respondents feel that traditional dishes are losing visibility and prestige. Here, eating global or “modern” food becomes a way to perform cosmopolitan identity, and traditional cuisine risks being read as old-fashioned or “backward.” This is where anxieties about cultural loss are most acute.

In Kolasib Urban, and especially in rural Kolasib and Aizawl, outside foods are present but more tightly controlled. Rural households in particular treat external cuisines as occasional additions rather than replacements, maintaining Mizo dishes as daily staples and key markers of identity. Intercultural contact does not simply erase tradition. Instead, it is filtered through local values of sufficiency, simplicity, and pride in Mizo food.

Within this broader picture of intercultural adaptation, the Mizo kitchen becomes a space of negotiation in cities, between aspiration and continuity and in smaller towns, between curiosity and caution and in villages, between limited experimentation and strong attachment to heritage. External cuisines enter Mizo foodways, but their impact on the popularity of traditional dishes is shaped by geography, generation, and the meanings people attach to “modern” versus “Mizo” food.

Table 6.12. Outside food influences introduction to new family favourite dishes

Impact	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	34	9	56	8	90 (45)	17 (8.5)	107 (26.75)
No	66	91	44	92	110 (55)	183 (91.5)	293 (73.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.12 shows how far outside cultural influences have led to the introduction of new family favourite dishes in Mizo households. Out of the total 400 respondents, 107 (26.75%) reported that external cuisines have contributed new favourite dishes in their households, while 293 (73.25%) stated that this has not occurred. Urban households show a significantly higher degree of adoption. Aizawl Urban (56%) reported having

new favourite dishes influenced by external food cultures, the highest among all regions. Kolasib Urban (34%) indicated new adaptations, showing moderate but notable influence. In comparison, rural households display much lower levels of change.

The urban-rural contrast is clear as total urban households (45%) show adoption nearly three times higher than total rural households (8.5%). This pattern highlights how accessibility, exposure, and lifestyle differences shape culinary adaptation.

The responses reveal that the integration of external dishes is more than a matter of taste, it reflects cultural curiosity, lifestyle change, and intergenerational negotiation. Many urban respondents named specific dishes that have become household staples such as “Noodles,” “ramen,” “kimchi,” “momo,” “fried chicken,” and “pasta” were mentioned repeatedly. Respondent 38 said simply,

“We eat kimchi now.”

Others described how preparation methods have shifted,

“I add masala to fried chicken and make it crispier, it’s our new favourite.” (Respondent 185)

Several voices illustrate how baking and café-style foods are becoming normalized,

*“Cake and coffee have become part of our routine.”
(Respondent 201)*

Another noted,

“Our son loves kimbap the most” (Respondent 157)

Yet many rural respondents expressed resistance,

“We have tried outside food, but it has not become a favourite.”

Urban households particularly in Aizawl are actively reshaping culinary identity. External dishes are not merely sampled, they are reinterpreted and domesticated. The kitchen becomes a site of experimentation where global cuisines meet local sensibilities. This reflects acculturation through assimilation and blending, where food becomes a space of identity-making, convenience, and aspirational modernity. Rural households overwhelmingly maintain traditional preferences. Here, food acts as a cultural anchor, a symbol of continuity and belonging and a medium of intergenerational transmission. Intercultural influence exists, but remains peripheral, framed as occasional exploration rather than replacement. Households become arenas

of negotiation where youth lean toward novelty and global tastes, while elders sustain heritage. This tension signals adaptive coexistence, not cultural conflict. Instead of replacing tradition, new preferences coexist alongside staples.

Thus, intercultural adaptation in Mizoram unfolds unevenly. Urban households are at the forefront of culinary change, embracing global food trends and converting them into everyday practice. Rural households, meanwhile, maintain strong culinary identity and resist rapid change. Rather than a linear shift, this represents a layered cultural negotiation where Mizo foodways evolve through selective adoption, adaptation, and preservation.

Table 6.13. Outside cultural influence adding variety to your household cuisine

Adding variety	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	26	7	73	21	99 (49.5)	28 (14)	127 (31.75)
No	74	93	27	79	101 (50.5)	172 (66)	273 (68.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The findings in Table 6.13 demonstrate a clear contrast in how households in Mizoram perceive outside cultural influences as contributing to culinary diversity. Looking at the total responses first, only 31.75% (n=127) of all surveyed households agree that outside influences have added variety to what they cook and eat, while a larger 68.25% (n=273) deny such influence. This suggests that although exposure to external cuisines exists, traditional food practices still dominate across the broader population. A closer look reveals a sharp divide between urban and rural settings. In urban areas, almost half (49.5%) acknowledge culinary diversification through external influence. This suggests that for many families living in urban environments, outside food cultures are not merely observed, they are being integrated, experimented with and selectively adopted.

Within the urban category, Aizawl Urban is the most adaptive, with 73% agreeing that outside food has expanded their household cuisine. This reflects the presence of cafés, Korean restaurants, fast-food outlets, social media food trends and stronger exposure to global culinary flows. Kolasib Urban, at 26%, indicates a slower pattern of change

hinting that access and exposure remain important mediators in intercultural food adaptation.

In rural Mizoram, by contrast, resistance is strong. Only 14% of rural respondents feel that outside culture has added variety to their cuisine, while 66% explicitly reject this idea. Kolasib Rural shows the highest resistance at 93%, followed by Aizawl Rural where 79% disagree. For these households, food appears more strongly tied to continuity, cultural belonging, and established routines.

Urban respondents often framed new food items as exciting additions rather than replacements. One participant from Aizawl Urban shared,

“We now have different varieties available. . . . foods we never used to see before. Things like sushi, momo, ramen or even baked items like pizza and garlic bread are becoming common for our children. Earlier, eating out meant only chow or bai, but now we enjoy trying something new on weekends. It feels like we have more options, and cooking at home also becomes interesting because we sometimes try to recreate these dishes.”

This quote highlights how novelty intertwines with identity and experimenting with food becomes a sign of being connected to a wider world and a changing lifestyle.

Another respondent from Kolasib Urban described adaptation more in terms of practicality,

“Frozen foods, roti, and ready-to-cook items are easier when we are busy. Sometimes we try new things because it saves time, not because we really want to change our food habits. But slowly, we are getting used to having more variety in our meals compared to before.”

For this household, intercultural food flow enters through convenience rather than cultural curiosity, marking a slow, functional shift rather than deliberate culinary exploration.

Some urban voices also expressed ambivalence, reflecting a negotiation rather than a simple embrace,

“Our food preference stays the same. . . we still enjoy Mizo dishes every day but sometimes we try new things if someone

recommends it or if the children ask. So, yes, variety has increased, but it hasn't replaced what we normally eat."
(Kolasib Urban respondent)

This captures a subtle form of intercultural adaptation i.e. adoption without displacement. In rural areas, however, responses carried a tone of firmness, sometimes even cultural defence. One respondent stated,

"Outside culture influence does not affect our household. We prefer Mizo foods..especially rice with simple vegetables and meat. Even if our children see new food on TV or social media, when it comes to eating, they still ask for bai and wawksa. This is what we know, what we trust, and what we enjoy."

Here, food is framed as cultural certainty, a continuation of shared memory and belonging.

Another rural household echoed this sentiment,

"The children like Mizo dishes. They sometimes taste outside food when they go to town, but at home, we don't prepare those kinds of dishes because traditional food is more filling, cheaper, and healthier for us."

This reveals how economy, familiarity, and cultural meaning overlap, food becomes a boundary that external influences enter rarely and only on the margins.

Yet, even in rural settings, small openings exist,

"Occasionally. . . sometimes when relatives visit or during a celebration, we might try something different like noodles or cake, but it is not something we eat regularly." (Aizawl Rural)

Thus, intercultural adaptation to food in Mizoram is uneven, layered, and selective. Urban centres especially Aizawl are emerging as active spaces of culinary hybridity, where outside cuisines are tried, adapted, and gradually normalised. In these environments, food is not only nourishment but also a symbol of modernity, cosmopolitan belonging, aspiration, and youth identity. Rural households, meanwhile, treat food as cultural inheritance deeply rooted in memory, landscape, and community rhythm. For them, outside food is tolerated but not embraced, familiarity outweighs novelty. Generational dynamics further shape this shift as younger people are often

the mediators of global influence, while elders position themselves as custodians of cultural continuity.

Table 6.14. Outside cultural influence: Fusion or appropriation

Fusion or appropriation	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Fusion	16	1	58	2	74 (37)	3 (1.5)	77 (19.25)
Appropriation	22	15	18	19	40 (20)	34 (17)	74 (18.5)
Both	52	13	22	68	74 (37)	81 (40.5)	155 (38.75)
Neither	10	71	2	11	12 (6)	82 (41)	94 (23.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.14 provides an important insight into how households across Mizoram interpret the arrival and integration of external culinary practices into their own food culture, reflecting varying degrees of openness, hesitation, and ambivalence. When looking at the overall distribution, the category *Both* (38.75%) emerges as the most dominant response, indicating that many respondents perceive cultural mixing in food as carrying both constructive and potentially damaging implications. This is followed by *Neither* (23.5%), suggesting that nearly one-fourth of households do not consciously engage with the discourse of fusion or appropriation, perhaps because such framing is still academically or discursively distant from everyday domestic food realities. Meanwhile, the responses for *Fusion* (19.25%) and *Appropriation* (18.5%) remain almost evenly split, signalling that households interpret global food influence through multiple emotional and cultural lenses rather than a singular stance.

Urban households show a notably different pattern compared to the total responses. In urban areas, *Fusion* (37%) and *Both* (37%) share equal dominance, reflecting a population more exposed to diverse cuisines, food media, and global consumption patterns. Only 6% selected *Neither*, demonstrating that urban respondents are more aware of or willing to engage in contemporary food conversations, even if their interpretations are divided between seeing hybridity as innovation or cultural risk. The rural responses contrast sharply. Here, *Neither* (41%) and *Both* (40.5%) dominate, pointing to a dual reality in which many rural households either have not formed explicit opinions about global food influences or hold mixed perspectives formed

through gradual exposure rather than deliberate reflection. The percentage of respondents selecting Fusion in rural areas is extremely low (1.5%), showing limited enthusiasm toward interpreting external influence as creative culinary integration. The rural levels of Appropriation (17%), though comparable to urban proportions, may emerge from protective tendencies toward cultural preservation rather than from critical awareness of global cultural politics. This contrast between rural and urban interpretations reflects different levels of contact with cosmopolitan culinary spaces, food experimentation, and media-driven trends.

The qualitative accounts further illuminate these patterns and ground the numerical findings in lived experience. One respondent from Aizawl Urban stated,

“We persistently view it as progress and sophistication”
(Respondent No. 21).

This short but telling statement demonstrates how, for some, engaging with external cuisines represents not only food preference but also a symbolic alignment with modernity and social advancement. Another urban respondent expressed concern instead of excitement, sharing,

“In restaurants, Mizo dishes are scarce now. It feels like outsiders’ food is celebrated while our own fades away”
(Respondent 248).

This voice captures a narrative of loss and displacement, where shifts in public food representation provoke anxieties about cultural erasure.

A third respondent added,

“Youngsters who consider themselves modern look down on traditional food now” (Respondent 365),

revealing how external influence has begun shaping generational attitudes and hierarchies around what counts as “modern,” “stylish,” or culturally valuable food. Together, these perspectives reflect how intercultural adaptation is not merely a culinary shift but also a negotiation of identity, pride, and internalised messaging around cultural value.

In contrast, responses from rural areas often reflected a grounded and pragmatic orientation toward food rather than ideological positioning. One respondent from Aizawl Rural explained,

“Depending on the occasion, we consume traditional foods and outside culture foods. We choose whichever suits the situation” (Respondent 271).

Here, intercultural adaptation appears flexible and situation-based rather than emotionally conflicted or identity-driven. Another rural participant expressed disinterest in the terminology altogether,

“I do not think much about whether it is fusion or appropriation. We eat what we are used to and what is available.”

Such a response aligns with the high frequency of Neither in rural regions and suggests that for many households, food decisions continue to be shaped by habit, availability, and practicality rather than global cultural discourse.

Taken together, both the numerical distribution and the accompanying narratives reveal that intercultural adaptation in food practices in Mizoram exists along a spectrum shaped by geography, exposure, generational change, and symbolic interpretation. Urban respondents, especially in Aizawl, appear more invested in viewing external influences as culinary potential and cultural expansion, while recognising the possibility of appropriation or cultural marginalisation. Rural respondents, meanwhile, show a more cautious or detached stance, shaped less by ideology and more by continuity and habit. Yet the shared dominance of the response Both across regions suggests that despite varying levels of exposure, many Mizos are already engaging with a complex awareness of cultural blending, one that contains opportunity and risk, belonging and uncertainty, familiarity and change. In this way, the table demonstrates that food has become a site where cultural shifts are negotiated, resisted, embraced, or quietly absorbed within everyday domestic life in Mizoram.

Table 6.15. Increase in availability of ingredients from outside cultures in stores

Increase	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	93	44	67	48	160 (80)	92 (46)	252 (63)
No	7	56	33	52	40 (20)	108 (54)	148 (37)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.15 shows how people across Mizoram feel about the increase of ingredients from outside cultures becoming available in local shops. When looking at the total responses, 63% of households said that these ingredients are now easier to find, while 37% said they have not noticed much change. This tells us that overall, more than half of the respondents are aware of new food items entering the market, but there is still a large group who feel that availability has not changed much.

In urban areas, this change is much more noticeable. A large majority of urban households (80%) said yes, ingredients from outside cultures are now more easily available in stores. Only 20% disagreed. This shows that people living in urban areas are surrounded by more diverse food products and have more access to supermarkets, food supply stores, and modern shops. Kolasib Urban shows the highest response, with 93% agreeing, which means the food market there is changing quickly and becoming more globalised. Aizawl Urban also shows this trend, though not as strongly, with 67% agreeing.

In rural areas, the pattern is very different. Only 46% said they noticed an increase, while 54% said no. This means most rural households still do not feel strong changes in ingredient availability. Many rural places rely on local vegetables, meat, and simple pantry staples, and their shops are smaller with fewer imported items. Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural both show a similar trend, meaning rural food markets are changing slowly and unevenly.

Comparing urban and rural responses shows a clear divide. Urban households are much more exposed to new food ingredients, food brands, and trends from outside cultures, while rural households continue to depend more on traditional and local food systems. This difference also reflects differences in access to shops, transport, and exposure to media and travel. It suggests that food change in Mizoram is happening, but not at the same speed everywhere. Urban centres are adapting more quickly, while rural communities are adapting more slowly and carefully.

The respondents' voices help explain these numbers. One urban respondent shared,

“Various new ways of preparing food are emerging continuously.”

This shows that for some households, the increase in new ingredients feels exciting and inspiring, opening the door to new recipes and flavours. Another respondent said,

“Many people have gone out to other places now, and they continuously learn about various ways of eating.”

Here, the change is linked to travel and migration, showing how new food habits come back home with people. Another explained,

“The use of masala and other ingredients has increased significantly, even oil.”

This shows how outside influences are not just about luxury items, but also about everyday cooking materials that are slowly changing what people eat and how they prepare meals.

On the rural side, one respondent noted,

“We are already eating a lot of things made by other ethnic groups.”

This comment suggests that even though the change is slower, it is happening, often in small steps. Another respondent viewed the shift positively, saying,

“Our nation has become more developed now, so availability has increased.”

For them, new ingredients represent growth and progress rather than loss.

Across both contexts, it becomes clear that ingredient availability is not only about food, it is also about how people experience cultural change. For some, increase in ingredients from outside cultures feels like a sign of improvement, learning, and modernity. For others, the change is slow or less noticeable and does not yet affect their daily cooking. This pattern reflects a broader process of intercultural adaptation, where food habits shift gradually, influenced by exposure, access, and personal preference. In this way, outside food ingredients are quietly reshaping how Mizos cook, eat, and think about food sometimes actively, sometimes slowly, but always as part of everyday life.

Table 6.16. Cooking dishes from outside cultures

Influence	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	13	13	42	6	55 (27.5)	19 (9.5)	74 (18.5)
No	87	87	58	94	145 (72.5)	181 (95.5)	326 (81.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban;KR=Kolasib Rural;AU=Aizawl Urban;AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.16 looks at whether households cook dishes from outside cultures in their homes. When looking at the total responses, only 18.5% of households said yes, while a large majority (81.5%) said they do not cook such dishes at home. This shows that even though global food trends are more visible in Mizoram today, most families still continue with their traditional food practices at home. Cooking food from outside cultures is happening, but only among a smaller group. This suggests that change is happening slowly and is not yet a common part of everyday cooking.

When looking at only the urban areas, 27.5% of the respondents said they cook dishes from outside cultures, while 72.5% said they do not. Urban households are more likely to try new recipes compared to the total population. Aizawl Urban has the highest percentage, with 42% saying they cook such dishes. This shows that many families in the capital are trying out foods like noodles, pasta, Korean dishes, or Indian sweets at home. Kolasib Urban, however, has a much lower percentage (13%), showing that even though it is a town, the habit of cooking outside dishes is still limited there.

In rural areas, the number is very low, only 9.5% said yes while 90.5% said no. This means cooking outside dishes is almost absent in most rural households. Aizawl Rural shows the lowest adoption at 6%, and Kolasib Rural is slightly higher at 13%, though still low. The numbers suggest that rural communities are holding on to traditional cooking styles and ingredients and are not yet fully influenced by global food trends. Comparing urban and rural responses shows a clear difference. Urban areas, especially Aizawl Urban, are becoming more open to trying outside dishes, while rural areas continue with traditional food practices. Urban households have easier access to ingredients, shops, and cooking ideas from the internet or travel. Rural households, on the other hand, rely mostly on familiar food and ingredients available locally. This gap shows that intercultural adaptation in food is happening unevenly, with cities leading the change and rural areas changing at a slower pace.

The respondents' voices help explain why this is happening. One respondent from Aizawl Urban shared,

“We sometimes cook a mixture. . . half traditional and half from other cultures. It depends on the mood and what ingredients we have.”

This shows how some households blend new recipes with familiar cooking methods, instead of replacing their food completely. Another respondent explained,

“We sometimes make kheer or try snacks from outside but not every day.”

This tells us that even in places where change is happening, it is not yet a daily habit, new dishes are tried occasionally, not regularly. A respondent from Kolasib said,

“We only prepare salads from outside cultures, nothing more than that.”

This shows selective adoption, where only simple and familiar dishes are included, rather than fully shifting to foreign cuisines. Meanwhile, a rural respondent said,

“We usually eat what we are used to and do not try outside dishes.”

This reflects comfort, habit, and familiarity rather than rejection. For them, change is unnecessary because their current food satisfies their needs and identity.

These voices show that cooking food from other cultures is not only about taste, it is also tied to identity, routine, and belonging. Some households see new dishes as something exciting and modern, while others see no reason to change what they have always cooked. In this way, intercultural adaptation in cooking is happening quietly and slowly. It is influenced by access to ingredients, exposure to media, movement to other places, and generational interests. People are not rejecting tradition, they are negotiating it. For now, traditional Mizo food still remains at the centre of home cooking, while outside dishes are entering slowly in small steps, mostly in cities and mostly among younger households.

6.6. Food as Fashion Commodity

Beyond its fundamental function as subsistence, food is being considered as a fashion commodity. Certain cuisines, eating experiences, and culinary trends are transformed into status, identity, and self-expression symbols through cultural, societal, and economic factors. Food's symbolic worth, rather than its nutritional value, defines it as a fashion commodity. It is influenced by quick, media-driven trends, acts as a social status and identity marker, and is becoming more and more intertwined with the luxury fashion sector. In this section, we will closely examine how food is increasingly valued for its symbolic and aesthetic appeal, rather than solely for nutritional sustenance. The data presented in the following tables shows how branded

bakery items, café culture, packaged snacks, and visually appealing foods have become popular consumption choices, particularly among younger and urban consumers. These trends reveal how food functions as a marker of lifestyle and prestige, where the act of eating becomes intertwined with display, social visibility, and identity expression. The tables also highlight the influence of social media platforms where food is photographed, shared, and circulated as a key driver in transforming everyday eating into a performative and trend-oriented activity. Through this empirical evidence, we can observe how food is mobilized as a fashion commodity that signals modernity, taste, and aspirational belonging, reflecting the broader cultural shift toward symbolic and experience-driven consumption in contemporary Mizo society.

Table 6.17. Sections of Mizo society likely to prefer non-Mizo food and takeaways

Preference	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
More affluent	49	61	20	17	69 (34.5)	78 (39)	147 (36.75)
Less affluent	4	15	11	3	15 (7.5)	18 (9)	33 (8.25)
Everyone	44	21	64	77	108 (54)	98 (49)	206 (51.5)
Others	3	3	5	3	8 (4)	6 (3)	14 (3.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.17 shows how people in Mizoram view which sections of society are most likely to prefer non-Mizo food and takeaways, and the responses show that food preference is slowly becoming a symbol of changing lifestyle and identity. Looking at the overall total, more than half of the respondents (51.5%) believe that everyone today is likely to take interest in non-Mizo food. This suggests that many households see food habits shifting widely, cutting across age, class, and location. At the same time, 36.75% still believe that the more affluent section of society is most likely to prefer outside food, showing that some still associate access to non-traditional food with wealth, exposure, and modern lifestyle. Only 8.25% believed the less affluent are more likely to prefer these foods, and a small 3.5% selected “others.”

When looking at the urban data alone, 54% believe that everyone prefers non-Mizo food, while 34.5% still associate it mainly with those who are more financially comfortable. This means that although change is happening broadly, the idea that

outside food is a lifestyle marker something linked to economic status still exists. In Aizawl Urban, the majority (64%) said that preference is universal, while only 20% feel it belongs mainly to wealthy households. In contrast, Kolasib Urban responses lean more toward the idea that those with higher income lead this change (49%), reflecting differing levels of exposure and food availability in these two towns.

In rural areas, the responses shift again. Here, 49% said that everyone is likely to consume non-Mizo food, while 39% believed the wealthier are more likely. Aizawl Rural stands out with 77% saying the change includes everyone, showing that in many rural places non-Mizo food is no longer seen as something only for elites but something becoming normal and socially accepted. Kolasib Rural follows closely, with 64% choosing everyone. This shows that in many rural settings, the spread of new food habits happens through shared influence, especially through youth culture, digital exposure, and community-level curiosity rather than class distinction.

Comparing the two, the urban respondents still attach some connection between food choice and class identity, while rural respondents see the trend as a broader community shift. This reflects that in cities, non-Mizo food may still feel like a lifestyle choice linked with modern identity, convenience, and image. Meanwhile in rural areas, it feels like a change moving across households naturally as new tastes and trends spread through technology, education, and peer influence.

These patterns connect closely to the idea of food as a fashion commodity. Food is no longer just for eating, it has become something that expresses identity, taste, and belonging. Many young people treat food the way earlier generations treated clothing, music, or hairstyles, as something that signals personality, lifestyle, and status. One respondent explained,

“Even with everything we already have here, even though Mizo food is available everywhere, we Mizos still choose to go out and eat. It has now become something normal, not just a special treat or something rare. Eating out has become a habit and almost a part of our lifestyle.”

This shows how eating out or ordering food is no longer just about taste, it is connected to social life, identity, and the feeling of being “up-to-date,” making food a part of fashion and lifestyle expression.

Another respondent shared,

“I think the people who enjoy trying new foods will do so, and it doesn’t really depend on whether they are rich or poor. Some people just enjoy experimenting and exploring new tastes, while others prefer sticking to what they are used to.”

This suggests that personality and curiosity now play a stronger role than status alone. Food becomes a personal style choice, much like choosing clothes or music.

A rural respondent wrote,

“Youth... they are the ones who follow these trends. They are the ones ordering food, trying new snacks, or choosing something other than Mizo food because it is what they see and hear every day.”

This short but meaningful statement shows how youth are shaping food trends, often driven by what they see on social media, K-culture, and online platforms.

Another respondent reflected,

“It depends a lot on the type of family. Some families encourage children and youth to try new foods from outside cultures, while others prefer traditional cooking. So, the change is not the same everywhere, even within the same town or village.”

This reminds us that food change is personal, shaped by family values, exposure, and everyday lifestyle choices.

The aesthetization of food among Mizo youth is especially noticeable. It is a fascinating process where food is deliberately treated as a visual commodity, something photographed, shared online, and admired and not just eaten. The influence of social media and Hallyu (K-culture) plays a big role here. Food becomes something to display, something to be seen with, and sometimes something more “aesthetic” than practical. Korean noodles, bubble tea, matcha drinks, sushi, cheese pulls, and café-style desserts are popular examples, not only because of taste, but because they “look good.”

To illustrate this shift, several respondents mentioned how food today is often valued first for how it *looks* rather than how it tastes.

One respondent shared,

“Nowadays, people don’t just eat food. . . they take pictures first. Even before tasting it, they want the perfect angle, the perfect background, and then they post it online. It feels like food has become part of how people show their lifestyle.”

This voice reflects how food is now part of social presentation, not only consumption.

Another respondent described how social media shapes food desire,

“Sometimes we don’t even know how a food tastes, but once we see it on Instagram or Facebook...especially someone we know posting it... we suddenly want to try it. It becomes attractive just because it looks good in the picture.”

Here, the influence is visual and relational and food becomes a symbol of participation in shared online trends.

A young respondent connected this directly to Hallyu influence,

“Korean food especially is popular because we see it everywhere. . .in K-dramas, TikTok, and YouTube. The way they eat makes it look enjoyable and cute, so we start wanting it too. Even if we don’t really like the taste at first, the idea of trying it feels exciting.”

This shows how K-culture is reshaping taste expectations by making food an emotional and stylish experience.

Another participant explained the idea of food as an accessory or identity signal,

“Bubble tea, sushi, and Korean ramen have become more like fashion items. Holding them or posting them feels like being part of something modern. Sometimes, it’s not even about being hungry it’s about being seen with it.”

This highlights how food is now part of self-branding, similar to clothing or technology.

Finally, one respondent described the pressure behind this trend,

“If you don’t post it, it’s almost like it never happened. People want others to see where they ate, what they ordered, and how ‘aesthetic’ the food looked. Eating has turned into content.”

This reveals how food now exists in two forms, as something eaten and as something displayed.

Together, these voices show that the meaning of food among Mizo youth is expanding beyond nutrition and taste. Food is increasingly used as a visual and social language, something that signals trendiness, lifestyle, belonging, and identity. The growing fascination with Korean noodles, matcha drinks, cheesecakes, and colourful café items reflects how global media and online culture are shaping what food represents turning it into a fashionable commodity in everyday life.

In this way, food becomes part of fashion. It reflects identity, style, imagination, and belonging to a global trend. The table shows that this shift is happening across Mizoram, at different speeds in rural and urban areas, but with the same underlying message i.e. food is no longer only about hunger, it is also about expression.

Table 6.18. Age group in Mizo society more likely to prefer non-Mizo food and takeaways

Age group	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
School children	5	10	18	1	32 (16)	11 (5.5)	43 (10.75)
Youth	78	86	49	50	127 (63.5)	136 (68)	263 (65.75)
Young Professionals	17	4	33	49	50 (25)	82 (41)	132 (33)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.18 shows that, across all four regions, youth are clearly seen as the group most likely to prefer non-Mizo food and takeaways. Out of 400 respondents, 263 (65.75%) pointed to youth, compared to 132 (33%) who chose young professionals and only 43 (10.75%) who selected school children. This means that more than two-thirds of the sample link non-Mizo food and takeaway culture mainly with young people, and that this preference often continues into early working life.

Looking only at urban households, the pattern is similar. Out of 200 urban respondents, 127 (63.5%) named youth as the main group who prefers non-Mizo food and takeaway, 50 (25%) selected young professionals, and 32 (16%) mentioned school children. Aizawl Urban shows a split between youth (49%) and young

professionals (33%), with a noticeable share for school children (18%), which suggests that in the capital children are exposed to outside foods at an earlier age. Kolasib Urban is even more strongly tilted toward youth, with 78% identifying them as the key consumers of non-Mizo food.

In rural households, youth are again at the centre. Out of 200 rural respondents, 136 (68%) chose youth as the main group, 82 (41%) selected young professionals, and only 11 (5.5%) pointed to school children. Kolasib Rural shows the strongest concentration, with 86% choosing youth, while Aizawl Rural sees almost equal emphasis on youth (50%) and young professionals (49%). This suggests that in rural areas, older youth and young adults often those who travel for study or work act as carriers of new food trends into the village.

Together, these numbers show that youth and young professionals are driving a shift toward non-Mizo food and mixed eating patterns, and that this shift is happening in both urban and rural spaces, though with different speeds and styles.

One young respondent explained how non-Mizo food fits into daily life,

“When my friends and I decide what to eat, we rarely choose only by taste or price. We check which place is popular on Instagram, which café has nice lighting and pretty plates. We choose the food that will look good in photos, then we order it on an app and post the pictures before we even finish eating. The food becomes part of how we show our day to others.”

This voice shows that for many youths, food is not just about filling the stomach, it has become a visible part of style and self-presentation, much like clothes or accessories.

Another respondent linked non-Mizo cuisines with status and confidence,

“Ordering a big butter chicken set, fancy biryani, pizza, or sushi feels different from eating simple rice and vegetables at home. When we bring that kind of food to a gathering, people immediately ask where it is from and how much it cost. There is a feeling that we are ‘upgraded’ for that moment, like we can also live the lifestyle we see in movies and social media.”

Here, non-Mizo dishes work as status markers. Their higher price, special taste, and connection to other places allow young people to show that they are worldly and financially comfortable, even if only occasionally.

A college student described takeaway and delivery as part of a modern routine,

“On busy days we don’t even think of cooking. We just open the app, scroll through the newest offers, and order something that looks attractive. Paying extra for delivery doesn’t bother us much because it saves time and gives us the feeling that our life is fast and busy, like people in big cities. The rider coming to our door with branded bags almost feels like getting a gift.”

In this case, convenience itself becomes a kind of luxury. Being able to outsource cooking and travel through delivery shows that the household can afford to pay for comfort and speed.

Another respondent highlighted the role of packaging and branding,

“Sometimes the box and cup are just as important as what is inside. If the logo is famous or the packaging looks classy, we keep it on the table and take photos with it. People seeing the picture already know the food is expensive or trendy, even without tasting it. The packet proves that we ordered from a ‘good’ place.”

This illustrates how branded, aesthetic packaging turns food into a visual currency. The containers themselves help confirm status and are woven into online posts and stories.

A working young adult reflected on how taste and fashion can clash,

“Honestly, some of the foreign foods are not that delicious for me. Sometimes they are too cheesy, too oily, or too strong. But if all my friends are trying it and posting it, I also join. I don’t want to be the only one still eating plain rice and vegetables when everyone else is eating what they call ‘fancy’ food. So, I follow the trend first, and my real taste comes second.”

This shows how food trends can override personal preference, with fashion, peer pressure, and fear of being left out pushing people to consume foods they may not fully enjoy.

Thus, non-Mizo food and takeaway/delivery culture have become powerful fashion commodities among Mizo youth and young professionals. Age-wise, these groups are most involved in trying new cuisines, ordering from outside, and mixing global dishes with everyday meals. At the same time, many households report a shift from purely traditional eating to mixed cuisines, especially in places like Kolasib Urban and Kolasib Rural.

The focus on non-Mizo food among Mizo youth highlights two major ways in which food now works like fashion. First, food is increasingly used for status signalling. High-end mainland Indian dishes, Western foods such as burgers and pizzas, Japanese sushi, and other Asian items are often more expensive and more complex to prepare at home. Choosing these foods shows not just preference, but access, familiarity, and cultural confidence. As one respondent explained,

“Sometimes when we buy biryani, sushi, or pizza, we don’t even think about whether we really like the taste. What matters is that it feels classy and different from home food. When people see it, they know we didn’t order something cheap or ordinary.”

This voice reflects how taste is not just about flavour, but about being seen making the “right” choices. Another respondent shared,

“When we bring food from expensive restaurants to gatherings, people immediately ask where it’s from and how much it cost. It becomes a talking point. Even before eating, people judge the food by the brand name.”

Here, food becomes similar to a designer bag or branded shoes as the brand becomes the message. A third respondent added,

“There are times when ordering fancy food makes us feel like we are doing something special. It’s almost like celebrating status. Traditional food is normal, but non-Mizo food feels like a step higher.”

Together, these statements show how food has become a marker of aspiration, social mobility, and belonging to a more global lifestyle rather than simply a response to hunger.

Second, food consumption through takeaway and delivery functions as a form of luxury based on convenience. For many, ordering food instead of cooking signals a modern lifestyle where time, comfort, and ease are prioritised. One respondent admitted,

“To be honest, we order food even when we could cook. It feels easier and more relaxing when the food comes to the house. It gives a feeling that life is comfortable, like we don’t have to struggle for daily meals.”

Here, convenience itself becomes a status marker, not needing to cook is treated as a sign of progress. Another participant focused on the visual side of ordering, noting,

“When the delivery rider arrives with branded packaging, it feels exciting. Sometimes we don’t even open it right away. . we take photos first because the whole presentation looks trendy.”

The moment of arrival becomes part of the consumption experience, transforming packaging into a visual asset meant for display. A final respondent expressed how delivery fits into fast-moving trend culture,

“Ordering food online makes us feel updated and connected. It’s fast and trendy, and we can try new foods the same day we see them online. Cooking suddenly feels old-fashioned when there is a quicker and more stylish option.”

Delivery enables instant participation in trends, turning food into a fast-moving consumable commodity similar to clothing or accessories that change with every fashion cycle.

Thus, for many Mizo youth, food now functions much like fashion. It is used to show who they are, how modern they feel, what they can afford, and how closely they follow global trends. Traditional Mizo food still carries deep meaning, especially within the home and during rituals, but non-Mizo cuisines and takeaway culture have added a new layer where eating is not only about nourishment, it is also about image, excitement, and being part of a fast-changing, visually driven world. Here, the meal

becomes a stage, and the eater becomes the performer showing identity, taste, and status through what is chosen and how it is displayed.

Table 6.19. Contemporary Mizo society: Balancing traditional foods and global cuisines

Balancing	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Traditional food	30	12	46	43	76 (38)	55 (17.5)	131 (32.75)
Mix cuisines	28	55	37	44	65 (32.5)	99 (49.5)	164 (41)
Both	42	33	17	13	59 (29.5)	46 (23)	105 (26.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.19 shows how people in contemporary Mizo society think about the balance between traditional foods and global cuisines. Looking at the overall total first, the largest share of respondents, 41% (164 households), feel that society is now moving towards “mix cuisines” that is, using both local and outside food but with a stronger pull towards new dishes and ingredients. About 32.75% (131 households) still see traditional food as the main focus, while 26.25% (105 households) say that both traditional and global foods are being kept together more deliberately. This already suggests that, for many people, food is no longer only about heritage; it has become a space where old and new are constantly compared, chosen, and displayed.

For the urban total, 38% believe that people mainly focus on traditional foods, 32.5% say they are leaning towards mixed cuisines, and 29.5% feel that both are being balanced. In Aizawl Urban, almost half of respondents (46%) say traditional foods still lead, while 37% say people are increasingly trying outside cuisines, and only 17% feel both are equally balanced. This shows that even in the capital, where global food is easily available, there is still strong pride in traditional dishes. Kolasib Urban is more even, 30% emphasise traditional food, 28% stress new cuisines, and 42% say they balance both. Kolasib town, therefore, looks like a place where people are more comfortable moving back and forth between Mizo dishes and global foods in everyday life.

In the rural total, the picture changes. Almost half (49.5%) say society is now more inclined to mix cuisines, while 17.5% say traditional food is still the main focus and

23% feel both are being maintained. Kolasib Rural shows the boldest shift: 55% say people are trying new foods, 33% say both are balanced, and only 12% insist on traditional food. This goes against the common idea that rural areas always remain conservative. In Aizawl Rural, food choices are more evenly split, 43% point to traditional food, 44% to mixed cuisines, and 13% to both. This suggests a careful, step-by-step way of changing food habits while keeping cultural roots in place.

Comparing urban and rural areas, we see that both are in motion but in slightly different ways. Urban Aizawl leans more towards the protection of traditional food with growing interest in outside dishes, while Kolasib Urban is more openly hybrid. Rural Kolasib is moving quickly towards new cuisines, and rural Aizawl is balancing between tradition and change. Across all of this, earlier age-group data (Table 6.18) shows that youth and young professionals are repeatedly identified as the main group linked to non-Mizo food, takeaways, and mixed cuisines, this is where the idea of food as a fashion commodity becomes most visible.

Among the Mizo youth, food has gone beyond its older meaning as simple sustenance and is now actively working as a fashion commodity, a complex marker of class, status, and aesthetic identity. This shift is driven by global influences (especially Korean and other Asian pop cultures), by social media, and by changing income levels within Mizoram.

First, global cuisines and class are closely linked. Traditional Mizo dishes such as *bai*, *sawhchiar*, or *sa rep* are still highly valued, but they are associated with everyday life, village roots, and a shared community feeling. By contrast, choosing non-traditional cuisines such as Korean, Japanese, Italian, Continental, or high-end mainland Indian foods often signals a more modern, “worldly” identity. Eating at specialised restaurants or regularly ordering such food requires extra money and some knowledge of what to choose. For many young people, this is what we might call a “taste of modernity” i.e. being able to understand and enjoy these foods shows that they are part of a wider world beyond Mizoram. Some young people also enjoy hybrid dishes for example, bakery items or café foods that mix global ingredients with local flavours which communicate a refined and experimental palate. All of this strengthens the idea that food is now used to show who has the means, the exposure, and the “right” kind of taste, reinforcing its role as a fashion commodity.

Second, the mode of getting the food especially through takeaway and delivery adds another layer. Regularly ordering food on the phone or through apps, paying delivery charges, and avoiding cooking at home turns convenience itself into a sign of modern life. It suggests a busy schedule, enough money to pay for comfort, and a close connection with digital technology. Delivery also allows Mizo youth to join trends quickly, when a new Korean snack, bubble tea, or dessert becomes popular online, they can order it the same day, post it, and feel “caught up” with the rest of the world. The branded, stylish packaging that comes with these orders becomes part of the performance, proving that the food came from a popular place and completing the cycle of fashion, convenience, and visibility.

A young respondent from a rural area linked the trend directly to youth culture and media,

“It is mostly the youth who follow these trends. They are the ones watching K-dramas, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. When they see spicy Korean noodles, cheese-filled corn dogs, or colourful drinks, they want to taste them and show their friends. Many of them order by phone or through the shop’s WhatsApp number. They post the food and the takeaway packets online, and others start wanting the same thing.”

This quote shows how social media and Hallyu (K-culture) turn food into a visual fashion item. Food is first consumed through the eyes and the phone, and only later on the plate. The online image pushes the desire to copy and share.

Another respondent described how families vary in their response,

“It depends a lot on the kind of family. Some parents also enjoy these outside foods, so they encourage their children to order pizza, burgers, Korean noodles, or special biryani, especially on weekends or after church. In other families, parents prefer simple, traditional Mizo food and they tell the children that outside food is only for rare occasions. So inside one village, you can see some houses where delivery boxes are always in the dustbin, and other houses where you almost never see them.”

This comment shows how the fashion side of food is uneven. Some households embrace non-Mizo food as part of normal life, while others resist it to protect tradition. This creates visible differences in how food is displayed and discussed within the same community.

A further respondent directly linked outside cuisines with prestige,

“When we order a big North Indian thali, special kebab, or those cheese-heavy Western foods, it feels like a big thing. We know that these dishes are more expensive and not easy to cook at home. Posting a photo of that kind of food, with the restaurant’s name on the box, makes it feel like we are achieving something or joining a higher level of lifestyle.”

Here non-Mizo food works like a branded bag or limited-edition shoe. Its higher price, special ingredients, and stylish packaging all help it act as a visible marker of achievement and modern taste.

Another respondent focused on the delivery mode itself,

“Ordering food on the phone or through apps has become a kind of style. It shows that we can afford to pay for somebody else to cook and bring it to our door. For young people, it also feels exciting to get the latest ‘trending’ food without leaving the house. We just tap on the screen and wait for the rider. Many times, we also take pictures with the branded bags and cups before we eat.”

This response highlights convenience as a luxury. Paying delivery fees and service charges becomes part of the fashion of food, proof that you can buy comfort, speed, and trendy experiences. It is a highly performative act, where the act of ordering and displaying the food is just as important as eating it.

Several respondents also talked about the look of food. One youth remarked,

“Nowadays, we first see food on the screen. If it looks good, colourful, and neat, we want it. Many of us take photos before eating. Sometimes we even buy something just because it will look nice in a picture, like bubble tea, pretty cakes, or sushi rolls. After that, whether we really like the taste or not is almost second.”

Another added,

“Korean food is very attractive because of how it is shown on dramas and videos. The way they eat, the sounds, the bright colours, the melted cheese, the big bowls of noodles. . it all makes the food look fun. So even if it is spicy or strange at first, we still want to try it and show that we are updated with K-culture.”

Youth and young professionals sit at the centre of changing food habits in Mizoram. They are the main consumers of non-Mizo foods and the most active in mixing global cuisines with traditional meals. At the same time, households across urban and rural areas are shifting towards mixed cuisines, though with different rhythms and degrees of caution.

The strong focus on non-Mizo foods, takeaways, and delivery shows that food now functions like a fashion commodity. Choosing a high-end or viral dish signal not only taste but also money, worldliness, and closeness to global trends. Ordering it through delivery shows that one can afford convenience and speed. Posting it online turns the meal into a public, performative statement of lifestyle.

For Mizo youth, especially in towns and semi-urban areas, food has become a way to speak about who they are and who they want to be, a language of aspiration, comfort, style, and sometimes quiet rebellion against older norms. At the same time, traditional Mizo dishes remain deeply meaningful and are often kept for family meals, rituals, and times when people want to feel rooted. In this sense, contemporary Mizo food culture is not only about what fills the stomach. It is also about what looks good, what feels modern, and what can be shown and shared with others on the street, at the restaurant, and on the screen.

Table 6.20. Social media’s influence on eating

Media influence	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	65	48	74	92	139 (69.5)	140 (70)	279 (69.75)
No	35	52	26	8	61 (30.5)	60 (30)	121 (30.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.20 shows how strongly people feel that social media influences their eating. Looking at the total, almost seven out of ten respondents (69.75%, 279 out of 400) said “Yes”, they feel social media has an impact on how and what they eat, while 30.25% (121 respondents) said “No.” This already tells us that, for most households, food is no longer shaped only by home, church, or village but also by the screen.

For the urban total, 69.5% (139 respondents) said social media influences their eating and 30.5% (61) said it does not. Within this, Aizawl Urban shows the highest impact: 74% feel influenced, compared with 65% in Kolasib Urban. This fits with the growth of café culture, fast-food outlets and good internet connectivity in the towns. Food is not only consumed in kitchens and restaurants, but also on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok, where what looks attractive and “up-to-date” can quickly spread.

For the rural total, the pattern is almost the same, 70% (140 respondents) said social media influences their eating, and 30% (60) said it does not. But there are big differences between the two rural sites. Aizawl Rural is extremely high at 92%, showing that even villages close to the capital are deeply drawn into digital food trends. Kolasib Rural, on the other hand, is lower at 48%, meaning that just under half there feel influenced by social media and just over half say they are not. This suggests that some rural communities still lean more on local habits and shared meals rather than online trends.

Comparing urban and rural, the overall percentages are almost identical, but the reasons may differ. In towns, social media influence is tied to café visits, branded outlets, takeaways and delivery services. In rural areas, especially around Aizawl, it comes through smartphones, cheap data, K-dramas, YouTube vlogs, and mukbang videos, even if there are fewer physical outlets. Across both spaces, the table shows that social media has become a major channel through which food is turned into a fashion object, something to watch, desire, perform and display.

Among Mizo youth, food has clearly moved beyond its earlier role as simple sustenance. It now works as a fashion commodity, a visible marker of class, lifestyle and aesthetic taste. Social media is the main stage where this happens.

Online platforms make the look of food almost as important as the taste. Young people judge food by how “Instagrammable” it is, colourful drinks, neat sushi rolls, cheesy Korean noodles, café desserts with toppings, or coffee in minimalist cups. Posting these pictures becomes a way of personal branding “This is where I go, this is what I

eat, this is the kind of life I have.” The cafés and restaurants in Aizawl and other towns, often designed with clean, Korean-inspired interiors, provide the perfect backdrop. Eating there is not just a meal but a performative ritual, you dress up, order something aesthetic, arrange the table, take photos, add the location tag, and then you eat.

Social media also speeds up food trend cycles. A snack, drink or recipe can become popular within days. Mizo youth see it on reels or stories, and soon restaurants stock it, or shops import it. Trying that food quickly before the trend dies shows that you are “in the know”. In this way, food behaves like fast fashion, trends come, peak and fade, and youth feel pressure not to be left behind.

A college student from Aizawl described how social media shapes her cravings,

“When I scroll through Instagram or TikTok at night, I see so many videos of Korean noodles, bubble tea, thick milkshakes and big burgers. Even if I am not hungry, I start craving them. Sometimes my friends and I order the same thing we see on the screen just to feel like we are part of what everyone is doing online.”

The screen triggers desire. The youth is not just copying a recipe; she is joining a shared online moment, where eating a particular food shows that she belongs to the same digital crowd. Another respondent explained how the visual side of food dominates the decision,

“Nowadays we often choose food with our eyes first. If it looks colourful and neat in the picture, we feel like we must try it. Even simple things like toast or coffee are decorated in such a way that they become special. Sometimes we order a dish mainly because we know it will look good in photos, even if we are not sure we will like the taste.”

showing how the aesthetic value of food, its colour, shape and plating can outweigh taste or nutrition. Food becomes a prop for self-presentation.

A young man who frequently visits cafés commented on the new café culture,

“Going to cafés has become our favourite pastime. We don’t just go there because we are hungry. We go there to take pictures with the interior, the lights, the plants and the drinks.”

We share the photos on Instagram with the café's name. It feels like we are collecting memories and also showing that we can afford that lifestyle."

The café itself is part of the commodity. Spending time and money there, and tagging the location, becomes a way to show aesthetic taste and economic comfort.

Another respondent from a semi-urban area talked about fast trend cycles and fear of being left out,

"Every few months there is a new food everyone is posting. . first it was dalgona coffee, then it was some type of ramen, now it is colourful soda and fruit drinks. If you don't try it and post it, you feel like you are behind. So even if we are satisfied with simple tea, we will still buy the trendy drink at least once just to say we also had it."

This illustrates how FOMO (fear of missing out) works. Food trends become a kind of checklist, and taking part in them is felt as a social necessity rather than a natural choice.

A young woman described the role of editing and filters,

"Before uploading, we always adjust the brightness and colour so that the food looks perfect. Sometimes the real food is a bit messy, but in the photo, it looks clean and shiny. People who see it online think our life is very fancy. In reality, it might just be a normal cake from a small shop."

Here we see how social media creates a polished version of reality. The edited image gives extra value to ordinary food, turning it into a symbol of a more glamorous life.

Another respondent reflected on how social media affects her idea of health and indulgence,

"I follow many food pages and also fitness pages. One reel shows a big cheese-filled burger, and the next reel talks about clean eating and workouts. It confuses me, but it also pushes me to think about how I look when I eat. Sometimes I feel guilty after eating something heavy because I remember all the 'healthy lifestyle' posts."

This shows that the same platforms that make food fashionable can also create tension and guilt, as youth try to balance pleasure, appearance and health. A more critical voice came from a respondent in Kolasib Rural,

“We enjoy watching mukbang and food videos, but we know that our body and our wallet are not like the people we see on screen. If we eat like them all the time, we will get sick and broke. So, I think social media is fun, but we have to remember that it is partly acting.”

This respondent recognises the performative nature of online eating. The videos are seen as entertainment and display, not models to be copied fully.

Thus, we have seen that social media is one of the strongest engines turning food into a fashion commodity among Mizo youth. Most respondents (about 70%) feel that social media influences their eating choices. Youth and young adults use food images to build their online identity, show class and taste, and feel connected to global trends. Cafés, restaurants and even small shops respond by making food more photogenic, knowing that being posted online can attract customers.

Food is now judged not only by flavour or price, but by how it looks in a photo, where it comes from, and how quickly it matches a trend. Posting such food, especially from recognisable cafés or with stylish packaging, gives young people a sense of aesthetic capital, the feeling that they own and display something visually valuable. Each like and comment gives small doses of approval, encouraging the next fashionable purchase.

At the same time, traditional Mizo foods quietly continue to nourish families and anchor identity. But in the digital space, it is mostly the global, colourful, “Instagrammable” foods that take centre stage. In this way, social media does not simply change what people eat. It changes what food means, from a daily necessity and cultural symbol into a powerful tool for self-expression, status, and style.

6.7. The Limits on Domestic Foodways

While the influence of global food trends, digital culture, and youth-driven consumption patterns is increasingly visible in Mizoram, the shift does not extend equally into every space. The dramatic rise of non-Mizo cuisines, café culture, delivery food, and highly aesthetic eating practices reflects rapid change but only in the public and performative sphere. Inside the home, food behaves differently. Here,

older culinary patterns, daily routines, and cultural rhythms continue to hold strong. This tension reveals an important dynamic, external influence may shape how food is consumed socially, visibly, and publicly, but domestic foodways often remain guided by habit, identity, economic practicality, and cultural meaning.

Domestic foodways act as a quiet but powerful boundary. They absorb certain new foods while resisting others, ensuring that the household remains the cultural anchor even as the outside world becomes increasingly globalised. New ingredients, snacks, and foreign cuisines may enter the home, but their presence rarely replaces the foundational traditional meals, they coexist, are adapted, or are reserved for occasional rather than everyday use. In this way, change occurs through selective adoption rather than full replacement.

This selectivity is tied to emotional comfort, cultural memory, and the social expectations embedded in shared meals. Ritual food practices tied to weddings, church events, funerals, and village feasts remain almost untouched by global influence. Even among youth, those most active in experimenting with fashionable foods, the daily household diet often returns to familiar dishes such as *bai*, *tlak*, rice, chutneys, fermented items. These foods are not just meals, they are cultural anchors, associated with belonging, home, and continuity.

At the same time, the growing popularity of foreign or hybrid food outside the home demonstrates how food now carries symbolic meaning beyond nutrition. Eating out, ordering delivery, and posting food online represent lifestyle, class, taste, and identity. Yet despite this shift, traditional domestic foodways demonstrate remarkable resilience. The home remains the space where cultural values are preserved, where culinary continuity is protected, and where food remains functional rather than performative.

Thus, the limits of external influence do not represent a rejection of new food culture, but rather a negotiated balance where the public sphere becomes a site of experimentation and fashion, while the private sphere continues to safeguard familiarity, identity, and rootedness. This duality shows that even in a rapidly globalising context, food in Mizoram is shaped by both aspiration and belonging, revealing how cultural systems adapt without losing their core. This section will explore how Mizo families balance the old and the new, negotiating cultural identity

as they reconcile traditional foodways with the fast-changing food landscape around them.

Table 6.21. Pressure to conform to dominant food cultures

Pressure	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	36	15	80	9	116 (58)	24 (12)	140 (35)
No	64	85	20	91	84 (42)	176 (88)	260 (65)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The findings from Table 6.21 reveal a clear divide in how different regions in Mizoram experience pressure to conform to dominant food cultures. When viewed across the entire sample, only 35% of respondents reported feeling this pressure, while the majority (65%) stated they did not. However, this balance shifts significantly when broken down by urban and rural contexts. In the urban total, 58% acknowledged feeling pressure to adopt more fashionable or widely accepted food cultures, whereas only 12% in rural areas reported the same. The most striking figure comes from Aizawl Urban, where 80% of respondents expressed that they feel compelled to follow dominant or trendy food practices. This suggests that the capital city, with its dense mix of restaurants, social interactions, and visibility, acts as a cultural space where food becomes linked to performance, social belonging, and distinction. Kolasib Urban reflects a softer version of this pattern, with 36% acknowledging such pressures, showing that even in smaller urban centres the influence of global food trends is present, though not as intensely.

In contrast, respondents in rural areas particularly Aizawl Rural (9%) and Kolasib Rural (15%) reported minimal pressure. Here, traditional domestic foodways appear stable and deeply embedded in everyday practice. The lower exposure to restaurant culture, reduced social display contexts, and stronger reliance on household cooking all contribute to this resilience. The divide between these spaces demonstrates that external influence does not operate uniformly. Instead, it circulates more strongly in environments where food consumption is visible, shared, and socially evaluated.

Respondents' voices further illustrate this tension. One participant from Aizawl urban shared,

“Sometimes when I go out with friends, I feel like I have to eat what everyone else is ordering. If I order something simple or traditional, people joke that I am not modern enough, so I choose what is trending even if it is not what I enjoy.”

This comment highlights the ways food choice can shift from personal preference to social compliance, driven by the fear of appearing outdated. Another respondent echoed similar feelings, explaining,

“These days people believe that eating non-Mizo food is a sign of being modern or educated. When we see others eating Korean food, café food, or restaurant dishes, it makes us feel like that is the right way to fit in.”

Here, aspiration and admiration, not coercion become the subtle engines of conformity.

Yet resistance remains visible, particularly within domestic spaces. One respondent firmly stated,

“I grew up eating rice and simple food every day, and that is what feels natural to me. I don’t feel any need to follow food trends just because others do.”

Another expressed the same sentiment in a more neutral tone,

“People eat based on their own taste. I don’t think we should feel pressured just because something is popular.”

These voices show how habit, identity, and familiarity act as protective layers around domestic foodways. A rural respondent emphasized this difference clearly, noting,

“In our village, we never feel that pressure. People eat what they have and what they know. Some try outside food once in a while, but it never replaces our everyday meals.”

Together, the numerical patterns and lived experiences show that the pressure to conform is strongest in public and social spheres, where food becomes visible and performative. However, once inside the private boundaries of the home, these pressures weaken noticeably. This demonstrates the cultural limits of external influence, fashionable foods may circulate widely online, in restaurants, and among peer groups, but traditional domestic meals continue to anchor everyday eating habits,

memory, and comfort. Despite the growing attraction to global cuisines and the desire to align with modern trends, the core of Mizo domestic foodways remains intact. Even in households where outside food is enjoyed socially, the routine returns to rice, *bai*, *sawhchiar*, dal, boiled vegetables, or smoked preparations reflects a cultural rhythm that external trends have not replaced.

This ongoing tension between public performance and private continuity reveals how modern food change in Mizoram is negotiated rather than passively absorbed. External influences may shape aspirations, aesthetics, and social behaviour, but domestic foodways continue to act as a cultural filter allowing experimentation without surrendering identity.

Table 6.22. Misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Mizo food practices

Misunderstanding	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	54	26	60	14	114 (57)	40 (20)	154 (38.5)
No	46	74	40	86	86 (43)	160 (80)	246 (61.5)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The findings from Table 6.22 reveal how misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Mizo food practices varies across regions and carries emotional weight for many respondents, especially in urban settings. At the overall level, 38.5% of respondents reported that their food practices had been misunderstood, while 61.5% had not experienced such judgement. When the numbers are viewed through an urban-rural lens, the pattern becomes clearer, 57% of urban households reported misunderstanding, compared with only 20% in rural areas. The highest level emerged in Aizawl Urban, where 60% felt their foodways had been misinterpreted, followed closely by Kolasib Urban at 54%. By contrast, rural respondents, particularly in Aizawl Rural (14%) and Kolasib Rural (26%), faced very little misunderstanding, suggesting that traditional food remains socially uncontested and deeply normalized in rural life.

Urban respondents often described these misunderstandings in personal terms. One explained,

“People sometimes call our food bland because it looks too plain or doesn’t smell like the masala-based food they are used to. But for us, that simplicity is the taste of home. At first, even some Mizos who grow up eating outside food think it’s boring, but slowly the flavour grows on you. It’s subtle, and you start noticing the freshness of the vegetables, the meat, the smoke. After some time, you begin to crave it.”

This quote reflects the idea that flavour is learned, not merely tasted, that traditional Mizo food requires familiarity rather than instant approval. Another respondent expressed a similar sentiment,

“I used to think Mizo food was too simple when I was younger and obsessed with trying food from outside. But later, I realized it is an acquired taste. The smell of sa-um, the taste of bai...once you fall in love with it, nothing else feels as comforting.”

Here, traditional food is framed not just as sustenance but as something that matures with memory, belonging, and emotional intimacy.

Some respondents expressed frustration with how outsiders evaluate Mizo food against the visual or sensory expectations shaped by mainstream cuisines. One respondent shared,

“People sometimes wrinkle their noses when they see our food because it doesn’t look fancy or colourful. But that reaction comes from not understanding it. They taste with their eyes first, not with experience. Once they actually try it, many change their minds.”

Another added,

“Many outside foods shock your tongue the first time.... they’re oily, salty, spicy, full of flavour. Our food is the opposite. It feels quiet at first. The more you eat it, the more it feels right.”

These reflections point to the way misunderstanding often arises from sensory mismatch rather than cultural rejection where food unfamiliarity is mistaken for inferiority.

In rural settings, the tone was notably calmer and more grounded. One rural respondent said simply,

“Here nobody calls our food bland or strange because everyone grew up with it. There is nothing to explain.”

Another reflected on how exposure can shift perception,

“When people first try our food, they think it’s too plain. But after they stay with us and eat it for a while, they start appreciating it. The taste is clean, the smell comes from the ingredients, not from spices. It grows on them.”

These voices remind us that taste is social, and that belonging shapes preference. Thus, the misunderstanding of Mizo foodways is not merely a matter of culinary preference but tied to broader cultural perception. Mistaken judgements arise when traditional cuisine is evaluated using globalized food standards that privilege complexity, spice, visual excitement, and novelty. Meanwhile, the values embodied in Mizo domestic food such as health, simplicity, efficiency, emotional grounding, and ingredient honesty remain invisible to those unfamiliar with the cultural logic behind them. While the public sphere pressures youth to adopt globalized food aesthetics, the domestic sphere quietly preserves cultural meaning. Thus, misunderstanding does not signal the disappearance of Mizo foodways but rather the gap between public perception and private continuity. Beneath the visible trends, the core domestic food system remains intact, not because it resists taste change, but because people continue returning to the food that feels like *home*, the food they grew into rather than the food they performed.

Table 6.23. Marginalization of Mizo food practices

Marginalization	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	45	33	68	15	113 (56.5)	48 (24)	161 (40.25)
No	55	67	32	85	87 (43.5)	152 (76)	239 (59.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.23 reveals a clear divide between urban and rural experiences regarding the marginalisation of Mizo food practices. At the overall level, 40.25% of respondents

indicated that Mizo food is marginalised, while 59.75% did not share this view. However, when broken down into rural and urban spaces, the differences become much sharper. In urban areas, 56.5% reported feeling that Mizo food is pushed aside in public settings. In contrast, in rural areas only 24% expressed similar feelings, showing that marginalisation is predominantly an urban phenomenon.

Aizawl Urban had the highest reported experience, with 68% acknowledging marginalisation. This suggests that in the capital city where food is more publicly performed through dining out, social media, and formal gatherings, traditional foodways are more vulnerable to being overlooked or undervalued. Kolasib Urban followed with 45%, indicating that even in smaller towns, traditional food must compete with visible, fashionable alternatives. Meanwhile, Aizawl Rural (15%) and Kolasib Rural (33%) showed relatively minimal concern, reflecting environments where traditional food remains the daily norm rather than a cultural choice.

Many respondents expressed that Mizo food is often judged based on external aesthetic standards rather than cultural context. One respondent explained,

“When people look at Mizo food, they think it looks too plain or too simple compared to other cuisines. They don’t understand that our cooking focuses on natural taste, not too many spices or oil.”

Their statement reflects how misunderstanding often comes from aesthetic comparison rather than experiential knowing.

Another respondent elaborated more emotionally, saying,

“If someone is not used to it, they think it’s bland. I remember when one of my friends from outside tried sawhchiar, they said, ‘Is this all? It tastes like nothing.’ But for me, that same taste feels like home...it reminds me of my family, my childhood, and our way of life.”

This comment highlights the role of memory and familiarity, showing that traditional food carries emotional meaning that cannot be measured solely by flavour profiles.

Some respondents acknowledged that Mizo food does require time to appreciate. One shared,

“At first, even I didn’t enjoy bai much when I was small. But over time, the taste grows on me. . . the smell, the texture, the

simplicity. It feels clean, and once you get used to it, other food feels too oily or processed.”

Another echoed this idea,

“Mizo food is an acquired taste. You don’t love it instantly, you grow into it. The aroma of sa-um or smoked meat takes time to understand.”

These reflections demonstrate that appreciation of Mizo cuisine is deeply subjective, tied to habit, upbringing, and embodied cultural memory. Other respondents described how traditional dishes are often overshadowed in public contexts. For example, one respondent said,

“When we go out with friends, we never choose Mizo food because it doesn’t look good or special enough. But at home, that is always what we eat.”

Another added,

“At parties or gatherings, people prefer ordering fancy food. If we served chhum han or bai, people would think it’s too ordinary.”

These comments reveal how Mizo food is perceived differently depending on whether the setting is public or private.

Yet, despite these experiences, resilience remains strong. One respondent stated firmly,

“Even if our food is not fancy or modern, it reflects who we are. We should not feel embarrassed or hide it.”

The qualitative voices and quantitative findings together show that while traditional Mizo food may be marginalised in public spaces due to aesthetic and social pressures, the domestic kitchen remains its protected anchor. The marginalisation does not indicate disappearance, but rather reflects how external influence dominates public spaces while Mizo foodways quietly persist in the home. This reveals a layered tension i.e. public conformity versus private continuity. In trendy cafés, parties, or restaurants, fashionable cuisines are consumed as symbols of modernity and taste. Meanwhile, at home, Mizo food remains the daily staple, familiar, affordable, comforting, and culturally significant. The very fact that many respondents describe Mizo food as

something one “grows to love” shows that its value comes from embodied cultural experience rather than external validation.

Even when traditional dishes do not align with global standards of aesthetics, plating, or flavour intensity, the resilience of the domestic foodways demonstrates that cultural identity continues to anchor eating practices. Marginalisation in the public sphere does not erase the cultural role of Mizo food. It merely reshapes where and how it is expressed.

Table 6.24. Impact of Outside Cultures on Family Bonding During Meals

Impact	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	6	2	47	1	53 (26.5)	3 (1.5)	56 (14)
No	94	98	53	99	147 (73.5)	197 (98.5)	344 (86)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The overall findings from the dataset reveal that only 14% of respondents across all regions feel that outside cultural influences have affected family bonding during meals, while a dominant 86% deny experiencing such an impact. This suggests that, despite the growing presence of external food practices, technology, and individualised eating habits, the traditional framework of shared meals remains strongly preserved across Mizoram. The data reflects a wider cultural trend where the act of eating together continues to be a protected domestic ritual, even as external influences shape other aspects of food consumption.

When observing the urban context, a sharper divide emerges. Across urban households, 26.5% reported that external influences have altered family bonding during meals, compared to 73.5% who said it had not. Aizawl Urban stands out most significantly, with nearly 47% acknowledging such changes, the highest across all study sites. This indicates that families in Aizawl Urban are more exposed to lifestyle shifts such as takeaway consumption, individual meal preferences, work-driven eating schedules, and the growing presence of digital devices during mealtimes. Meanwhile, Kolasib Urban shows minimal disruption, with only 6% agreeing that external culture has impacted their mealtime bonding, suggesting that traditional norms remain relatively strong, even in smaller urban settings.

In rural areas, the pattern is almost the opposite, only 1.5% report that outside culture has affected bonding during meals, while a striking 98.5% insist that no such change has occurred. Both Kolasib Rural and Aizawl Rural present near-unanimous responses, reflecting the resilience of communal mealtime practices where eating continues to function as a culturally meaningful act tied to rhythm, routine, and shared responsibility.

Comparing both settings, the data highlights a clear rural-urban divide. Urban households particularly in Aizawl appear to be navigating the tension between modern food consumption patterns and traditional expectations of shared mealtimes. Meanwhile, rural households remain firmly grounded in domestic foodways, where the family meal is not only a nutritional activity, but a social and cultural institution. Aizawl Urban respondents provide insight into how these disruptions manifest. One respondent explained,

“Because of school, work, and schedules, we don’t always get time to sit together and eat. Sometimes one person eats early, another later, and even when we sit together, somebody is on the phone.”

This expanded reflection reveals the subtle but growing shift away from synchronous meals toward fragmented, individualised eating patterns. The interpretation here points to the role of urban structure not just external cuisines in reshaping the pace and social quality of meals.

Another participant admitted,

“Sometimes we just order separate food because everyone wants different things, and when the food comes, we just eat without talking much. It doesn’t feel like a family meal anymore.”

This comment reflects how the rise of personalised food choice linked to social media trends and delivery platforms introduces a cultural shift from shared dishes to *individual orders*, quietly undermining the traditional Mizo custom of eating the same food from one serving pot or bowl.

Another respondent added a more emotional perspective,

“Sometimes my parents are still working or busy when the food is ready, so we just eat without them. Earlier, we would

*wait and pray together before meals, but now it happens less.
I miss that feeling of everyone being together and starting the
meal the same way.”*

Rather than rejecting tradition, this voice expresses nostalgia, a recognition that something meaningful is slowly fading, not because of lack of value, but because of lifestyle restructuring. However, other respondents expressed discomfort with such change. One shared,

*“Sometimes I feel bad when we eat together but everyone is
looking at their phone. We are together, but not really talking
like before.”*

This voice demonstrates awareness of the disconnection, not of the food itself, but of the *quality of presence*, pointing to how technology mediates family interaction more than the cuisine does.

In contrast, rural respondents emphasised continuity. One said,

*“We always eat together. Even if someone is late, we wait.
That is how we have been raised.”*

Another added,

*“Eating food together is important. It is not only eating, but
respecting each other. So even if other food comes, we still
eat like this.”*

Their reflections reinforce how rural domestic foodways operate as a culturally protected space where shared meals remain tied to values such as respect, patience, and unity limits that prevent external influence from altering traditional patterns.

While external influences introduce new food styles, media habits, and individualised consumption, the core cultural practice of eating together remains intact, especially in rural areas and even to a significant degree in urban households. The domestic space acts as a cultural boundary that protects the deeper meaning of shared meals, even if the ambiance, pace, or behaviour at the table has begun to shift among urban youth.

In essence, the influence of outside cultures appears to be changing the quality of interaction, rather than eliminating the act of communal eating itself. The table and the voices behind it show that while global trends may reshape how Mizo families *consume*, the meaning and structure of the family meal still serve as a protective anchor of cultural identity.

Table 6.25. Influence of outside cultures on cooking tools and techniques

Impact	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	15	2	43	9	58 (29)	11 (5.5)	69 (17.25)
No	85	98	57	91	142 (71)	189 (94.5)	331 (82.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

Table 6.25 reveals a clear pattern in how outside influences are reshaping cooking tools and techniques across Mizoram, though the extent of this influence remains highly uneven. When examining the total responses, only 17.25% of households reported adopting foreign-influenced tools or methods, while a significantly larger proportion 82.75% continue to rely solely on traditional approaches. This shows that despite global exposure, traditional cooking systems remain deeply embedded in everyday domestic practice.

Urban households show a much higher openness to external cooking tools and techniques compared to rural households. Across the urban total, 29% of respondents acknowledged change, with Aizawl Urban being the strongest driver of this shift at 43%, followed by Kolasib Urban at 15%. This pattern suggests that modern appliances and cooking styles are being normalized first in the capital, where lifestyle pace, technology, and exposure to outside cuisines are higher. In contrast, the rural total presents an extremely low influence rate of 5.5%, represented by 9% in Aizawl Rural and just 2% in Kolasib Rural, indicating that rural kitchens remain sites of cultural and material continuity where tradition is dominant and protected.

When comparing the two contexts, the contrast is striking, urban households are nearly five times more likely to adopt outside culinary tools and techniques than rural households. This comparison reflects the same cultural negotiation seen throughout this chapter, urban households' experiment, adapt, and selectively absorb external practices, while rural households' function as cultural anchors resisting rapid change. Yet this resistance is not stagnation. Rather, it signals the strength of domestic norms, taste memory, and cultural identity that regulate how far external influence can enter the intimate space of the kitchen.

The respondents' voices deepen the numbers, showing that the kitchen is becoming a site of subtle transition though not one of complete replacement. One Aizawl Urban respondent shared,

"We now use an oven, steamer, toaster, and sometimes an electric kettle. Before, we cooked everything on gas and sometimes firewood, but these tools make cooking faster and easier."

Here, convenience becomes the key motivation, signalling how modern appliances are valued not only for novelty but for reducing labour in increasingly time-pressured households. The emphasis on efficiency reflects an evolving domestic reality shaped by work, school schedules, and faster-paced living. Another respondent explained,

"In our house, we have a rice cooker, grinder, waffle maker, and microwave. Some things we use often, others only when we try new recipes we see online."

The admission that many appliances are used occasionally suggests that external tools enter the home through lifestyle aspiration rather than necessity. Their irregular use reflects selective adoption, kitchens absorb influence, but only what fits existing routines and cultural comfort remains permanent. A respondent from Kolasib Urban offered a more gradual narrative,

"We didn't grow up using spoons, forks, or appliances, but now we use them more often, especially when we cook noodles or other outside foods. Still, for real meals, we don't really need them."

The phrase *"for real meals"* reveals an important distinction, external utensils may support experimenting with global foods, but the traditional way of cooking and eating retains emotional and cultural authority when it comes to daily or meaningful meals. By contrast, voices from rural areas demonstrate a strong continuity. One rural respondent stated,

"We still cook the way we always have. . . firewood, boiling, steaming in bamboo. We don't need other tools."

Another added,

“Even if modern tools are available, we prefer the taste of food cooked traditionally. It feels more natural and reminds us of home.”

These responses show that resistance is not merely due to limited access but is grounded in meaning, memory, and taste identity.

A final rural quote captures the core limit clearly,

“I see others use air fryers or microwaves, but I don’t feel the need. Our food doesn’t require those tools.”

This distinction underscores that the compatibility of technique and cuisine determines adoption and not the presence of external influence alone.

The influence of outside cultures on cooking tools and techniques in Mizoram demonstrates that while global culinary practices generate curiosity, domestic foodways remain strong cultural boundaries that regulate transformation. Tools like air fryers, microwaves, rice cookers, and blenders may enter the household, but their adoption is selective, limited by taste preference, cultural identity, and the deep familiarity of traditional methods such as boiling, steaming, smoking, and firewood cooking. Urban households, particularly in Aizawl, demonstrate greater flexibility and experimentation, reflecting changing work patterns, online exposure, and social aspiration. Yet even here, the shift is layered, partial, and meaningful external influence does not replace tradition, it sits beside it.

Rural households remain the strongest guardians of continuity. Their kitchens show that domestic foodways are not easily displaced even in the face of convenience, technology, or global media. Instead, tradition persists not as nostalgia but as daily lived practice, anchored in rhythm, habit, and cultural sense. Ultimately, the influence of outside cultures is visible but limited. The domestic kitchen remains a space where identity is preserved, not overwritten. What enters is negotiated and what stays is earned.

Table 6.26. Influence of outside cultures on ingredients used in household cooking

Influence	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	51	41	51	18	102 (51)	59 (29.5)	161 (40.25)
No	49	59	49	82	98 (49)	141 (70.5)	239 (59.75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data in Table 6.26 shows a gradual but uneven shift in household cooking practices across the four study regions. Looking at the total sample, 40.25% of respondents reported using ingredients influenced by outside cultures, while 59.75% stated they had not adopted such changes. This means that although global or non-traditional ingredients have entered many kitchens, more than half of the households still rely primarily on familiar, traditional ingredients reflecting cultural resistance and attachment to long-established food practices.

When broken down by settlement type, the contrast becomes clearer. In urban households, the pattern is evenly divided, 51% reported incorporating external ingredients, while 49% said they had not. This suggests that urban kitchens have become an active negotiation space where traditional ingredients coexist with newer additions like soy sauce, cheese, packaged masala, mayonnaise, and instant noodles. Urban access to supermarkets, social media influence, and the preferences of younger household members likely contribute to this shift.

In rural areas, the majority still resist these changes. Only 29.5% of rural respondents reported using external ingredients, while 70.5% indicated no such influence. This suggests that rural foodways remain closely tied to seasonal availability, subsistence practices, and the traditional taste palate shaped across generations. The strongest resistance appears in Aizawl Rural, where only 18% have experimented with outside ingredients, compared to 41% in Kolasib Rural, indicating that proximity to urban centres may influence adoption. Urban households appear to be moving faster toward culinary adaptation, while rural households remain key sites of cultural continuity.

Many respondents linked the introduction of new ingredients with exposure, convenience, and curiosity. One respondent explained,

“Nowadays, we use ingredients like soy sauce, pasta, and cheese because the children prefer these tastes. When they see new recipes online, they want to try them at home, so we slowly start buying those ingredients too.”

This quote shows how generational influence plays a role in shaping household cooking patterns. The younger household members become cultural intermediaries, encouraging experimentation. The interpretation aligns with the theme: even where outside ingredients enter the kitchen, they arrive because the domestic sphere allows it, not because tradition disappears.

Another respondent echoed a similar shift, stating,

“We now use masala packets and ready-made seasoning because it feels easier and faster than making everything from scratch.”

This reflects a shift driven not only by taste but also by changing rhythms of daily life. Time-saving products appeal particularly to dual-income households, yet their use does not erase traditional ingredients rather, they supplement them. The change is layered, not substitutive.

At the same time, several respondents emphasized emotional and cultural attachment to traditional tastes. One rural respondent remarked,

“Even if we try new ingredients sometimes, nothing can replace the taste of simple bai and local vegetables. It is the food we grew up with.”

Here, taste is linked with memory and identity, reinforcing how deeply food habits are shaped by what feels familiar, comforting, and culturally “correct.”

The narratives show that while new ingredients enter Mizo kitchens, they are filtered by habit, taste memory, identity, and practicality. In other words, the domestic foodways acts as a cultural gatekeeper, deciding what becomes normal and what remains occasional. This means external influence triggers adaptation, not replacement. For instance, Ready-made masala may be added to chicken, but the dish is still eaten with rice and boiled vegetables. Instant noodles may appear, but they

coexist with homegrown greens and smoked meats. Exotic sauces may be used, but the fundamental cooking rhythm including boiling, steaming, smoking remains intact. Thus, the household kitchen becomes a site where global food influences must negotiate with deeply rooted culinary grammar.

The findings from Table 6.26 reveal that outside cultures have entered Mizo cooking, especially in urban households. But the adoption is not wholesale. Instead, it is partial, selective, and slow, shaped by generational preferences, convenience, exposure and most importantly by cultural familiarity and emotional connection to traditional ingredients. External influences may expand the pantry, but they do not displace its foundation. The limits on domestic foodways remain strong, identity, taste memory, economic practicality, and tradition continue to anchor Mizo kitchens, ensuring that even in a globalizing food culture, the core remains distinctly local.

Table 6.27. Impact of outside cultures on household's dietary habits

Impact	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	3	0	26	6	29 (24.5)	6 (3)	35 (8.75)
No	97	100	74	94	171 (85.5)	194 (97)	365 (91.25)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The analysis presented in Table 6.27 shows that despite growing exposure to global food practices, the overall dietary system in Mizoram remains largely unchanged. At the total level, 91.25% of households reported no influence from outside cultures, while only 8.75% acknowledged change. This suggests that while external food trends may shape taste preferences, eating out behaviours, or ingredient choices, the deeper structure of everyday meals remains rooted in traditional practice, rice as the staple, shared side dishes, and predictable daily timing.

Looking at the urban sample alone, 24.5% reported some change to their dietary habits, and this shift is most visible in Aizawl Urban, where 26% acknowledged influence. Here, families are more likely to adjust meal timing, include packaged foods, eat on the run, or replace full meals with snacks or beverages. Kolasib Urban shows very limited transformation, with only 3% noting dietary change, suggesting

that even within urban settings, exposure does not automatically translate into restructuring daily food routines.

In contrast, rural households overwhelmingly report continuity. 97% of rural respondents affirmed that their dietary habits remain unchanged, and in Kolasib Rural not a single respondent reported external impact. Aizawl Rural shows only minimal variation, with 6% acknowledging influence. These patterns confirm that the traditional structure of meals in rural Mizoram, three shared meals anchored in rice, vegetables, and seasonal availability remains culturally and practically intact.

When comparing the two clusters, the divide is stark, urban areas are beginning to show gradual dietary experimentation, while rural foodways remain steady and resistant. This pattern reinforces what has been observed across previous tables, external influence enters the Mizo food system selectively and more visibly in public or semi-public contexts, while the domestic core remains stable, familiar, and culturally meaningful.

Respondent 213 noted,

“Noodles and different varieties of side dishes are served more often now,”

reflecting subtle diversification of meals rather than a full replacement of traditional structure. This suggests that global influences often *layer* onto existing systems rather than dismantle them. The meal remains a Mizo meal, but now includes additions shaped by exposure, convenience, or trend.

Similarly, Respondent 235 stated,

“Maybe coffee. . .because my children drink coffee now,”

indicating that dietary influence often enters the household generationally. Coffee, once considered an occasional or festive item, now functions as a habitual or symbolic marker of modern lifestyle among younger family members. Yet, this shift affects the margins of the meal system rather than the core suggesting the presence of change without structural displacement.

Respondent 191 shared,

“We still eat the same food.... only sometimes we add outside food depending on the children’s wishes.”

This statement reflects a common negotiation pattern i.e. the traditional meal remains the default, while external items act as flexible, optional extensions. This reinforces

the idea that domestic foodways operate through selective absorption rather than full substitution.

In rural settings, resistance was expressed more firmly. One respondent explained,

“We still follow the same diet...rice, vegetables, and sometimes meat.”

The certainty of this response suggests not only habit but identity and comfort deeply rooted in long-term practice. For these households, external influence does not feel necessary or relevant because the existing system remains sufficient, practically, economically, and symbolically.

The evidence shows that while global food influences especially through media, markets, and youth culture introduce new ingredients, beverages, and occasional dietary experimentation, the everyday structure of meals in Mizo households remains remarkably resilient. The persistence of three meal timings, rice-based dietary patterns, and communal eating routines demonstrates that change is occurring at the surface through additions, not replacements.

External influences tend to reshape taste, aspiration, and social eating but the home remains the strongest boundary where traditional dietary identity is safeguarded. In this way, the household functions as both a filter and a guardian, adopting what is convenient, desirable, or fashionable, while rejecting or minimizing anything that disrupts established meaning or cultural familiarity.

Table 6.28. Impact of Outside Cultures on Family Cooking and Eating

Impact	KU (%)	KR (%)	AU (%)	AR (%)	Total Urban (%)	Total Rural (%)	Total (%)
Yes	19	14	58	9	77 (38.5)	23 (11.5)	100 (25)
No	81	86	42	91	123 (61.5)	177 (88.5)	300 (75)
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200	400

**Note: KU=Kolasib Urban; KR=Kolasib Rural; AU=Aizawl Urban; AR=Aizawl Rural*

The data in Table 6.28 reveals a clear unevenness in how global food influences have entered Mizo households, showing more noticeable shifts in urban spaces while rural regions continue to maintain long-standing domestic foodways. When looking at the total responses, only 25% of households across the four regions felt that outside cultures had influenced their cooking and eating practices, while a significant 75%

reported no effect. This indicates that despite exposure to global cuisines through media, travel, and urban restaurant culture, the core structure of cooking and eating in most households remains grounded in tradition.

Examining the urban totals shows that the experience of change is far more pronounced in city spaces as 38.5% of urban households acknowledged being influenced, compared to just 11.5% in rural households. The difference becomes even sharper when broken down regionally. In Aizawl Urban, 58% of respondents reported change, the highest in the dataset demonstrating how the capital city functions as a gateway for new cooking ideas, eating schedules, imported ingredients, and restaurant-inspired recipes. Meanwhile, Kolasib Urban reports a smaller but visible shift, with 19% acknowledging influence and 81% reporting stability in their food habits. This contrast between two urban contexts suggests that proximity to competitive food culture, number of eateries, and social environments strongly affects food change.

Rural patterns stand in clear contrast. In Kolasib Rural, only 14% of households reported adopting new food habits, while a large majority maintained that nothing had changed. The resistance is even more pronounced in Aizawl Rural, where only 9% of families reported any influence, and 91% stated that their cooking and eating habits remain rooted in traditional practices. The rural households serve as strongholds of domestic continuity, where food remains tied to seasonal availability, inherited techniques, communal rhythms, and collective memory. Taken together, the data shows that while some change is occurring, domestic foodways continue to hold firm boundaries, especially outside major urban centers.

Respondent voices add depth to these patterns. One Aizawl Urban participant shared,

“We now make things like chilli chicken or new curry types we see online or in restaurants. Before, we never made these things at home.”

This response highlights how global recipes do not enter the household spontaneously as they arrive through exposure, imitation, and aspiration. This shift does not erase traditional foods but adds layers to them, marking a slow yet visible culinary transition.

Another urban respondent expressed,

“Whenever I return home after studying or staying outside, I cook the food I learned from there...things like pasta or salad. Slowly my family got used to it.”

The interpretation here reflects generational mediation. Food becomes an emotional and cultural souvenir, carried from new environments into the family kitchen. Change appears not as pressure but as sharing, an attempt to bring home a world experienced elsewhere.

Contrast this with a voice from Kolasib Rural,

“We still eat the same food we grew up with. We don’t try other things because we are already used to our taste.”

The meaning here is not resistance but comfort. The respondent implies that new foods are unnecessary, the familiar taste, smell, and texture of Mizo food is enough. It demonstrates how early taste socialization shapes lifelong food preferences, functioning as a cultural anchor. Another rural participant stated simply but firmly,

“We don’t need to follow others. Our food is enough for us.”

Behind the shortness is pride, a reminder that food can be identity before it is trend. These narratives reveal that while outside food cultures have introduced new dishes, ingredients, and cooking styles, their influence stops at a cultural threshold shaped by identity, memory, routine, and belonging. The adoption observed in urban households reflects experimentation, not replacement. Meanwhile, rural families maintain practices that have defined their foodways for generations, demonstrating how deeply rooted culinary rhythms resist foreign influence.

The influence of outside cultures on family cooking and eating is therefore a process of selective incorporation rather than wholesale change. External influences may inspire new dishes or introduce global flavours, but traditional meal patterns, preparation styles, and family eating rituals remain the anchor points that limit how far change can penetrate. Mizo domestic foodways show resilience not because they are closed, but because they are culturally meaningful.

Creation of new, unique dishes from outside cultural influence: At the overall level, responses indicate that while a growing number of households are experimenting with global flavours and ingredients, the majority still maintain traditional cooking styles without modifying or inventing new dishes. This pattern already reflects a tension

between culinary innovation and cultural continuity. Urban households engage more actively in experimentation, with both Kolasib Urban and Aizawl Urban showing that most families are creating hybrid dishes that blend external food influences with familiar Mizo cooking sensibilities. These urban kitchens appear to function as spaces of curiosity and creativity, where younger members in particular explore new textures, ingredients, and techniques. In contrast, rural households show far lower engagement, with only a small portion reporting experimentation and the majority adhering to inherited cooking practices that emphasise continuity, familiarity, and practicality. The respondent narratives further illuminate this divide. One participant from Aizawl Urban noted,

“I sometimes make food just to try it out because I saw it online, and even if the taste isn’t perfect, I enjoy experimenting with it.”

This statement shows how digital exposure particularly online food content acts as a catalyst for culinary innovation. Yet the phrasing “just to try it out” suggests that experimentation remains occasional and recreational, rather than embedded into routine cooking. Another respondent elaborated,

“I now mix Korean-style marinated vegetables with our local herbs, and my family prefers it that way because it is familiar yet new.”

Here, the concept of food being “familiar yet new” highlights how global dishes are rarely adopted wholesale; instead, they are reshaped to align with Mizo taste expectations. A similar sentiment emerged from a Kolasib Urban respondent who shared,

“Sometimes we mix pasta or noodles with smoked pork or fermented bamboo shoots because using only outside ingredients feels too foreign.”

This blending practice reflects a compromise, foreign elements are accepted only when anchored to culturally meaningful flavours, suggesting that food memory and emotional comfort remain powerful determinants of acceptability.

Meanwhile, rural responses expressed a contrasting stance grounded in confidence rather than lack of exposure. One respondent stated,

“Nobody in my family feels the need to make different kinds of food. We have everything we need in our own dishes.”

This illustrates how rural kitchens perceive traditional food not only as sufficient but complete. Another rural participant reinforced this by saying,

“Even if we see new foods online or at weddings, it never becomes something we make at home, because we prefer what feels right for us.”

These statements reflect values rooted in identity, routine, and sensory familiarity, reinforcing the idea that rural foodways change slowly not simply because of limited access, but because traditional food continues to meet cultural and emotional needs. Thus, domestic foodways act as both filters and gatekeepers. While outside cultures may inspire experimentation, they do not automatically reshape everyday meals. Instead, new dishes survive only when they are adapted to cultural taste, affordability, and established eating rhythms. In rural households, these boundaries remain firm, whereas urban households demonstrate more flexibility but even there, innovation does not replace tradition. Rather than a process of substitution, what emerges is selective layering, where new culinary influences sit alongside and sometimes fuse with traditional food practices. In this way, the creation of new dishes reflects not the erosion of food heritage, but the careful negotiation of cultural change marking the limits of domestic foodways and the ways in which identity continues to shape what enters, remains, or fades from the household kitchen.

Preserving and promoting traditional Mizo foods in modern society: Across all regions, the preservation and promotion of traditional Mizo food continues to hold cultural weight, with the majority of respondents expressing support for maintaining food heritage despite the growing presence of global cuisines. At the overall level, most households recognised the value of safeguarding traditional dishes, indicating that food remains closely intertwined with identity, memory, and belonging. Urban households also reflected strong support, though the stance was slightly more divided compared to rural areas. In cities such as Aizawl and Kolasib, preserving Mizo cuisine exists alongside increasing exposure to restaurant culture, digital food content, and convenience-based eating patterns. While many households remained committed to promoting traditional food, a notable minority particularly in Aizawl Urban expressed uncertainty or felt no pressing need to actively preserve traditional dishes, suggesting

that shifting work rhythms, busy schedules, and global food accessibility may weaken emotional attachments to inherited foodways.

In contrast, rural households expressed a firmer and more collective commitment to preservation. In rural Aizawl, support was nearly unanimous, reflecting the deep continuity between food, land, customary practices, and generational knowledge. Here, traditional dishes are not merely personal preference but an expression of communal life, a moral responsibility, and a cultural anchor against rapid social change. Responses such as,

“It is a reflection of our ethnic identity.”

and

“Because it is our identity, and other ethnic groups will not cherish it for us.”

highlight how preserving Mizo foodways is framed as an act of stewardship rather than nostalgia. Even in Kolasib Urban, where households showed openness to external culinary experimentation, many respondents still expressed commitment to maintaining traditional food, with one stating,

“Because it is fundamentally our ethnic way of life, it deserves to be continually uplifted.”

and another proposing institutional support,

“To make training for dishes in Mizo.”

These statements suggest that preservation is not seen as incompatible with culinary creativity but as a parallel effort requiring intentional reinforcement.

Urban responses also reflected a growing awareness that cultural preservation now demands proactive effort. One participant from Aizawl Urban remarked,

“We have somewhat neglected the way Mizo dishes are made now,”

while another noted with concern,

“Because foreign things/items have entered our culture.”

These views show that while urban kitchens engage with global ingredients, new recipes, and new eating patterns, they also carry a consciousness that without deliberate action, traditional food knowledge may gradually erode. This tension was most clearly articulated by a respondent who stated,

“It is indeed important to promote our tradition to protect our nation,”

framing food preservation as cultural defence in the face of shifting tastes and lifestyles.

A smaller but meaningful minority stated they did not feel the need to preserve traditional food, reflecting the emerging influence of convenience, modern consumption habits, and generational distance from agricultural life.

One respondent stated simply,

“I don’t feel the need to,”

while another reflected,

“We don’t cherish it enough.”

These voices indicate that the continuity of domestic foodways may become increasingly dependent on intentional intergenerational transmission rather than automatic inheritance. Therefore, rural households act as cultural strongholds of inherited knowledge, while urban households negotiate the balance between continuity and change. Despite increasing exposure to outside cuisines, ready-made products, and modern meal structures, traditional Mizo food remains widely seen as an essential cultural resource rather than just dietary habit. In this sense, the preservation of Mizo foodways illustrates the broader theme of the limits on domestic foodways, external influences may diversify eating habits and introduce new culinary possibilities, but they do not replace the symbolic, emotional, and ritual significance of traditional food. Instead, urban and rural households alike reinforce that Mizo cuisine remains a marker of belonging, identity, and cultural memory, a living heritage that requires both adaptation and protection in an increasingly globalised food landscape.

6.8. Overview

This chapter introduces food as a vital cultural resource reflecting identity and intercultural adaptation. It emphasizes that food transcends nourishment, serving as a medium for expressing belonging, memory, values, and cultural continuity. The chapter depicts food identity as dynamic, influenced by social contexts and experiences. Mizo food practices illustrate the intersection of tradition and external influences, highlighting the preservation and transformation of cultural identity through eating. Mizo cuisine, from everyday meals to ceremonial dishes, embodies

cultural values while adapting to global trends. The chapter outlines themes such as food as a cultural symbol, language, heritage transmission, adaptation, and fashion commodity, framing its analysis of how Mizo households navigate identity amidst external cultural influences. Overall, it explores food as both a marker of cultural identity and a site of adaptation, reflecting broader cultural resilience and transformation.

- 1) Section 6.2. explores how traditional food functions as a cultural symbol within Mizo society. Rather than being understood only as sustenance, traditional dishes represent embodied heritage, expressing collective memory, identity, and social values. Food choices become markers of belonging, allowing individuals and households to assert cultural continuity while negotiating modern influences. As scholars note, food preference is closely tied to cultural identity, reflecting how communities balance preservation and adaptation. In the Mizo context, dietary decisions reveal deep connections to tradition while also signalling shifts brought about by exposure to external food cultures. By examining how traditional foods are maintained, chosen, and valued in daily life, this section highlights the ways Mizo foodways operate not only as culinary practice but as meaningful cultural expression and identity work. The findings in Table 6.1 demonstrate that food remains a strong and widely recognised marker of cultural identity in Mizoram, with 86% of respondents affirming this connection. The association between food and identity is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where 92% expressed agreement compared to 80% in urban settings. The highest affirmation was observed in Kolasib Urban (98%), followed by Kolasib Rural (93%) and Aizawl Rural (91%), indicating that the symbolic role of food is deeply embedded across regions, though with varying intensity. Aizawl Urban respondents show comparatively lower endorsement (62%), suggesting a gradual shift influenced by urbanisation, changing lifestyles, and exposure to diverse food cultures. Respondents' open-ended responses emphasise that traditional dishes such as bai, bekang, sa-um, vawksa rep, sawhchiar, mautuai/rawtuai and tlak continue to serve as cultural anchors, evoking memory, belonging, and a shared sense of "Mizoness." These foods operate not merely as meals but as emotional and symbolic artefacts that reinforce

identity through taste, smell and embodied familiarity. As one respondent put it, “*Bai, bekang and rep smell like home. I feel Mizo when I eat them.*” A notable distinction emerges between urban and rural interpretations of food identity. While many urban respondents grounded identity in named dishes and sensory memory, rural households emphasised process, land, and labour. For them, Mizo food identity is rooted not only in consumption but in the entire food cycle from cultivation and harvesting to preparation and sharing. As expressed by one rural participant, identity is located in “*the whole journey of food from the earth to the plate.*” This reflects an agrarian worldview, where food embodies ancestral knowledge, environmental intimacy, and intergenerational continuity. Overall, the findings reveal that traditional food continues to function as a living cultural symbol across Mizoram, though the meaning attached to it varies by context. In rural areas, food identity is land-based, process-oriented and embodied, whereas in urban spaces it becomes more symbolic, memory-based and selectively performed in response to modern dietary shifts. Despite these differences, the overwhelming agreement across regions indicates that food continues to play a central role in expressing, remembering, and negotiating Mizo cultural identity.

- 2) Section 6.3 examines food as a cultural language, emphasizing how food-related behaviours communicate meaning beyond nourishment. Instead of focusing solely on the physical meal, this perspective interprets food as a symbolic system shaped by shared knowledge, embodied skills, rituals, and social norms. Through this lens, food becomes a non-verbal medium through which history, memory, and cultural values are expressed and transmitted. By analysing these intangible practices, from preparation to serving and consumption, the section highlights how everyday food routines foster belonging, emotional connection, and the formation of cultural identity. This section shows how food in Mizo society functions as a non-verbal language through which memory, emotion, morality and belonging are communicated. Rather than focusing only on ingredients or nutrition, it traces how practices such as nostalgia for home food, Sunday meat traditions, sharing dishes, hospitality and family meals encode meanings about who one is, who one cares for and where one belongs. Nostalgia and memory: Table 6.4 shows that

almost half of all respondents (47.25%) feel nostalgic for Mizo food when away from home, with much stronger nostalgia in urban areas (62.5%) than rural (32%). For city dwellers regularly exposed to non-Mizo foods, simple dishes like *bai*, *sawhchiar*, smoked pork, *sa-um*, bamboo shoots and seasonal greens become powerful “edible archives,” evoking home, childhood and landscape through smell and taste. In rural areas, where these foods are still eaten daily, they are lived rather than remembered, so nostalgia is less pronounced. Sunday meat tradition Table 6.5 shows that a slight majority (53.5%) still treat meat as the main Sunday dish, especially in Aizawl Urban and Aizawl Rural. This practice, rooted in earlier scarcity and Christian Sabbath rhythms, marks Sunday as a special, blessed day. Households describe the day as incomplete without meat, and children in particular expect it, so Sunday meat becomes a weekly ritual that affirms continuity, family togetherness and cultural identity even where economic conditions or health concerns sometimes modify the practice. Table 6.6 indicates that 58.5% of respondents still express gratitude through food, more so in urban (71.5%) than rural areas (45.5%). In towns and cities, gifting cakes, meat, eggs, chicken, chocolates or preparing a special meal is a deliberate way of saying thank you, closely tied to *tlawmngaihna* (selfless care). In rural areas, food-sharing remains so woven into daily life during harvests, pig slaughter, or mutual help that many no longer label it explicitly as “gratitude,” even though it still embodies cooperation and appreciation. Table 6.7 shows that the practice of sharing homemade food (*chawhmeh in-suah*) remains very strong: 86.75% still share food with neighbours and loved ones (90% rural, 83.5% urban). Classic dishes such as *bai*, *bawl*, *sa-um* and *vaipaden* as well as cakes, sweets or restaurant food circulate as gestures of affection, kinship and connection. Hospitality towards guests remains a core value. Many households prepare special or more abundant food often meat for guests and for visitors, at least they offer tea and snacks. The exact form varies by region and resources, but the underlying ethic “to give the best of what is available” persists. Finally, the section shows how shared meals and kitchen labour create a sense of belonging within households. Eating together, sharing from the same pot, serving each other and cooking favourite dishes are repeatedly

described as what “shows we are a family.” Mealtimes double as spaces for encouragement, discipline, storytelling and teaching manners, while children learn participation and identity through helping in the kitchen. Across rural and urban contexts, food becomes a lived script of inclusion, care and continuity sustaining not only bodies but the emotional and moral fabric of Mizo family life.

- 3) Section 6.4. demonstrates that food continues to function as a key form of intangible cultural heritage in Mizo households, where culinary skills, values, and memories are transmitted primarily through lived practice rather than formal instruction. The kitchen emerges as an important cultural space where identity, memory, and family relationships are reproduced through shared routines. Rather than being documented or standardised, food knowledge is embodied, learned through watching, tasting, repetition, and participation alongside family elders. Across both rural and urban settings, traditional dishes, seasonal ingredients, preservation techniques, and ritual meanings are embedded in everyday food work, making food an active site of continuity. Even as lifestyles change, cooking remains intertwined with storytelling, memory, and belonging, allowing Mizo families to maintain cultural transmission across generations. Across the households surveyed, cooking together remains a valued cultural and relational practice, though expressed with varying consistency across rural and urban settings. Rural households, especially in Aizawl and Kolasib, reflect the strongest continuity, where cooking continues to operate as a collective task shaped by cooperation, interdependence, and shared labour. In these settings, preparing meals together deepens bonds and carries moral meaning linked to *tlawmngaihna*, reinforcing ideals of mutual support and responsibility. Urban households also recognise the cultural value of shared cooking, though practical constraints such as working schedules, schooling, and contemporary lifestyle patterns mean this practice often shifts to weekends or special occasions. While some respondents expressed resistance, preferring efficiency or privacy in the kitchen, the dominant sentiment across the sample frames shared cooking as meaningful for learning, bonding, and preserving tradition. Respondents’ reflections highlight that cooking together is not merely a functional activity

but a relational and educational space where children learn techniques, etiquette, and the symbolic purpose of food. Through everyday participation and conversation, shared cooking becomes a medium through which cultural identity, memory, and social belonging are reproduced. Learning to prepare traditional Mizo dishes continues to be a central expression of cultural continuity across generations. A strong majority of respondents reported having learned traditional recipes, with rural households showing the most consistency. Kitchens are described as lived archives where knowledge is passed on not through written recipes but through embodied presence, watching, helping, tasting, and gradually mastering dishes over time. This form of learning emphasises sensory intuition rather than measured precision, reflecting an intergenerational mode of teaching rooted in familiarity, repetition, and memory. Respondent voices show that specific dishes such as *bai*, *bawl*, or bamboo shoot preparations carry lineage value, reinforcing identity through continuity of taste and method. For many, passing down cooking knowledge is understood as passing down heritage. The kitchen thus operates as a cultural memory space, where identity is reproduced not only through food but through emotion, storytelling, and ritualised practice. Even amid modern food systems and changing consumption patterns, respondents expressed pride in maintaining traditional cooking knowledge. The act of teaching children how to prepare culturally meaningful dishes is understood as preserving something irreplaceable, an inheritance carried not only in recipes, but in memory, skill, and belonging.

- 4) Section 6.5 shows that Mizo food culture is undergoing selective adaptation rather than wholesale change. A large majority of households (about three-quarters) perceive external food influence as a relatively *new* trend, especially in Aizawl Urban, where café culture, delivery platforms, and global media are most visible. Yet, fast food has not become a daily norm: only 7% of all respondents and 18% even in Aizawl Urban consume takeaway food every day, while most households still reserve it for “special days” or occasional convenience. Home-cooked meals remain the core of everyday eating and continue to structure family time, care, and belonging. Urban-rural contrasts run through all tables. Urban households, particularly in Aizawl, are far more

likely to say that outside cultures add variety to their cuisine, introduce new family favourites, and reduce the visibility of traditional dishes. They report experimenting with noodles, ramen, kimchi, kimbap, pasta, cake, fried chicken, and café-style foods, often domesticating them through local tastes and methods. Rural households, by contrast, largely reject the idea that external influences add variety or weaken traditional food popularity. They continue to centre rice, *bai*, *vawksa*, simple vegetables and meat, framing Mizo food as sufficient, healthier, more filling, and culturally meaningful. For many rural respondents, outside dishes are tasted only occasionally and do not become favourites. Across the sample, most households note an increased availability of outside ingredients in shops especially in towns but only a minority actually cook dishes from other cultures at home (18.5% overall, with 42% in Aizawl Urban and under 10% in rural areas). This indicates that while the market is globalising, domestic cooking remains cautious and selective. Interpretations of this intercultural flow are complex: the most common response is that it is *both* fusion and appropriation, revealing ambivalence, food mixing is seen as creative and modern, yet also as a possible threat to cultural distinctiveness. Urban youth in particular sometimes associate non-Mizo food with sophistication, while some elders fear that Mizo dishes are being sidelined in restaurants and in public food spaces. Taken together, the findings show that intercultural adaptation in Mizoram is uneven and negotiated. Urban kitchens, especially in Aizawl, are emerging as spaces of experimentation and hybridity, where global tastes are incorporated into everyday life. Rural kitchens act more as cultural anchors, filtering external influences and preserving continuity in daily meals. Rather than replacing tradition, outside cuisines mostly sit alongside it expanding options for some households, provoking anxiety for others, but everywhere prompting reflection on what it means to maintain a distinct Mizo food identity in a changing culinary landscape.

- 5) Section 6.6 illustrates how food in contemporary Mizo society is shifting from a basic necessity to a form of lifestyle expression and symbolic capital. Rather than being valued solely for taste or nourishment, certain cuisines especially non-Mizo and globally influenced foods are now associated with identity,

status, aesthetics, and trend participation. This transformation is most visible among youth and young professionals, where food choices increasingly reflect aspiration, modernity, and social belonging. Across the dataset, more than half of respondents (51.5%) believe that preference for non-Mizo food now cuts across all social classes, indicating a broad cultural shift. However, a substantial proportion (36.75%) still associate such food practices with the more affluent, suggesting that external cuisines continue to carry symbolic value linked to exposure, purchasing power, and lifestyle change. Urban and rural responses differ as urban households still associate outside food with status and modern living, while many rural respondents see it as part of an expanding everyday food landscape. Age-based responses strengthen this picture. A clear majority (65.75%) identify youth as the group most likely to seek out non-Mizo cuisines and takeaway food, followed by young professionals (33%), showing that food trends circulate most rapidly among digitally connected, socially mobile populations. These preferences are not only about taste, but also about visibility and identity performance particularly through takeaway culture, delivery services, and branded packaging. Patterns of consumption reflect a growing move toward culinary hybridity. While a minority (32.75%) believe contemporary society prioritises traditional food, 41% view mixed cuisine as the dominant trend. This suggests that eating practices are now shaped by a blending of local culinary identity with global influences, a dynamic that varies across localities. For example, Kolasib Urban respondents report the strongest tendency to balance both systems, while Kolasib Rural shows the fastest acceptance of new cuisines. Social media plays a decisive role in accelerating these changes. Nearly 70% of respondents report that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube influence what they want to eat, how they choose food, and how they evaluate value and desirability. Online food aesthetics, colour, plating, texture, brand logos, and photography are now major drivers of consumption. Food is first seen, shared, and admired before it is tasted. For many, photographing and posting a dish has become as important as eating it. Respondent voices reinforce this transformation. Youth describe food as something to “show,” “collect,” or “post,” rather than only consume. Takeaway bags, café interiors, and trendy

beverages such as ramen, sushi, bubble tea, matcha, and colourful desserts are used as symbols of belonging to a global, digitally connected generation. Some respondents acknowledge subtle pressures, certain foods are chosen not for flavour but for how well they fit online trends. Convenience, speed, and branded delivery are frequently framed as signs of a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Overall, this section demonstrates that food among Mizo youth now functions as a cultural artifact of aspiration and identity. Eating has become performative, a way to express taste, status, and alignment with global trends. While traditional Mizo cuisine remains meaningful within the household and community settings, global foods dominate public and digital spaces, reshaping what food represents in everyday life. In this context, food operates as fashion, consumed not only with the mouth, but with the eyes, camera, and audience.

- 6) Section 6.7. illustrates the boundary between public food experimentation and the stability of private, domestic eating routines in Mizo society. While global food trends, digital influence, and youth-driven consumption culture have reshaped visible eating behaviour particularly in urban spaces the household remains a site of cultural preservation. The findings show that although external cuisines are eagerly explored in cafés, online spaces, or social gatherings, they rarely disrupt the deep-rooted patterns of traditional domestic foodways. Instead, households selectively adopt new practices without abandoning established culinary rhythms. Across the tables presented in this section, a consistent rural-urban contrast emerges. Urban respondents especially those in Aizawl reported feeling pressure to align with fashionable food cultures, with experiences of misunderstanding or marginalisation of Mizo cuisine more pronounced. Rural respondents, however, expressed minimal exposure to such pressures, reinforcing the domestic kitchen as a culturally protected space, shielded from social comparison and performance. Respondent voices deepen this divide. Urban participants described navigating peer expectations, digital visibility, and identity negotiation sometimes choosing food trends out of social obligation rather than preference. However, several respondents also expressed awareness and discomfort with this shift, recognising that shared meals and traditional food offer emotional grounding

and cultural continuity. Meanwhile, rural voices emphasised stability, familiarity, and confidence in inherited food patterns, noting that outside influences may be visible elsewhere but do not meaningfully affect their daily meals. The influence of external cultures on domestic cooking tools and techniques remains limited. While appliances like microwaves and blenders are increasingly used in urban households for convenience, traditional cooking methods such as steaming, boiling, and smoking continue to dominate especially in rural kitchens. Respondents noted that modern tools often remain supplementary and are incompatible with many traditional dishes, further reinforcing the resilience of domestic culinary systems. The integration of new ingredients follows a similar pattern. Urban households are more likely to stock items such as cheese, soy sauce, packaged masala, and instant noodles, but these are added selectively, often in response to children's preferences or online trends. Rural households, in contrast, show limited adoption of external ingredients and continue to rely largely on locally available produce. Even where new foods enter the household, they do not replace the core dietary structure built around rice, bai, smoked meats, pickled condiments, and seasonal vegetables. The tables also show that family bonding during meals remains largely unaffected by global influence, especially in rural households. While some urban respondents reported increased individualised eating routines or device use at the table, these shifts represent changes in interaction rather than abandonment of mealtime togetherness. The family meal continues to serve as a symbol of respect, unity, and shared cultural practice. Finally, although some households particularly in urban areas are experimenting with hybrid or new dishes inspired by external cultures, such innovation remains occasional. Culinary adaptation reflects layering rather than replacement: new recipes survive only when they align with cultural taste memory, practicality, affordability, and familiarity. Alongside this, strong support persists for the preservation and promotion of traditional Mizo cuisine. Preservation is seen not just as preference but as cultural responsibility, particularly in rural areas, where food, identity, and land remain strongly intertwined. Taken together, the patterns across the tables and narratives reveal that domestic foodways in Mizoram operate as a cultural filter. While external influences reshape public

food spaces, domestic practices remain anchored in memory, identity, routine, and belonging. Change is negotiated rather than absorbed, and even among the most globally engaged youth, home remains the site where traditional food continues to define cultural meaning.

- 7) Thus, the limits on domestic foodways demonstrate that food modernity in Mizoram is not a process of replacement but coexistence, where aspiration and heritage remain in ongoing dialogue. The next chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the study, bringing together the key findings from the previous sections. It reflects on how the results address the research objectives and offers a final interpretation of what they reveal about food, identity, and cultural change in Mizoram.

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CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Socio-Economic Profile

7.3 Rural-Urban Domestic Spaces

7.4 Identity and Intercultural Adaptation Issues

7.5 Sociological Implications

7.6 The Study Perspective: Culinary Triangle

7.7 Future areas for research

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

Food serves not only as a means of survival but also plays a critical role in shaping human identity and culture. It intertwines with social interactions, as highlighted by Mintz and Bois (2002), noting that eating is essential to social life. Barthes (2008) posits that food multifacetedly shapes identities, while changes in culture influence dietary habits (Visser, 1999). Culture is described by Freeman (2006) as a complex set of societal values, helping distinguish different groups. Through food, we can explore societal values and dynamics, with various culinary practices reflecting cultural identities (Katz et al., 2003). Long et al. (2017) define food culture as encompassing practices, beliefs, and the systems surrounding food production and consumption, influencing group identity and societal roles. Global cuisines exhibit significant variations based on nationality and cultural heritage, reflecting the uniqueness of cooking styles and ingredients across ethnicities. The study examines Mizo culture through contemporary food practices. It analyses changes in food habits, culinary techniques, consumption patterns, and social nuances related to food. By focusing on food norms, cooking styles, dietary choices, and the division of labor in households, the research aims to reveal how food influences social prestige and health consciousness. Additionally, it seeks to understand the symbolic meanings of food within Mizo cultural identity, highlighting cultural exchanges and adaptations in response to evolving food dynamics.

Chapter I introduces the study, followed by Chapter II, which reviews the state of the art. Chapter III outlines the methodological framework, while Chapter IV presents the socio-economic profile of the sampled respondents. Chapter V examines Mizo food culture in urban and rural areas. Chapter VI investigates issues of identity and cultural adaptation. Finally, Chapter VII concludes with a summary and contextual discussion of the text.

Chapter I provides a comprehensive introduction to the study of cultural and ethnic identity, particularly in relation to food studies. It discusses key concepts such as cultural identity and ethnic identity, referencing notable authors like Cooley, Mead, Erikson, Goffman, and Giddens, among others. The chapter emphasizes the role of food as a marker of cultural identity, illustrating how it intertwines with customs and

values, and serves as a reflection of heritage. Food is portrayed not just as sustenance but as a symbolic medium that fosters community and empathy, offering insights into societal customs and rituals. The text argues that food encapsulates a culture's way of life and is essential for understanding social identity. It also notes the academic exploration of food studies, positing that food reflects social class and cultural features, and looks into food culture within various contexts, including global, Indian, Northeast Indian, and specifically Mizoram. The discussion concludes by asserting the vital role that food culture plays in shaping identity and community.

Chapter II presents a literature review focused on the social and cultural aspects of food consumption, structured under three headings: Theoretical Perspective, Methodological Review, and Thematic Review. The Theoretical Perspective encompasses eight theories: Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, the Theory of McDonaldisation, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Bourdieu's Habitus, Food as Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism. Each theory is critically examined and applied within the study, enhancing the understanding of food habits and culinary practices while situating the findings within a broader theoretical context. Functionalism views society as a structured system where food practices maintain social stability through relationships and cultural norms. Structuralism analyzes the symbolic meanings behind food, while Structural-Marxism examines food's role in reinforcing social hierarchies and economic inequalities. McDonaldisation highlights the impact of globalization on culinary diversity. Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class connects food consumption to social status through conspicuous consumption. Bourdieu's habitus theory associates taste with social differentiation, portraying it as a reflection of class. Mauss's concept of 'The Gift' emphasizes food as a medium of social obligation and reciprocity. Lastly, Symbolic Interactionism focuses on how daily interactions shape the meanings of food, impacting identity and social relationships.

Under the methodological review, various methods and techniques used by prior researchers on similar themes have been analysed to aid in developing the current study's methodological framework. Those studies employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which were effective, prompting the current research to adopt a descriptive and exploratory research design. Specifically, it utilizes ethnography and

interview schedules, positioning the study primarily within qualitative research while also incorporating basic descriptive quantitative techniques.

The thematic review explores eight categories related to food culture: Culturing food, culinary practices and cultural identity; Culture, Kitchen and Eating patterns of family; Sociology of food and eating and the role of taste; Food Choice; Eating Rituals and Symbolism; Food as fashion; Indian society and food; Mizo society and food; and Western impact on food habits. These themes provide insights into food culture, examining food norms, rituals, cooking styles, dietary habits, food choice, and preservation techniques. The review highlights the domestic division of labor and gender roles within households, the negotiation of cultural identity through food symbolism, and the influence of external and global forces on food habits. Ultimately, it identifies key concepts and concludes with a research gap, justifying the need for further investigation into changing food dynamics.

Table 7.1. Research Gap and Rationale for the study

Sl No	Research Gap	Rationale
1.	Dearth of studies capturing the cultural symbolism of food.	To enrich sociological literature.
2.	Lack of scholarly attention on cuisine and food rituals as indigenous cultural practice.	Food and cuisine act as cultural indices in affirming cultural indigeneity.
3.	Lack of focus on cultural identity in existing food studies.	There is a need for grounded, identity-focused analysis from a sociological lens.
4.	Limited research on Mizo cultural identity through food.	To establish the significance and nuances of food habits in Mizo society and culture.
5.	West- centric studies both theoretically and methodologically.	Need for study in India, the Northeast, and Mizoram.
6.	Limited methodological clarity in identifying Mizo cultural identity through food culture.	To implement a grounded qualitative approach suitable for exploring Mizo cultural identity through food culture.
7.	Lack of focus on cultural connotations and social symbolism of food.	To interpret food as a living cultural text and a marker of unique Mizo identity.
8.	Little focus on intra-household gender roles, decision-making, and food-related division of labour amidst Christian modernity.	To understand how gender roles and domestic responsibilities get negotiated, revealing, food as a medium for care and authority.

9.	Absence of comparative data between urban and rural food practices within Mizoram. Minimal attention to the link between food habits and rising health awareness.	To uncover the continuity and transformation of food culture across different spatial and economic settings. To examine how health consciousness influences food choices and related practices.
10.	Lack of documentation and analysis on how Globalization, Westernization, and Korean culture influence on Mizo food.	To investigate culinary hybridization and cultural negotiation through the localization of foreign trends.

Chapter III outlines the methodological framework employed in the study, detailing the processes and techniques utilized. It begins by stating the Objectives of the study and progresses to the Research Design, describing the universe and sample selection, alongside the Principles of exclusion and inclusion that guided the research. The chapter also covers the Operationalization of concepts, which clarifies how theoretical constructs were translated into measurable variables. Sources of Data used for information gathering are discussed, leading into discussions of the Pilot Study conducted to test the study's procedures. The Interview Schedule is detailed, explaining the structure and content of the questions posed to respondents. The chapter recounts Field Experiences, providing insights into the practical aspects of data collection and any challenges faced. Following this, it outlines the Analysis of the data, describing the methods used to interpret the results. Research ethics adhered to during the study are emphasized, ensuring that participant rights and confidentiality were respected. Lastly, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the study, recognizing potential constraints and biases that might affect the findings.

Based on the identified research gap, the study outlined specific objectives for processing.

- 1) To prepare a socio-economic profile of the sample respondents.
- 2) To study the urban-rural differentiation in relation to food culture such as their contemporary food norms and rituals regarding food consumption, cooking styles, dietary habits, food choice, eating practices, food preservation techniques and food hygiene in Mizoram.
- 3) To analyze the food related domestic division of labor and gender roles within household structures.

- 4) To examine the shaping and negotiation of Mizo cultural identity through the symbolic meanings of food, culture content of food, fashion substance, external and global influences, cultural exchange, and the ways households reconcile with changing food dynamics.

The study employs a descriptive and exploratory research design, focusing on Aizawl and Kolasib districts in Mizoram. It selects Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban as urban sites, with two villages from each district identified as rural sites: Sihphir and Lungleng (Aizawl) and Thingdawl and Pangbalkawn (Kolasib). A total of 400 households were purposively sampled, with 200 from each district across urban and rural areas using a multi-stage quota sampling process. Urban localities were classified into centrally located and peripheral areas to capture socio-economic variation. Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, with Microsoft Excel employed for analysing the quantitative data, while qualitative findings were presented as narratives and quotations. The chapter concludes with a discussion on research ethics and the limitations faced during the study.

7.2. Socio-economic Profile

This chapter analyses the socio-economic profile of respondents in urban and rural areas, focusing on variables such as age, gender, social category, type of ration card, household type, family size, head of household, living conditions, housing type, water source, resources and infrastructure, occupation, monthly income, number of earners, religious affiliation, and educational background.

The age distribution of respondents predominantly features younger individuals, with those under 30 years making up 63.25% of the sample, notably higher in Kolasib Urban (90%) and Kolasib Rural (66%). In contrast, respondents aged 31 and older constitute 36.75%, with low representation in older age bands, especially in urban areas. Younger respondents show greater enthusiasm for engaging in modern food discussions, reflecting their adaptive culinary preferences and lifestyles. Older respondents, while knowledgeable about traditional practices, often see the study's focus as more relevant to younger generations. This generational divide illustrates how food acts as both an identity marker and a cultural expression, emphasizing younger participants' engagement with evolving food narratives. Overall, the findings highlight the relationship between age, food culture, and participation in culinary

discussions, setting the stage for further exploration of gender and lifestyle influences in subsequent sections.

The survey respondents exhibited a significant gender imbalance, with 62.75% women and 37.25% men. This trend was especially strong in urban areas, where women's participation reached 66%, compared to 59.5% in rural regions. Notably, both Aizawl Urban and Rural had the highest female representation at 73%, while Kolasib Rural was unique for having slightly more male respondents (51% vs 49%). The predominance of female respondents is tied to the study's focus on household food practices, as cultural norms often associate women with food knowledge. Many men, when present, chose not to participate, believing women were better suited to answer food-related questions. Additionally, the survey was conducted during the day, coinciding with women's availability at home. This gender pattern not only reflects participation but also highlights women's critical role in food labor, decision-making, and the transmission of culinary practices within Mizo households.

The study, conducted with 400 respondents exclusively from Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Mizoram, reflects the state's demographic reality where over 94% are classified as ST. The absence of Scheduled Caste (SC) representation is indicative of the homogeneity of the cultural community, focusing on food practices and household behaviours among indigenous populations. However, this limits the generalizability of findings to broader caste-based food consumption patterns in India. The ration card is highlighted as a crucial factor, revealing economic disparities and informing the socio-economic dynamics that shape food-related behaviours and cultural meanings. The distribution of ration cards in the study areas reveals a socio-economic hierarchy. The majority of respondents hold APL (white) cards, indicating stable incomes and reduced reliance on state-subsidised grains, particularly in urban areas like Aizawl Urban. The PHH (blue) cards are primarily seen in rural areas, signifying continued dependence on food subsidies due to agrarian lifestyles and limited urban job access. BPL (yellow) and AAY (pink) cards are scarce, indicating minimal extreme poverty or challenges in eligibility. Overall, the data highlights a divide where urban households favor market-based food purchasing, while rural counterparts lean on state subsidy systems, affecting food access and household decision-making.

The study on household composition in Mizo society reveals that nuclear families are predominant, comprising 61.25% of households, with urban settings showing 59%

and rural 63.5%. This trend indicates a shift towards smaller, self-contained units. Joint families represent 25.25% of the total, particularly in Kolasib Rural (31%) and Aizawl Urban (29%), where cultural traditions and economic responsibilities fuel these arrangements. Single-parent households account for 11.25%, peaking at 20% in Kolasib Urban, pointing to socio-cultural changes linked to migration and separation. Single-person households are rare at 2.25%, typically associated with elderly individuals or temporary residents in rural areas. Overall, while the nuclear family has become the dominant structure, joint families still play a crucial role in certain regions, highlighting an evolving landscape in family dynamics amidst social changes that influence household size and food management practices.

Looking at the size of the respondents' households, the majority of households are medium-sized, with families of 4-6 members making up 58.5%. This trend is evident in both urban (54.5%) and rural (62.5%) areas, indicating that mid-sized family structures are the norm in modern Mizo society. Households with 7-9 members represent 22.25% of the total, showcasing the persistence of extended or semi-joint families, especially in districts where kinship support is significant. Smaller households of 1-3 members comprise 13% of the sample and are more prevalent in Aizawl Urban due to housing limitations and changing family dynamics. Conversely, very large households (10 or more members) are uncommon (6.25%) and mainly found in rural areas like Kolasib Rural, where agricultural activities promote collective living. The data reveals a demographic transition towards smaller, nuclear family units, particularly in cities, influenced by work-life changes and living conditions, while rural areas maintain varied family structures linked to land-based livelihoods and kinship. This shift also affects household food practices, meal organization, and cooking frequency, which are further discussed in later sections.

The study on head of the household reveals that male leadership dominates household structures in the study areas, with 67% of households headed by fathers, particularly notable in rural areas like Aizawl Rural (76%) and Kolasib Rural (73%). This trend is largely supported by traditional gender norms and agricultural roles. Urban areas demonstrate some variation, indicating emerging shifts in household leadership potentially influenced by evolving family dynamics and employment trends. Mother-headed households make up 15.25% of the sample, predominantly found in Kolasib Urban, reflecting scenarios such as widowhood, separation, or increased economic

involvement of women in single-parent or nuclear households. Elder-led households, including those headed by grandfathers and grandmothers, constitute 16.75% of the sample and highlight intergenerational living arrangements, particularly in urban settings where older family members maintain decision-making authority. While father-led households remain the norm, the presence of mother- and elder-led households underscores changing family arrangements and varied pathways of responsibility. These developments have significant implications for understanding food choices, budgeting, and domestic routines within Mizo households, setting the groundwork for further exploration of the spatial and material dimensions of domestic life.

The study of living rooms and ambience in various regions reveals that household space in Mizo society transcends mere physical structure, embodying cultural values that reflect economic status, lifestyle aspirations, and the importance of hospitality. In urban settings, especially Aizawl Urban, homes are characterized by distinct and attractive spaces, with modern furnishings and well-equipped kitchens indicating upward mobility and international design influences. These kitchens function as social hubs, emphasizing cultural practices of hospitality. In contrast, Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural households have more flexible layouts, with multifunctional spaces serving as living, dining, and activity areas. Here, the furniture is simpler and cultural decor focuses on practical items, complementing a lifestyle that integrates food preparation with agricultural activities. Outdoor spaces play a critical role in food-related tasks, showcasing a practical approach to subsistence living. Kolasib Urban presents a blend of urban and rural characteristics, with compact living areas that maintain a connection between cooking and social interactions. Although material resources vary from the capital, the centrality of food and conversation persists. Across all settings, the essence of home remains a space filled with warmth and community, highlighting the role of food in fostering relationships. Traditional practices, such as offering unsweetened red tea, illustrate the deep-rooted values of generosity and community connection. Overall, despite variations in material conditions across socio-economic contexts, the cultural significance of household space in everyday food practices is a defining characteristic of Mizo identity, where kinship and hospitality are interwoven into daily life.

The distribution of housing types in the study areas reveals a significant shift towards permanent and structurally stable dwellings, with pucca houses constituting 70.75% of the surveyed households. Assam-type houses account for 28.25%, while kutcha houses are rare, comprising only 1% and found solely in rural areas. This trend indicates an overall improvement in housing conditions and access to durable construction materials across both districts. In urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, pucca housing dominates at 84%, reflecting economic stability and modern infrastructural development. Kolasib Urban showcases a mix of pucca and Assam-type houses, signifying a transitional phase from traditional to permanent structures, with kutcha houses absent, underscoring better housing standards. Rural regions show contrasting patterns. Aizawl Rural has nearly transitioned to pucca housing (99%), also indicating strong structural stability. Conversely, Kolasib Rural is diverse, with 66% of households living in Assam-type homes and 4% in kutcha houses, highlighting disparities in material access, economic capability, and lifestyle. Overall, these housing distributions indicate broader infrastructural development and modernization trends in Mizoram, while regional variations are influenced by resource access, levels of urbanization, and local livelihood practices. These material living conditions also impact domestic routines related to cooking, ventilation, food storage, and kitchen design, linking home structures to everyday food practices.

The study on source of water indicates that all four study locations rely entirely on piped water supplied by the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department, with 100% of households designating it as their primary source. This complete access denotes a significant achievement in infrastructure, highlighting the integration of both urban and rural areas into state-managed water systems. The transition away from wells, hand pumps, and natural sources signifies a substantial reduction in the labor traditionally undertaken by women for water collection. Despite universal access, respondents reported modifications to their daily routines to manage the inconsistent flow of water, such as filling tanks and buckets when it is available. This shift illustrates that while dependence on PHE water has alleviated physical burdens and enhanced hygiene, households continue to navigate daily activities around the water supply schedule. From the perspective of food culture, the presence of piped water has significantly influenced domestic practices by providing a clean and consistent water source for preparing rice, washing vegetables, making tea, and ensuring kitchen

sanitation. This availability reduces contamination risks and waterborne illnesses, streamlining meal preparation and enhancing the efficiency of household food routines. In summary, universal piped water access not only reflects infrastructural growth but also signifies changes in domestic life, hygiene, and food preparation, reinforcing households' integration into modern services while necessitating adaptable practices in daily life.

When studying household and infrastructure, the section is divided into two key areas of analysis. The first focuses on fuel and cooking equipment, examining the types of energy sources and tools households use for food preparation. The second explores food sources and kitchen practices, looking at how ingredients are obtained, stored, and cooked in daily life. The analysis of cooking fuel usage in Mizo households reveals a blend of modern and traditional practices. LPG is the predominant fuel, utilized by 36% of households, indicating a transition to cleaner cooking methods. Despite this, many rural households maintain a mixed-fuel approach, combining LPG, electricity, and firewood, driven by both practicality and cultural preferences for traditional cooking methods. Urban households rely heavily on LPG and electric appliances, while rural areas show a significant dependence on biomass. The diversity in fuel usage reflects socio-economic factors and the importance of cultural identity in cooking practices, highlighting that traditional methods remain valued for their authenticity and flavor alongside modern conveniences.

The analysis of stove distribution in Mizoram reveals a prevalent use of multi-stove setups, with 71.75% of households utilizing two stoves. This reflects cultural cooking practices and the need for efficiency in preparing traditional Mizo meals. A significant 22.25% of households have three stoves, accommodating larger family sizes and diverse cooking methods. Only a small percentage use four or more stoves (3.5% and 0.5%), while single-stove households are rare (2%). Urban areas, particularly Aizawl, tend to adopt modern configurations, while rural households often combine LPG with firewood. The presence of multiple stoves is influenced by culinary identity, household dynamics, traditional practices, and economic factors, highlighting the integration of modern conveniences with cultural cooking expectations.

The study on kitchen garden indicates that the practice of owning kitchen garden is still a prevalent and culturally significant practice in Mizoram, with 72.25% of households participating 72.5% in urban areas and 72% in rural settings. This suggests

that gardening transcends rural traditions and remains embedded in urban life. Households continue to prioritize home-grown produce for its reliability and cultural relevance despite urbanization and increased market access. Urban households adapt by utilizing limited spaces such as balconies and terraces, while rural households manage larger and more productive gardens, particularly in regions like Aizawl Rural, where 93% of households have kitchen gardens. In contrast, Kolasib Rural has only 51% garden prevalence, highlighting differences in land availability and settlement patterns.

Feedback from respondents reveals the reasons behind the significance of kitchen gardens. Home-grown vegetables ensure freshness, reduce costs, and provide consistent access to essential ingredients like chillies and leafy greens, crucial for traditional Mizo dishes. These gardens serve as buffers against market price fluctuations and food scarcity, enhancing household resilience. Urban respondents often miss the taste of village-grown produce, while rural respondents underscore the economic and cultural importance of their daily harvests. Overall, the prevalence of kitchen gardens in Mizoram represents a balance between self-sufficiency and market dependency, allowing Mizo households to preserve culinary identities while adapting to changing environments. They not only supply food but also uphold cultural continuity, sustaining the flavors and practices integral to Mizo cuisine.

The data indicates that kitchen gardens are a prevalent practice in Mizoram, with 72.25% of households participating, including 72.5% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas. This reflects a cultural tradition that persists despite urbanization. Urban households utilize limited space for gardening, while rural households, particularly in Aizawl Rural (93%), maintain more productive gardens. Kitchen gardens provide fresh ingredients, reduce food costs, and ensure access to staples important for Mizo cuisine. They also serve as a buffer against market fluctuations, highlighting their role in household resilience and cultural continuity in cooking practices.

Upon looking at the Economic aspects, the occupational landscape in the study regions demonstrates a clear urban-rural divide. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, are characterized by salaried employment in government and private sectors, leading to a market-dependent food system with limited agricultural engagement. This reliance on purchased groceries is driven by time constraints and dense living conditions. Conversely, rural areas like Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural focus on

agriculture for food and income, relying on rice and vegetable farming, with households consuming and selling surplus crops. Wage labour supplements income but does not replace farming as the primary livelihood. Semi-rural areas, such as Lungleng and Kolasib Urban, exhibit hybrid occupational structures where families engage in both farming and diverse income-generating activities like teaching and shop-keeping. Overall, occupational structures significantly impact food access, cooking practices, and the preservation of traditional foodways, highlighting the differences in food sourcing and cooking time between urban and rural households.

The study on monthly income of the respondents' family showed income disparities between urban and rural households often influenced by livelihood opportunities, employment stability, and economic structures. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl, have higher income levels due to the concentration of government offices and businesses offering stable, salaried jobs. The availability of diverse employment pathways contributes to higher earnings, with Aizawl Urban having the most households earning above ₹50,000. Conversely, rural areas like Kolasib Rural face lower income levels as they rely mainly on agriculture and seasonal labor, which are subject to external variables such as climate and market access. This reliance results in many households being confined to low-income brackets, heavily dependent on government programs like MGNREGS. Semi-urban towns, such as Kolasib Urban, present a mixed scenario with moderate economic activities but limited high-income prospects, typically skewing towards middle-income households. Educational access significantly impacts income potential, with urban households generally possessing higher education levels that enable access to better-paying jobs, in contrast to rural households that face educational and institutional restrictions. Overall, these dynamics highlight the stark economic divide shaped by geographic and infrastructural factors.

When studying Types of Household of the respondents, Households in Mizoram are predominantly reliant on a single income earner, with 74% of families fitting this profile. This trend is more pronounced in urban areas (79.5%) compared to rural ones (68.5%), as urban jobs typically center around one primary wage earner. Rural areas, where agricultural and wage labor allow more members to contribute, exhibit a slightly higher prevalence of two-earner households (19.75%), particularly in contexts where shared labor is common. Only a small fraction of households employs three earners (6%), and four earners are exceedingly rare (0.25%), indicating limited job

opportunities and a societal norm of having one main provider. These employment patterns significantly affect food practices. Single-earner households, facing tighter budgets, tend to prioritize basic staples and simpler meals, cutting down on meat consumption during price increases, and relying on homegrown or seasonal produce, especially in rural settings. Conversely, households with two or more earners enjoy greater dietary flexibility, enabling them to purchase meat more frequently and maintain a varied diet with a wider array of vegetables and packaged foods. Urban two-earner households particularly benefit from the increased purchasing power necessary to cope with higher living costs and better market access. In contrast, rural multi-earner households, especially those in Aizawl Rural, demonstrate greater food stability due to the combined contributions from various family members to both cash and homegrown resources. Thus, the number of earners directly correlates with employment opportunities, livelihood strategies, and economic tactics employed by households, ultimately influencing food security, dietary diversity, and the sustainability of traditional Mizo food practices.

The study on Dependency reveals that across Mizoram, household dependency patterns significantly influence economic stability and food practices. Most households, whether urban or rural, are characterized by a primary earner supporting dependents, including children, elderly parents, and non-earning adults. This creates a vertically layered dependency structure, where upward care for aging parents and downward care for children intersect, placing considerable pressure on the breadwinner. Urban dependency is driven by factors such as high living costs, prolonged education for youth, and elderly migration for healthcare, which leads to educated young adults and elders remaining financially dependent, thus burdening working parents. Consequently, urban households often operate on tight budgets, prioritizing essential expenses over nutritional needs, resulting in simplified meals and greater reliance on markets instead of home-grown produce. In contrast, rural households depend on agricultural livelihoods and multi-generational structures. Although farm work involves multiple family members, it rarely yields stable or adequate income, which increases reliance on one or two cash earners, particularly during lean seasons. Larger households often depend on kitchen gardens and foraged greens to manage food insecurity, demonstrating resilience during financial difficulties. In regions like Aizawl Rural, extended household dynamics result in more

dependents and shared labor systems, alleviating some economic pressure on main earners. Overall, the dependency patterns across Mizoram illustrate that the balance between earners and non-earners shapes a household's food security and dietary diversity. Households with more dependents face tighter budgets and increased reliance on home-produced food, leading to simpler meal patterns. In contrast, those with fewer dependents and more earners can afford greater resilience, enabling frequent market purchases and the maintenance of culturally significant Mizo dishes. This interplay between dependency structure and food practices reflects how economic responsibilities are distributed within families and influences daily eating habits in both urban and rural settings.

The study on Religious Affiliation reveals that all surveyed households in Kolasib and Aizawl are entirely Christian, reflecting Mizoram's demographic trend, where Christianity, introduced by missionaries in the late nineteenth century, is integral to Mizo culture. This religious homogeneity influences daily life, particularly in food-related customs such as hospitality and feasts. The lack of other religious influences indicates that alternative dietary practices have minimal impact on the region's food customs, with Christianity fostering a shared cultural framework characterized by collective eating and values of simplicity and generosity.

Upon studying denominations, the data indicates that Presbyterianism is the dominant religion in the study areas, representing 54% of households, particularly strong in rural regions (73%) compared to urban areas (35%). This dominance is attributed to the historical influence of Welsh Presbyterian missionaries in rural villages. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, showcase greater religious diversity due to migration and various church networks, evidenced by the presence of Baptists (14%), Roman Catholics (3%), and UPC groups. Kolasib Rural displays notable presence of Salvation Army (7%) and UPC-NEI (10%). Smaller denominations are less prevalent, indicating localized congregations. While Christianity in Mizoram has no strict food restrictions, denominational affiliation influences household routines, meal types for church events, and hospitality patterns. Thus, the religious landscape reflects a blend of strong Presbyterian tradition with urban diversity influenced by education and mobility.

The study on educational background highlights the education profile of respondents in Mizoram reveals significant disparities between urban and rural regions. The largest

group consists of individuals with Higher Secondary education at 30.25%, followed by Graduates at 24.5% and Matric completers at 22.5%. Additionally, 22.75% have not reached Matric, highlighting uneven educational advancement. Urban areas display a more robust educational landscape, with 34% of graduates, 33% having completed Higher Secondary, and only 11% lacking Matric qualifications. In contrast, rural regions struggle, with 34.5% below Matric and only 15% graduates, evidencing limited access to advanced education. The data indicates Aizawl Urban leads in tertiary education, with 17% post-graduates, while Kolasib Rural exhibits the lowest educational attainment, with 60% below Matric and merely 1% graduates. Aizawl Rural achieves a middle ground due to its proximity to the capital, benefiting from better educational resources. Several factors contributing to these patterns include urban areas' superior access to educational institutions, such as high schools and colleges, which encourages prolonged education. Urban families often prioritize schooling because of the necessity of qualifications for stable jobs, while rural dependence on agriculture leads children to leave school early to assist with family work. Proximity to Aizawl also enhances rural education levels due to better transportation and access to superior educational facilities. The historical influence of missionary education in urban centers has also created lasting educational advantages. Additionally, economic constraints persist, with families in poorer districts struggling to afford educational costs, affecting academic outcomes. Lastly, differing levels of exposure to competitive education and career opportunities in urban areas foster higher aspirations for education than in rural households, which are more focused on immediate economic needs.

7.3. Mizo Food Culture at Rural-Urban Domestic Spaces

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of food culture within Mizo households in both rural and urban environments, positioning the home as a critical space for food production, sharing, and their interconnected roles in identity, memory, and social relationships. Using data from various localities in two districts, the study illustrates how household food practices are influenced by resource availability, migration patterns, exposure to new cuisines, and evolving socio-economic conditions. Food is perceived not merely as sustenance but as a cultural practice through which societal values, power dynamics, and meanings are expressed. The chapter is organized thematically into six sections that address dietary habits, culinary

practices, food norms, preservation techniques, health-conscious eating, and gendered domestic responsibilities.

In Mizo dietary habits and practices, it notes a strong preference for meat-based diets, with 94.75% of households identifying as non-vegetarian. Meals are structured around rice, complemented by vegetables and a limited amount of meat, highlighting eating together as patterns deeply woven into family life. Urban households tend to incorporate more processed foods and fast food due to convenience and modern influences, while rural households maintain traditional three-meal patterns with home-cooked, fresh meals.

The culinary techniques prevalent in Mizo kitchens describe cooking methods include boiling and frying, with urban households leaning more towards frying. Fresh ingredients are paramount, with a reported 94% of families prioritizing them over processed food. While traditional cooking knowledge is primarily passed down through generations, modern influences and the use of social media for recipe guidance are appearing, though to a limited extent.

Studies on cultural food norms and rituals emphasise the social importance of shared meals. Pre-meal rituals, such as collective family prayers and discussions, serve to strengthen family ties and instil values. The section also discusses the attitudes surrounding dog meat consumption, highlighting a shift in perceptions influenced by contemporary views on animal welfare.

The analysis shifts to food preservation practices, revealing a blend of traditional methods like fermentation and modern refrigeration technologies. While traditional techniques persist for certain foods, urbanization has prompted a shift toward more contemporary methods of food storage, creating a dynamic preservation landscape that blends new technologies with established cultural practices.

The emergence of health-conscious eating among the Mizo has been addressed, characterized as reactive rather than proactive. Rural families often consider their diets healthy, relying heavily on fresh produce, while urban households adapt to dietary changes primarily due to medical advice.

Finally, gendered patterns in domestic food responsibilities delineates where women predominantly assume roles related to food procurement and cooking, while men's involvement remains minimal and often framed as assistance rather than obligation. Despite some urban trends toward shared responsibilities, cooking and food-related

tasks continue to be primarily associated with femininity, reinforcing traditional gender roles within Mizo households. Overall, the chapter elucidates that Mizo food culture is not static but rather a complex interplay between tradition and change, influenced by a myriad of cultural, economic, and societal factors.

7.4 Identity and Intercultural Adaptation Issues

This chapter shows how food in Mizoram operates as a key marker of cultural identity while simultaneously serving as a site of intercultural adaptation. The study on Traditional Food as a Cultural Symbol demonstrates that traditional food continues to function as a powerful symbol of cultural identity in Mizoram. The majority of respondents associate food with belonging, memory, and shared cultural meaning, though rural and urban interpretations differ. Rural households emphasise food as a lived connection to land, labour, and generational continuity, whereas urban households increasingly rely on symbolic association, nostalgia, and selective performance of tradition. Despite these differences, the findings show that traditional dishes remain emotionally and culturally significant, anchoring identity amid social change and external influences.

Viewing Food as Cultural Language, the finding explains how food practices operate as a non-verbal form of communication that expresses affection, respect, memory, and cultural values. Rituals such as Sunday meat, sharing homemade dishes, and mealtime hospitality reflect social expectations and emotional bonds. Nostalgia for home-cooked Mizo food is especially strong among urban respondents, revealing how food can carry memory and identity across distance and mobility. Through everyday acts i.e. serving, eating together, showing gratitude, or offering food to guests, households reaffirm belonging and the moral ethos of *tlawmngaihna*, positioning food as a lived language rather than simply sustenance.

Studying Food Heritage Transmission, the data highlights kitchen as a vital cultural space where culinary knowledge, memory, and identity are passed down through lived experience rather than written instruction. Rural households show the strongest continuity, treating cooking as a shared responsibility tied to cooperation and moral values, while urban households maintain the practice more selectively due to changing routines. Respondents describe learning through watching, tasting, and repetition, expressing pride in preserving family recipes and techniques. Cooking together serves

not only practical needs but also strengthens relationships and preserves cultural memory, positioning food heritage as an emotional, embodied inheritance.

The study on Intercultural Adaptation of Food Practices illustrates that external culinary influences are increasingly present particularly in urban areas, yet traditional Mizo foodways retain prominence in daily life. Fast food and global cuisines appear mainly in cafés, special occasions, or youth trends rather than replacing staple meals. Households adopt outside dishes selectively, often modifying them to suit taste and familiarity, signalling a pattern of negotiation rather than displacement. Rural kitchens act as cultural anchors where traditional food remains dominant, while urban spaces become sites of experimentation and fusion, reflecting uneven but active adaptation. Studying Food as Fashion Commodity shows how food has expanded beyond nutritional or cultural meaning to become a tool of self-expression, particularly among digitally engaged youth. External cuisines are increasingly tied to aesthetics, trend participation, and social signalling, amplified by social media visibility. Respondents associate takeaway foods, branded packaging, and café culture with aspiration, status, and modern identity, suggesting a shift in how food is evaluated and consumed. However, this performative food culture exists alongside traditional food values, demonstrating that food identity among younger generations is layered, dynamic, and influenced by global cultural flows.

The study on Negotiated Cultural Boundaries in Domestic Foodways reveals that while global food trends reshape public eating spaces and individual preferences, household food routines remain largely grounded in tradition. Urban respondents experience greater pressure to participate in fashionable food culture, yet home meals continue to follow established patterns centred on rice, local produce, and familiar dishes. Rural households report minimal influence from external trends, underscoring food as a site of cultural stability and resilience. Even when new ingredients, tools, or hybrid dishes are introduced, they rarely replace the foundational structure of Mizo cuisine, demonstrating that change is incorporated gradually and selectively rather than fully absorbed.

7.5 Sociological Implications of the study

The overall picture of the study highlights a complex interplay of socio-cultural traditions, modernity, household economies, rural-urban differences, kinship and gender relations, generational memories of scarcity, and global food flows, all of

which interact to shape contemporary Mizo food culture and the ways food expresses identity, status, care, and belonging. Besides presenting these empirical findings, it is essential to examine and theoretically contextualise why food practices take these particular forms and to understand their wider sociological meanings. To do that, eight theories have been employed, Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, the theory of McDonaldisation, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Bourdieu's concept of Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism. By using these perspectives, the study seeks to develop a grounded sociological understanding of Mizo food culture as both a system of everyday practice and a living cultural text.

Table 7.2. Culture of food: Theoretical Text and Study Context

Theory	Key Theorists	Key parameters	Study Context
Functionalism	Durkheim (1893) Malinowski (1939); Radcliffe-Brown (1940s); Audrey Richards (1939); Jack Goody (1982);	(1) Culture of food serves a social function and maintains equilibrium. (2) Rituals strengthen cooperation and solidarity. (3) Linkage with kinship, gender, and social order. (4) Reinforcing sentiments and emotional bonds. (5) Modernity manifests hierarchy and cohesion amidst adapting to change.	Traditional meals and feasting in Mizoram, the Sunday Meat Ritual, and the longing (nostalgia) for traditional foods fulfil the function of reinforcing family cohesion. The organized roles of men and women in preparing, serving, and consuming these meals maintain the existing kinship structure and social equilibrium, Mechanical Solidarity is maintained through rigid female roles, ensuring structural continuity. Conversely, the Public sphere utilizes Male (Fa Tu) specialization, led by the son-in-law, to establish Organic Solidarity and reinforce crucial kinship alliances.

Structuralism	Lévi-Strauss (1969); Mary Douglas (1972, 1975); Jack Goody (1982)	(1) Food transformations (raw-cooked-rotten) and the nature-culture relationship. (2) Meal rules and taboos (3) Food as a system of symbols of ideology and identity. (4) Cultural classifications and norms evolve	Mizo food distinctions, rice as the “proper meal” boiling as a culturally valued cooking method, and shifting meanings of dog meat reflect symbolic boundaries. Pre-meal rituals transform eating into a symbolic act that reinforces moral order, sacred meaning, and collective identity before food is consumed. In Mizo society, meat is essential for a proper meal, especially during hosting occasions. The absence of meat makes a meal culturally improper when guests are invited. Global foods (ramen, kimbap, kimchi, bubble tea) introduce new cultural codes, marking modernity and identity negotiation.
Structural Marxism	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Tucker, (1978)	(1) Food symbolism and class distinctions indicating social hierarchy. Reproduction of inequality and class distinctions. (2) Food is structured by habitus and capital. (3) Commodification of food under capitalism.	Access to trendy foods (cafés, bakery items) is higher among urban youth and middle-class households. Preferences in tea consumption indicate class distinctions, with households using Lopchu for red tea showcasing cultural capital. Dining practices reinforce distinctions, as households with branded crockery, coordinated table settings, and dining etiquette exhibit symbolic capital. ^[1] Rural reliance on seasonal, local foods demonstrates class-linked differences in taste. The rise of fast food commodifies eating, making it a purchase rather than a domestic labor, thereby deepening the rift between classes who can afford convenience and those who must rely on subsistence/local production.

Theory of McDonaldization	George Ritzer (1993); Max Weber (1921)	(1) Fast-food principles, efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. (2) Globalization and local adaptations. (3) Rationalization of eating habits, convenience culture, and consumer identity.	Takeaway food, instant noodles, and delivery apps are common in Aizawl. Youth favor value meals and combos, Local cafés provide fixed menus with consistent flavors. Ordering has become systematized and fast food acts as a supplement to traditional home-cooked Mizo meals. This rationalised system contributes to individualised eating practices.
Theory of the Leisure Class	Thorstein Veblen (1899); Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Johnston & Baumann (2010)	(1) “conspicuous consumption” and exhibitionism (2) Linked culinary taste to class reproduction and social prestige. (3) Ethical food trends as moral and cultural markers of distinction.	Posting bubble tea, brewed coffee, kimchi, kimbap and branded bakery items online serves as aesthetic and social signalling especially among urban Mizo youth. Food becomes performative, expressing modern self-assumed identity and distinction rather than only satisfying hunger. These items serve as aesthetic marker as well as a form of belongingness to a particular sub-culture or culture.
Bourdieu’ s Theory of Habitus	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Ehlert (2021)	(1) Habitus indicating food preferences and internalised class dispositions. (2) “Taste of necessity” and “taste of luxury” (3) Food, body, and gender practices expressing embodied social distinctions.	Rural households demonstrate practical, memory-based food practices rooted in necessity (e.g., preference for filling <i>Bai</i> or smoked meat <i>Vawksa Rep</i>). Urban and youth populations adopt hybrid tastes combining traditional dishes with modern global foods, reflecting embodied shifts in food preference and lifestyle.

Gift and Reciprocity	Marcel Mauss (1925); Sarmiento (2017); Hawkins & Kuntsman (2021)	(1) Obligations to give, receive, and reciprocal exchange, (2) Symbolic inclusion and hierarchy within communities. (3) Renewal of social connection and ethical exchange.	Practices such as sharing food (cooked and uncooked) with neighbours, reserving guests the best available food, and gifting meat or homemade dishes reinforce kinship, hospitality norms, and the moral ethic of <i>Tlawmngaihna</i> . This circulation of food maintains social connections.
Symbolic Interactionism	George H. Mead (1934); Herbert Blumer (1969)	(1) Meanings through interaction and shared symbols. (2) Sense of belonging, and moral order. (3) Globalisation and digital media and shared understandings of food and identity.	The practices of <i>eirawngbawl</i> (culturally meaningful act of preparing a complete traditional meal) and the serving of rice (<i>buh</i>) by a specific family member operate as symbolic acts. The practice of <i>Kil</i> (cultural norm of gathering around the table to eat together) and <i>chaw-eikhawm</i> (collective act of eating together as a group) affirm belonging, family and group identity.

Viewed holistically, the theoretical perspectives synthesised in Table 7.2 illustrate that food in Mizoram is a multi-layered sociocultural system rather than a merely nutritional or domestic activity. Food practices operate at the intersection of structure and agency, where cultural meaning, social order, identity formation, and historical memory are continually produced and reproduced.

Functionalism helps illuminate how shared meals, ritualised commensality, and patterned roles such as who prepares, serves, or leads prayer stabilise family cohesion and maintain social continuity. These practices are not incidental; they function as mechanisms through which kinship, belonging, and intergenerational alignment are enacted. Structuralism extends this by showing that Mizo foodways are governed by cultural classification systems seen in distinctions such as what constitutes a “proper meal,” acceptable vs. taboo ingredients, and ritualised behaviours like *Chhung-inkhawm*. These categories structure meaning and establish symbolic boundaries between purity and modernity, home and outside influence, and tradition and change. Structural Marxism and theories of consumption foreground the role of class, access, and inequality in emerging food distinctions. The rise of cafés, branded snacks, and

global cuisines among urban youth demonstrates how food operates as cultural capital and a form of symbolic display, increasingly linked to lifestyle rather than subsistence. Ritzer's McDonaldization and Bourdieu's reconstruction of habitus further reveal how globalisation and convenience culture reshape food behaviour particularly through fast food, delivery apps, and instant cooking yet do not entirely replace traditional practices. Instead, old and new coexist, producing hybrid food identities that mirror broader social transformation.

At the micro-interactional level, Symbolic Interactionism and theories of reciprocity show how food mediates social relationships and shared meaning. Everyday embodied acts such as sitting together (*Kil*), sharing food (*chaw-eikhawm*), gifting meat, or culturally meaningful preparation (*eirawngbawl*) function as symbolic performances through which respect, ethical obligation, and belonging are communicated and affirmed.

Taken together, these theoretical framings reveal that Mizo food culture is not static. It is adaptive, negotiated, and socially patterned. Continuity and change operate simultaneously, with tradition acting as an anchor while modern influences reshape tastes, meanings, and practices. Thus, food provides a clear window into broader social change in Mizoram. Patterns of eating, cooking, serving, and sharing as seen in everyday culinary practices and food habits reflect the influence of modernisation, rising class-based consumption, and global cultural adaptation, while traditional practices continue to sustain cultural identity and belonging. Thus, Mizo food culture represents an evolving system where long-standing meanings coexist with new aspirations shaped by changing lifestyles and social conditions.

7.6 The Study Perspective: Culinary Triangle

After an in-depth analysis of the Theoretical Text and the Study Context in relation to Culture of food, the study in the overall context aligns with the theory of Culinary Triangle advanced by the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.

I. Foundation of the Model: Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle

The development of the proposed model emerges from the conceptual groundwork laid by Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose Culinary Triangle provides a structuralist approach to understanding how societies symbolically organise food transformation. Lévi-Strauss conceptualised cuisine as a cultural language in which cooking processes mediate the relationship between Nature (Raw) and Culture (Cooked), assigning

symbolic meaning to the technique's humans use to transform food. His framework positions culinary processes along three poles:

- 1) Raw (Nature): Food in its untouched form, representing the unelaborated beginning from which transformation occurs.
- 2) Cooked (Culture): Food transformed intentionally through human knowledge, technique, and heat.
- 3) Rotten (Nature's Transformation): Food altered through natural decomposition or fermentation, where nature not human agency directs the process.

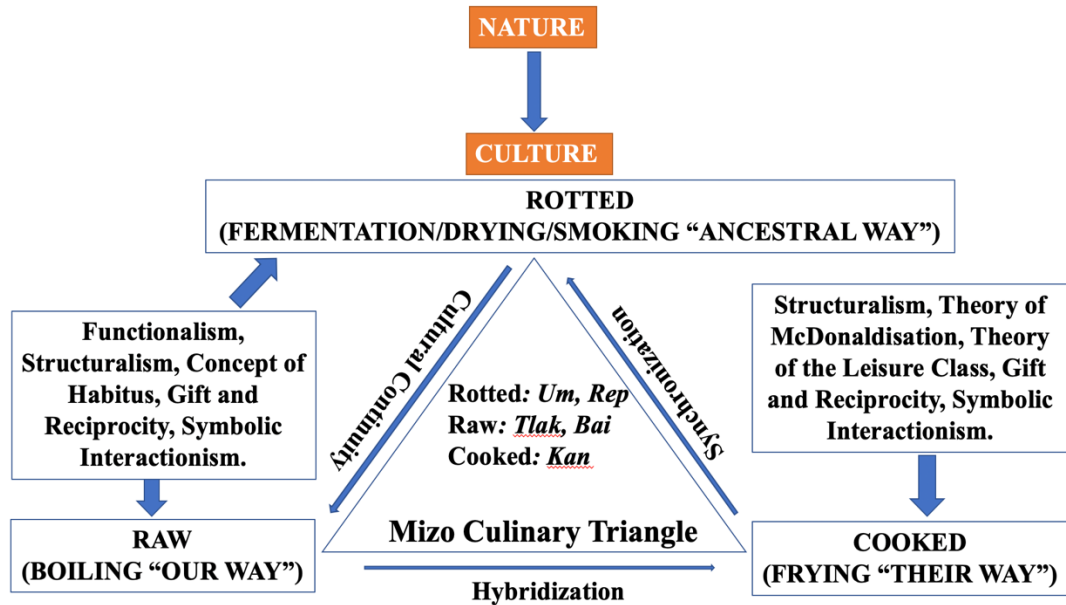
Table 7.3. Lévi-Strauss's Foundational Culinary Triangle Structure

Pole	State	Transformation Agent	Implication
Raw	Unelaborated	None	Nature
Cooked	Elaborated	Culture (Human Activity)	Culture
Rotten	Elaborated	Nature (Decomposition)	Nature

Lévi-Strauss argued that food transformation is never arbitrary. Rather, it follows a cultural logic. He positioned food along three symbolic points, the Raw, the Cooked, and the Rotten. In the Lévi-Strauss framework, the Raw represents nature in its untouched state, the Cooked represents human culture through deliberate transformation assisted by heat, tools, and knowledge, and the Rotten represents transformation directed by nature itself rather than by intentional human intervention. His broader argument is that cooking operates as a cultural language and that culinary methods such as boiling or roasting carry symbolic meaning. For example, roasting is associated with public and ceremonial contexts, masculinity and social status, whereas boiling is positioned within the everyday domestic sphere, associated with nurture, family, and femininity.

II. The Model: The Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle

Figure 7.1. Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle



The Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle is a conceptual model developed to deepen the understanding of Mizo food culture by demonstrating not only what Mizos eat, but how food practices communicate identity, history, belonging, and cultural exchange. This model begins with the foundational work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist who proposed the original Culinary Triangle. However, during the analysis of the empirical findings of this research, it became evident that while Lévi-Strauss's structural framework was analytically useful, it did not fully capture the complexity of Mizo food culture. In the context of Mizoram, culinary practices cannot be understood solely as techniques of transformation; rather, they are deeply shaped by history, identity, and continuous processes of cultural negotiation. The original Culinary Triangle does not sufficiently represent the distinctiveness of Mizo foodways and therefore requires expansion to reflect the specificity of Mizo cultural reality. In the Mizo context, food transformation reflects three additional and interconnected layers: time, referring to the movement from past to present; cultural origin, signifying internal versus external influence; and identity formation, articulated through the relational distinction between what is defined as '*our food*' and '*their food*'.

Drawing from research findings, the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle has thus been developed, retaining the structural logic of Lévi-Strauss while reframing and

extending it through the lived realities of Mizo culinary practice. This expanded model positions food not merely as a material object or cooking process, but as a cultural system embedded in memory, negotiation, identity and belonging.

At the apex of the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle is positioned Nature, which represents the untouched state of food before any human intervention. In the Mizo context, Nature refers specifically to the field, the jhum, and the forest, the spaces where food originates and where ingredients exist in their raw, unprocessed form. This apex therefore acts as the conceptual and material starting point of the model. The vertical axis extending from Nature downwards is identified as the Time Axis, representing a progression from nature to culture. This conceptualisation aligns with Lévi-Strauss's foundational Nature-Culture binary, wherein nature denotes what is given, and culture signifies what is transformed through human knowledge, technique, and social meaning. In this model, the lower end of the vertical axis is labelled the Ancestral Way, referring to traditional culinary methods passed down through generations, particularly those employed for survival and preservation such as fermentation, smoking, and drying. These practices embody a historical continuum rooted in indigenous ecological knowledge and adaptive resilience. Moving upward along the axis leads back to the apex of Nature, symbolising ingredients in their original state, prior to any cultural modification. This vertical dimension therefore enables a visual understanding of how culinary transformation involves movement through time, from raw natural materials, to traditional and contemporary practice, and ultimately into expressions of cultural identity. By embedding the Nature-Culture conceptual divide of Lévi-Strauss within a temporal and ethnographically grounded framework, the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle illustrates how food in Mizo society evolves from its natural origin, through inherited techniques, toward contemporary interpretations linked to identity, memory, and cultural negotiation.

Thus, the model does not merely categorise cooking techniques based on prevalence, but rather situates them within a broader sociocultural and historical framework. Boiling and frying are grounded in empirical data demonstrating present culinary patterns, while fermentation/smoking/drying represents a mode of preservation and identity-making rooted in collective memory, traditional knowledge systems, environmental adaptation, and ancestral survival strategies. In this sense, the choice of these three modes reflects the intersection of contemporary practice, cultural

continuity, and historical consciousness, making the Mizo Culinary Triangle both analytically rigorous and culturally resonant.

The selection of the three culinary modes i.e. boiling, frying, and fermentation/smoking/drying within the Mizo Culinary Triangle is deliberate and theoretically informed rather than arbitrary. These categories emerge organically from both the empirical findings of the study and the deeply embedded cultural logic that structures Mizo food practices. Boiling is selected because, according to the study, it stands as the primary cooking method adopted by households and statistically represents the highest frequency of usage. Frying is incorporated as the second node because it appears as the second most commonly used cooking method across the surveyed contexts. The third node, fermentation/smoking/drying, is included not due to high frequency of everyday usage but because it holds substantial historical weight, symbolic density, and cultural significance within Mizo culinary heritage.

The first node, Boiling, positioned at the central vertex and labelled “Our Way,” represents the dominant and most widely practiced culinary method among Mizo households today. The data demonstrates that boiling is integral to defining the sensory identity of Mizo cuisine which is simple, mild, minimally seasoned, and reliant primarily on water-based preparation such as *bai*, *tlak*, and similar dishes. This method produces what is often described as the natural, authentic, or “bland” taste that characterizes Mizo food. As such, boiling signifies continuity, home, familiarity, and the core culinary identity of the Mizos, symbolizing an uninterrupted lineage of tradition and food-based belonging. Theories such as Functionalism, Structuralism, Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism align with this node because boiling reinforces social structure, collective identity, emotional bonds, everyday practice, and shared cultural meaning. Boiling signifies continuity, stability, and identity, connecting present households to long-standing culinary traditions. As this mode aligns with theoretical frameworks such as Functionalism (as it reinforces equilibrium and social cohesion through shared meals and norms), Structuralism (through binary oppositions such as natural vs. artificial, simple vs. elaborate, home vs. outside), Habitus (as boiling represents embodied everyday practice transmitted through generations), Gift and Reciprocity (through communal eating and resource sharing), and Symbolic Interactionism, which helps explain the meaning-making process behind valuing boiled food as morally and culturally ‘authentic Mizo.’

The second node, Frying, identified as “Their Way,” represents the next most widely adopted method according to the study’s findings. Its growth marks the influence of external culinary practices brought through increased access to resources, modernization, migration, exposure to new cuisines, and the circulation of food through media and global consumption platforms and signals broader processes of social and cultural transformation influenced by increased accessibility to cooking oil, expanding markets, exposure to media, migration, and the penetration of global cuisines. Historically, oil was scarce and expensive. Thus, frying symbolically marks aspiration, modernity, novelty, and external influence. Although now integrated into everyday culinary life, it retains the perception of being externally influenced and culturally negotiated. Theories including Structuralism, the Theory of McDonaldization, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism are relevant here as frying represents consumption patterns linked to modern consumer culture, status-based distinctions, external influences, and evolving symbolic meanings. This category aligns with Structuralism (modern vs. traditional), McDonaldization (standardization and speed associated with convenience foods), Theory of the Leisure Class (where fried foods signify luxury and prestige), Gift and Reciprocity (frying is strongly associated with hospitality and celebration), and Symbolic Interactionism (as meanings around frying reshape identity in response to modern influences). Thus, frying becomes a site of cultural negotiation between rooted identity and cosmopolitan exposure.

The third node, Fermentation, Smoking, and Drying, is included not because it is most frequently used in the contemporary period, but because it remains culturally and historically invaluable. These techniques constituted essential survival strategies during earlier eras marked by hunting, shifting cultivation, seasonal scarcity, and environmental challenges. Items such as *bekang*, *sa-um*, and *sa-rep* serve as powerful sensory markers connecting contemporary Mizos with ancestral memory, ecological intelligence, and lineage. Excluding this category would erase the depth of Mizo food heritage and oversimplify culinary identity. Thus, this mode embodies ancestral knowledge, resilience, and cultural rootedness, aligning with theories such as Functionalism, Structuralism, Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism due to its role in maintaining social unity, transmitting cultural knowledge, and preserving symbolic continuity. Theories such as Functionalism

(supporting collective survival), Structuralism (nature vs. culture transformation through preservation), Habitus (embodied ancestral knowledge), Gift and Reciprocity (exchange of fermented products during social relationships), and Symbolic Interactionism (heritage encoded through sensory meanings) provide interpretive depth. To exclude this category would risk erasing heritage and flattening the depth of Mizo culinary identity.

Conceptual Meaning of the Three Directional Arrows

The arrows connecting the three nodes, rotted to raw; raw to cooked; and cooked to rotted carry deep conceptual significance that reflects the processes guiding the transformation and continuity of Mizo food culture. The movement from rotted to raw represents cultural continuity, demonstrating how ancestral culinary knowledge persists into the present. Although fermentation, smoking, and drying are less frequently practiced in everyday cooking today, they continue to hold symbolic and cultural value. Importantly, boiling has always coexisted alongside these ancestral preservation methods and remains the most dominant culinary practice in contemporary Mizo households. This coexistence illustrates continuity rather than rupture. In connection to Lévi-Strauss's Nature-Culture framework, the ancestral node (*rotted*) reflects transformation through natural processes (where change is guided by nature itself), whereas the raw node reflects the untouched state of nature prior to human intervention. The arrow between them demonstrates how Mizo culinary practices move from nature to culture without abandoning their foundational heritage. Thus, cultural continuity here reflects the ability of Mizo society to maintain its indigenous culinary identity through the ongoing dominance of boiling "*Our Way*" even while ancestral preservation practices have gradually declined in everyday frequency.

The second arrow, from raw to cooked, represents hybridization, signifying the negotiation between cultural protection and external adaptation. The movement from boiling (*Our Way*) to frying (*Their Way*) captures the increasing influence of external forces, new ingredients, technologies, exposure to global cuisines, and modern food markets. Frying, a technique that historically required scarce resources such as oil, symbolizes aspiration, novelty, modernity, and the acceptance of external culinary identities. This directional shift also functions as an identity arrow, representing the space in which Mizo culinary identity is actively negotiated. Here, one sees neither

rejection nor passive absorption of external practices, but a hybrid middle zone where the community balances the safeguarding of cultural roots with adaptive innovation. The negotiation between Our Way and Their Way therefore becomes a living process through which contemporary Mizo identity is shaped and re-defined.

The third arrow, from cooked back to rotted, signifies synchronization, capturing the way ancestral culinary methods continue to operate alongside modern practices rather than being overridden by them. In sociological terms, synchronization refers to a situation where two or more cultural practices operate at the same time within the same social space, with neither displacing the other, but instead being actively maintained together. Despite the growing dominance of frying and the normalization of external cuisines, practices such as fermentation, smoking, and drying persist as active and meaningful components of everyday food culture. These ancestral methods remain especially significant for culturally symbolic foods such as *bekang*, *sa-um*, and *sa-rep*, where preservation techniques carry historical memory and cultural value beyond mere utility.

Synchronization within the Mizo Culinary Triangle thus illustrates how culinary change unfolds through coordination rather than displacement. Old and new practices are not positioned as oppositional but function interdependently, allowing tradition to remain embedded within contemporary foodways. This cyclical return reinforces Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion that culinary systems operate as symbolic languages through which societies encode meaning, memory, and identity. In the Mizo context, synchronization reveals how food practices continuously move between nature, culture, and heritage, producing a dynamic yet resilient culinary landscape where continuity is maintained through coexistence rather than resistance.

Taken together, the three directional arrows articulate that Mizo food culture is not static or linear but circular, negotiated, and evolving. Cultural continuity (rotted → raw), hybridization (raw → cooked), and acculturation (cooked → rotted) collectively demonstrate how Mizo culinary identity is continuously shaped through interaction between past and present, self and other, and tradition and transformation.

Ultimately, the Mizo Culinary Triangle demonstrates that Mizo cuisine is not merely a matter of food preparation, but a complex cultural system that speaks to history, identity, negotiation, collective memory, and symbolic meaning. It visualises how food moves through time from nature to practice to identity, echoing Lévi-Strauss's

framework of nature versus culture, where ingredients shift from natural states to culturally encoded forms. The Triangle articulates how Mizo culinary identity is continuously shaped, neither static nor fully transformed, but evolving through continuity, hybridization, and synchronization.

When viewed holistically, the Mizo Culinary Triangle demonstrates that Mizo cuisine is not organised solely around the binary distinction between raw and cooked food, as proposed in Claude Lévi-Strauss's classical model, but is instead structured around deeper layers of identity, belonging, historical memory, and cultural transformation. Within this expanded framework, the model foregrounds three symbolic anchors-

- 1) Boiling as the cultural self.
- 2) Frying as the cultural other, and
- 3) Fermentation/smoking/drying as the cultural past.

Each point carries meaning that extends beyond the material preparation of food and speaks to the ways in which culinary practice expresses who the Mizos understand themselves to be.

Through this reading, the model reveals that Mizo culinary practice transcends the functional act of preparing food, it becomes a symbolic language through which identity is lived and negotiated. It reflects a way of life shaped by the land, the field, and the ecological rhythms of jhum cultivation, forest harvests, and community subsistence. The triangle is therefore not a static structure but a dynamic and living cultural system. It evolves as Mizos engage with historical memory, contemporary social change, and global culinary influences. As such, the Mizo Culinary Triangle illustrates that Mizo cuisine holds the past, speaks to the present, and gestures toward the future demonstrating who the Mizos were, who they are today, and who they are becoming.

Correspondingly, the three culinary modes within the model operate as symbolic currents of social meaning. Boiling protects cultural continuity, representing simplicity, home-based identity, and the sensory essence of Mizo cuisine. Frying represents adaptation, aspiration, and global connection, capturing the influence of external food cultures and shifting tastes shaped by modernity and mobility. Fermentation, smoking, and drying represent memory and heritage, functioning as sensory and emotional reminders of ancestral knowledge, environmental resilience, and collective history. Together, these three modes form a narrative of movement

between past and present, between self and influence, and between nature and cultural meaning. Perhaps this idea is best captured in the words of one rural respondent, who poignantly stated,

“When we talk about Mizo identity, it is not just the name of the dish, the final product that identifies us. . .it started from the land that produces such food. The whole journey of food is linked to Mizo identity.”

This reflection reinforces that the Mizo Culinary Triangle is not merely a theoretical model but a lived cultural reality embedded in identity, memory and everyday practice.

7.7 Future areas for research

Future researchers may consider exploring the following dimensions to expand understanding of the changing food culture, culinary practices, and food-related identities in Mizoram:

- 1) The present study was limited to selected urban and rural locations across two districts. Future studies may include additional districts and localities across Mizoram to generate a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of food practices and cultural patterns across regions.
- 2) While this study analysed households as the primary unit of inquiry, future research could categorise the universe based on socio-economic strata, ethnic sub-groups, or religious denominational differences to understand whether food habits, culinary identities, and cultural practices diverge across social groupings.
- 3) Comparative research incorporating equal representation of age groups could offer deeper insight into generational differences particularly how younger urban populations negotiate global food trends alongside traditional culinary identities.
- 4) Longitudinal studies would be valuable in assessing whether emerging consumption patterns, convenience food culture, and digital food environments continue to reshape commensality, meal structure, gendered labour, and cultural food identity over time.
- 5) Further research could examine the intersection of food, class, and aspiration particularly the relationship between income, food access, food spaces (cafés,

restaurants, street food), and symbolic consumption in shaping identity and social distinction.

- 6) While this study focused on domestic consumption and household practices, future work may also explore institutional and public food spaces such as hostels, schools, workplaces, church feasts, or community events to understand how food practices shift beyond the household environment.
- 7) Another potential area of study includes the environmental and agricultural dimensions of food culture, analysing how changing farming patterns, food availability, and sustainability concerns impact traditional ingredients, cooking practices, and seasonal food habits.
- 8) Research may also explore specific cases where traditional food norms encounter newer lifestyle demands such as digital food delivery, food entrepreneurship, wellness culture, and dietary shifts to understand how cultural negotiation occurs in everyday settings.

In conclusion, this study highlights that food in Mizoram is not merely dietary but a social and cultural system through which identity, memory, belonging, and modern aspirations are expressed and negotiated. As food practices continue to evolve, further research remains essential to trace how culinary traditions, food habits, and cultural identities adapt, persist, or transform within the rapidly changing social landscape of Mizoram.

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APPENDIX – I

Research Diary

Research Diary

26.08.2021 – Completed admission process for Ph.D. Choose Food Culture for my topic and I will dig deep into it.

03.09.2021 – Orientation programme has been conducted for Ph. D scholars via online mode. 04.09.2021 – I have read an introduction to Qualitative Research.

10.09.2021 – For the past week I have read Research design and various types of research method.

17.09.2022 – Visited District Library and checked out available material related to my topic.

07.10.2021 – Short Term Course on Research and Publication Ethics has been conducted by UGC- Human Resource Development Centre, MZU between 1st – 7th October, 2021. I have attended the whole session, and it was really productive and meaningful.

14.10.2021 – I have collected materials through online mode. I downloaded journals, articles and books for the past week.

20.10.2021 – I have read some articles and note down information which I feel will be useful for my research. Sir Zara has sent me an article.

26.10.2021 – I have read the materials sent to me by Sir Zara. It contains food studies which is written in relation to new cultures. It's a good read.

01.11. 2021 – Today marked the beginning of our coursework class. Orientation has been organized which is followed by class lectures.

03.11.2021 – Allotment of supervisors for Ph. D in Sociology has been given out. I am going to work under the supervision of Dr. B Lalzarliana.

08.11.2021 – Course work has started. Its hectic but I enjoyed every minute.

12.11.2021 – My supervisor has sent me various articles and journals.

16.11.2021 – Prof. RK Mohanty had discussed Common Uniform Writing Research Proposal format for all Ph. D Scholars of the Department.

27.11.2021 – I have talked to Miss Catherine who is also currently working on the

topic of food culture. We discussed various areas and I gained a lot through the discussion.

1.12.2021- I have discussed my objectives with my supervisor and clarified my doubts. He has provided me solutions and simplifying the complex.

8.12.2021 – We had Miss Dindin's Class. She has explained the meaning of Sampling and its various types. She also shared her experiences which I find it really helpful.

9.12.2021 – I discussed the sample size and techniques to be adopted for my research with Miss Dindini.

10.12.2021 – A special class has been arranged. We had a class on SPSS which is explained by Prof. Zokaitluangi.

17.12. 2021 – I have edited, re- written deleted portions of my research proposals. I have read articles, books, journals and reviewed them for the past week.

11.01.2022 - Went to Aizawl to meet my supervisor.

12.01.2022 – I met my supervisor today. We had a lengthy discussion regarding my research proposal. He had given me directions on how to move forward with my research proposal. We included health-conscious matter into it. We also discussed methodology and sampling for my study.

13.01.2022 - I made changes in my writings regarding my research proposal. I visited Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl. Collected few books.

14.01.2022 – I meet my supervisor. We discussed what methodologies and techniques would be suitable for my research proposal. I am told to add the necessary discussions to my research proposal.

18.01.2022 – Sir Zara has sent me a blogpost link about eating which has been published in Everyday Sociology blog written by Todd Schoopflin. He mentioned the role of nostalgia, religious customs, family traditions in relation to food consumption.

19.01.2022 – Reviewed a journal in the form of pdf from my supervisor. The title is Consumer Citizenship: Instant Noodles in India by Amita Baniskar. The author talked about an instant noodle called Maggi and how it became the favorite comfort food of an entire generation of young urban Indians.

I attended a seminar online hosted by South Asian University, Department of Sociology. The topic is Indian Food at Home and Abroad and the speaker is Prof. Krishnendu Ray. The speaker mentioned about popularity and prestige of cuisine.

27.1.2022 – I reviewed an article based on Literature Reviews and Personal

Interviews. The title is Anthropology of Food in Nagaland. The author mentioned about the changes in the cultural aspect of food. How Christianity affects the food rituals of Naga.

28.01.2022 – A graphic novel called Cuisine Chinoise: Tales of Food and Life by Zao Dao has been sent to me by my supervisor. The entire novel has been depicted using graphical illustrations. This kind of illustrations can also be of use when writing the thesis to portray the cuisine and food items of the Mizo for better understanding.

02.02.2022- 1. 03. 2022 - My niece and my younger brother are both hospitalized at Synod Hospital, Durtlang due to some underlying medical conditions. Since I am being asked to take care of them and nurse them, I have to stay in the hospital for a month. During my stay in the hospital I am interested in studying addiction but my supervisor advised me to stick to my topic.

15- 17. 03. 2022 – I have now spent three consecutive days to re-write my proposal. I have added articles and also removed unnecessary themes.

18. 03. 2022 – I sent my proposal to my supervisor and waited for his response.

22. 03. 2022 – I meet Prof. Mohanty. He changed the wording of the research title which is better. I have to provide links in my reference lists and modifications and rephrasing of the literature reviewed has been done. Under theoretical review, elaboration of theories has to be touched upon.

23.03.2022 – I am struggling with sample size. I have written the justifications for choosing the research sites.

24. 03. 2022 - I consulted the HoD today again with my proposal. He helped me out with the sampling.

25. 03. 2022- Presentation of our Synopsis in the meeting of Research Committee was held earlier today. It was a fruitful one. Recommendations were given which I will have to incorporate in my synopsis.

28.03.2022 – HOD has informed every scholar to meet him to work on suggestions given in DRC so as to finalise it sufficiently ahead of BoS.

29.03.2022- I went to the Department and meet HOD. I have several works to do and I will have to meet him again tomorrow.

30.03.2022 – I consulted HOD at the Department today with my Synopsis. We finalized it and I have sent the final draft of the proposal to Sir Mohanty.

01.04.2022 – All proposals cleared to be submitted to the CR in soft copy and I Have

sent it CR.

01.04.2022- All proposals of the scholars are cleared finally.

04.04. 2022 – As instructed, soft copy and hard copy of the synopsis has been given to CR today.

05.04.2022 – We were informed that all the Synopsis cleared School Board.

12.04. 2022 – Discussed with my supervisor about the objectives and he has provided me with a lot of deeper insights as to how to carry forward the process of research journey.

27.04. 2022 – Consulted HOD and made minor editings.

28. 04. 2022 - Sent final copy proposal for the School Board after editing all the necessary changes.

4.05.2022 – Send proposal for plagiarism check. All proposals were checked under the similarity check.

26.05.2022 – Meet my supervisor and he had given me various themes to look upon for further readings.

01.06.2022 – I reviewed an article called Food, Gender and Films: Representation of the Gender in Culinary Discourses through the eyes of Moire Salt and Pepper by Mibin Mathhew Mammen.

09.06.2022 – Today, I reviewed an article written by Reiheld wherein the author talked about food behaviour both public and private spheres.

14.06.2022 – Sir Zara sent me a book in pdf called Food and Media.

17.06.2022 – Review of literature has been done yet ongoing. It is an article called Changing food consumption patterns in rural and urban Vietnam: Implications for a future food supply system.

23.06.2022 - Vindigni & Peri wrote an article about a case study done in Lebanon. I reviewed this article today and out of all the findings that has been revealed, relationship between incomes and patterns of food consumption is quite interesting.

6.07. 2022 – Submission of Semester Progress in connection with Ph. D Registration has been postponed due to the postponement of Academic Council.

07.07.2022 – Hod gave me suggestions in writing a good research diary such as giving proper references, outcome of analysis of the articles to be included, overview of articles.

11- 14. 07. 2022 – Reviewed 5 articles related to my study topic.

18.07.2022 – Progress Report presentation done today. For this, our research experiences till date has been highlighted. We also stressed on the problems faced during the ongoing research process and how we solve such problems are also being included in the report.

5.08.2022 – Today, I reviewed 3 articles, from the articles reviewed, we can see that interviewing method is commonly used for collecting data in food studies. Along with it, methods such as Observation, survey, and ethnography also find their relevance.

6.08.2022 – Reviewed 4 articles. Concepts such as convenience food, fast-food and theory of symbolic interactionism has been analysed.

9.08.2022 – Life's all about reading articles, re-reading it and reviewing them. Today I reviewed two articles.

5.09.2022 – Went to Koris restaurant and observe the food and services.

13.09.2022 – We had HoD's class on how to frame interview schedule and Lawmsangpuia also explained how he identify key concepts so as to utilize for further framing of questions for research.

19.9. 2022 – Reviewed two more articles.

3.10. 2022 – Tonight I created an Instagram account by the name whatyoucaneat13 for the purpose of my study to analyse and gather information on social media. I have followed accounts which are based on food.

5.10.2022- Local Product Expo 2022 was held at Millenium Centre. In this Expo, several foods stalls were opened. I observed everything.

21.10.2022- Reviewed two books. Street Food by Kraig and Taylor Sen (2013) and Fast- Food Nation by Schlosser.

10.11.2022 – I am done with overview of Review of literature. I have also added a podcast of Vanneihluanga who talked about Mizo Food habits. In his Podcast, he mentioned changes that occurred in food habits and factors responsible for such change.

14-30. 11. 2022 – I am down with dengue and typhoid and I went home to Kolasib.

2.12.2022 – I am back from home. I tried framing questions using key concepts. I was struggling to frame appropriate questions based on the keywords, I called Lspa and he helped me out by sharing his experiences.

8-10. 12. 2022 – I have structured the skeleton for my interview schedule under each objective. It's a challenging task. I have come up with 103 questions.

13.12.2022 – Progress Report presentation has been given by research scholars. I had given mine and suggestions, recommendations and plans were put forward for consideration.

14.12.2022 – Today, I met Prof. Mohanty in his chamber. He asked me to define keywords from which questions will be framed. I defined keywords in his chamber.

13.01.2023 – The festive mood has finally died down. I had a discussion with my supervisor and he as advised by him, I looked up scales which has been used for studying health consciousness. He went through my interview schedule and asked me to add more questions and we also made alterations in framing questions.

27.01.2023 – In a blogpost written by Emily Lush, the author explores culinary traditions around the world. The author shared food- related rituals observes as a traveller by getting to know food scene and joining in with culinary traditions.

3-7.02. 2023 – I found two scales namely- Health consciousness scale and Food Choice Questionnaire which have been used by some studies and I sent the articles to my supervisor. With the help of my supervisor, I framed questions and statements for the purpose of my study.

24.2.2023 – I met Prof Mohanty today with lots of confusion and problems. He helped me out with my doubts and he asked me to do a pre-test on my interview schedule and regarding the scales which I wish to adopt, he asked me to meet Prof Loknalth which will be taken into consideration.

25-28.02.2023- I have spent days re-framing questions, adding more points and deleting some questions which are repetitive and some found to be irrelevant when asked.

2-5.02.2023 – I have finally made the necessary changes that needed to be done for this moment. My interview schedule now consisted of 136 questions in total.

7.03.2023 – Today I started my first pilot study. I have interviewed 2 respondents from two households. Out of 136 questions I have found some questions which can be clubbed together. After the pilot interview, I have added more questions and deleted some questions.

8.03.2023 – Today, I interviewed another 2 households for the purpose of my research pilot study.

9.03.2023 – I met my supervisor and discussed about the selection of urban and rural areas for my study and decided to make final decision tomorrow.

10.03.2023 – Today I met my supervisor. We discussed about the selection of urban and rural areas for my research study. In Aizawl districts, 10 localities will be taken. From each locality, 10 households will be taken. For rural, Lungleng, Neihbawih and Kolasib will be taken.

11.03.2023 – Today, I went to Bazarpui to collect the names of food available at the local market in general.

14.03.2023 - Started my first interview at Zarkawt locality. I gained a lot from the interview.

15.03.2023 – I showed my works to my supervisor and we discussed how to simplify some of my questions and he asked me to complete it by tonight.

16.03.2023 – My supervisor cut off some questions. I was also asked to translate all my questions to avoid wasting time translating then and there itself while interviewing.

19.03.2023 – Met my supervisor and he checked the edited version of my interview schedule.

23.03.2023 – I typed all questions from my interview schedule into excel documents to make my task easier later on.

27.03.2023- 4.04.2023- I spent more than 6 days interviewing households at Zarkawt locality. I interviewed 10 households from this locality.

6-12.04.2023 – Interviewed 10 households at Bawngkawn locality. 17-22.04.2023 – Interviewed 10 households at Muanna Locality.

23-30.04.2023 – I went to the library to collect books for writing papers for my presentations. I downloaded articles. Reviewed articles and wrote two papers.

1-6.05.2023- Interviewed 10 households at Edenthlar locality. 8-13.05.2023 – Interviewed 10 households at Muanna locality.

24.05.2023 – Today I presented progress report. The external Sir Himanshu and prof. Mohanty both suggested to include several new areas such as: restricted food patterns among the Mizo and uniqueness of Mizo cuisine. I met Prof Mohanty after the presentation and he simplified my questions which I have cut off from my interview schedule and I will now add those deleted questions and consult him again after adding it. Discussed with Prof. Mohanty after the progress report addressing challenges related to simplifying certain complex questions in interview schedule, enhancing the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions for the data collection.

25.05.2023- Today, I met Prof. Mohanty and discussed the questions which are omitted with him. He guided me in simplifying questions and I find it very beneficial. Advices me to revisit and redefine the interview schedule, specifically emphasising the need to simplify questions. After which the interview schedule became more comprehensive.

08.06.2023 – Meet with supervisor. Advised me insightful tips and actions to take, what to avoid and key considerations to keep in mind while conducting the fieldwork.

09.06.2023 – Returned home to Kolasib to continue with fieldwork.

12.06.2023 – 04-07.2023 - Focus was on intensive fieldwork within the urban areas of Kolasib district. Gathered data from 10 distinct localities. To ensure a comprehensive representation, deliberately selected 5 localities identified as more affluent and progressive. While the remaining 5 were characterised as less progressive. This approach aimed to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences within the urban landscape of Kolasib. In total 50 households with each locality contributing 5 households to the database.

Noteworthy observation during the field work in urban areas of Kolasib district revolves around the nature of questions related to food and eating habits.

16.07.2023 – My supervisor sent me 4 articles for review: 1. Antin Jamas M.J and Geoffrey Hunt (2012). Food Choice is a multidimensional experience: A qualitative study with young African American Women. 2. Minkoff-Zern et al. (2015). Latino immigrants' dietary health and social exclusion. 3. Carins. K and Johnshon, J. (201) Food and femineity. 4. Szabo, M (2014). Men nurturing through food: Challenging gender dichotomies around domestic cooking.

05.07-2023 – 31.07.2023 – Dedicated time for potential article topic and attempted to draft pieces on “Food as a marker of cultural identity.”

14.08.2023 – 23.08.2023 – Focus was mostly on the article centered around the theme of food within the northeast region. This is an initiative for the Ist Annual International Conference on Social Science scheduled for 8th-10th November 2023 ant Mizoram University.

18-09-2023 – 30.09.2023 – Conducted fieldwork in the rural area of Pangbalkawn in the Bilkhawlthir Block of Kolasib District, Mizoram. A unique observation surfaced – A prevalent use of ajinomot as a seasoning, incorporated into almost every households' dishes. Meat consumption unlike urban areas was relative lower due to

limited availability.

October 2023 – fieldwork continued in 2 distinct villages: Thingdawl in Kolasib District and Siphir in Aizawl District. The challenge of reaching scattered households was evident. In Thingdawl, the preservation of traditional practices such as the continued use of old-fashioned aluminium cookware and the reliance on Chingal for Bai preparation.

In Sihphir, collected data from 50 households. Uncovered distinctive aspects and lifestyles of the villagers. Renowned for cultivating Chayote (iskut) Sihphir boasts a vegetable market, reflecting their self-sustaining approach to fresh produce. The abundance of locally grown vegetables diminishes reliance on dried alternatives, emphasising their preference for freshness.

29.10.2023 – Prof. Mohanty shared a picture of a book titled Sociology of Food. I proceeded to procure it online.

8.11.2023 – 27.11.2023 – Participated in the International Conference and presented a paper titled “Revisiting the Culinary Diversity of Northeast India: A secondary source-based exploration.”

Following the conference, I embarked on a journey to Lungleng Village with the intention of gathering data from 50 households. Lungleng village is also known for their jaggery production and the hospitality extended to me during the course of my fieldwork included offering tea with jaggery. Notably, there is no market in this region and residents refrain from consuming pork which are from outside due to caution.

18.11.2023 – Submitted abstract for National Seminar organised by the Department of Political Science at St. Joseph University Nagaland to be held on 20-23th February 2024. Received acceptance of the abstract on 21st Nov, 2023.

6.12.2023 – Meet with Prof. Mohanty. Discussed about the work done so far and advised to take another 100 households from Kolasib area so that sample size in both the chosen districts would be of the same size which would ease the process of analysing data and comparison.

7.12.2023 – Presented 4th progress Report.

12.12.2023- 22.12.2023 – Continued conducting interviews by going to 10 localities in Kolasib District. Collected data from 5 households in each locality.

03.01.2024 – 16.01.2024 – Collected data from Thingdawl in 25 households.

12.02.2024 – Attended One-day Workshop on Urban landscapes in Mizoram which

was held in our Department of Sociology MZU.

22.02.2024 – Presented a paper “Understanding the Cultural significance and ecological context of Mizo traditional food through folktales and indignity” at National Seminar on Tribal Politics in North-east India: Navigating Identity, Autonomy and Development organised by the Department of Political Science, St. Joseph University, Nagaland in collaboration with Tribal Research Centre, Department of Sociology, Nagaland University.

29.02.2024 – 3.03.2024 – Spent the days entering questions on spreadsheet for data entry.

4.03.2024 – Meet Prof. Mohanty and discussed the research. Talked about research which is not just merely where and when but rather about something to be reflected. Also, he stressed on the quotations obtained for the study.

6.03.2024 – Replaced the questions entered on spreadsheet by captions as advised by Prof. Mohanty.

8.03.2024 - Attended “Tracing History”. Event involved tracing Mizo history and folklores and discussions on the history of the Mizos, which faced a sudden and quick change with the coming of Christianity and how it led to changes in the Mizo Cultural practices.

11.03.2024 - Started entering data into excel sheets. Started with data collected from urban areas in Kolasib district. The process required careful attention so that each piece falls into the right place. Also, during the data entry inconsistencies were observed and time was given to recheck everything and correct the errors in the process.

14.03.2024 – Attended International Seminar on ‘Voices Unbound: Perspectives on Social Science and Beyond’ at PUC. Prof. Joy Pachuau’s presentation on “More than human histories: Some thoughts and reflections” was very insightful. From her talk I realise that in Sociology, we deal with individuals and the production of human interaction. My research deals with food and its association with humans and since food is non-human, I must link with how humans create meanings and interact with it.

23.03.2024 – The Indian Express Newspaper presented an article “What in India is pure vegetarian?” written by Heena Khandelwal. The article explores the concept of vegetarianism in India and highlighted the growing interest in vegetarianism as a

lifestyle choice driven by concerns for health, environment and animal welfare.

6.05.2024 – 14.05.2024 – Spent time looking back at fieldwork and adding in experiences that were missed initially. In Pangbalkawn there was water shortage, extensive use of Ajinomoto, no local market was observed. In Thingdawl, the concept of grocery shopping was something foreign to the villagers as there was an absence of local market places in the area. Villagers consumed vegetables that are seasonally available in their fields or kitchen gardens. The usage of Chingal (lye) for cooking is still prevalent here which has been replaced by cooking soda in other places. In Sihphir, the residents are remarkably self-sufficient particularly in terms of producing their own food with much of their vegetables coming directly from kitchen gardens or fields. It is also renowned for the chayote production which is a staple in the villager's diet and a point of pride for the community.

20.05.2024 – Read an article sent by Prof. Mohanty “How food safety culture is operationalised for retail food settings: A systematic literature review” by Girvin Liggans Sei Rim (Sally). According to this article, conceptualisation refers to the process of specifying the meaning of a term or concept. Operationalisation refers to the process of specifying the exact measuring method used for a given variable.

6.06.2024 – Read theoretical approaches from the book “Sociology of Food” by Madhu Nagla. From it I learned that Structuralism approach recognises that taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled. It focused more on the aesthetic aspects of food and eating. And I added this in my chapter 2 of review of literature.

27.06.2024 – Had a productive discussion with prof. Mohanty. Significant adjustments to the chapter headings were made. Suggested to start working on writing chapters as well.

July 2024 – Began gathering articles for Chapter 1 – Introduction on topics such as culture, identity and food. After that the articles and its inputs were organised under several headings and created meaningful framework for the chapter. This was useful to synthesise information and understand how different pieces fit together.

Started working on chapter 2 – Review of literature after that and chapter 3 – Methodology simultaneously.

26.07.2024 - Meet Prof Mohanty to discuss the work done so far. He edited works done under chapter 1 and advised me to expand some of the headings.

30.07.2024 – 5th Progress report presented.

August 2024 – September 2024 – Began the transcription process. Listened to audio recordings collected during fieldwork and started transcribing them. It demanded intense concentration and time. Not all record audio interviews were usefull in its raw form. As I researcher I had to critically filter the content. Had to constantly return to research questions and examine which inputs fitted for the use of the study.

October 2024 – January 2025 – The most intensive stage of the research journey started. Dealed with data coding and analysis of data through SPSS. However, just as I was making progress, laptop malfunctioned and lost a significant amount of data I had entered and coded. I had to get a new laptop and had to restart the entire data entry and coding process which was tasking. Simultaneously, worked on Chapter 2 of literature review and Chapter 3 Methodology. Chapter 2 kept expanding making it comprehensive and every new relevant literature was added and could finalise Chapter 3.

February 2025 – March 2025 – On 6th -7th February 2025, I attended a seminar titled “Thomas Herbert Lewins Legacy and contributions to Mizo Literature” organised by Department of Mizo, PUC. This seminar prompt me consider how food may function as a carrier of cultural legacy.

I also began translation of respondent’s interviews from Mizo to English requiring careful cultural interpretation ensuring that the nuances, tones and contextual meanings of what respondents said were accurately preserved.

Started working on Chapter planning for the thesis. Mapped out thematic chapters based on both research objectives and the emerging data.

By end of March 2025, the translation of the respondents’ quotes gave a sense of direction to understand the work and the chapter plan bringing me clarity.

April 2025 – Attended 6-day workshop on “Innovative approaches to data collection and digital platforms in social science research” held from 21st to 26th April 2025, organised by MMTC and coordinated by Department of Social Work MZU.

I also began the process of gathering relevant tables from data set and organising them into thematic sections I had outlined and also started writing portions of chapter 4.

May 2025 – Continued to focus on Chapter 4.

7.05.2025 – Attended International Seminar on “Mizo Foodways: Cultural traditions, Societal transformation and Political dimensions across time” organised by the Tribal Research Institute, Govt of Mizoram in collaboration with Department of History,

Govt Aizawl West College and Department of History, PUC. I presented a paper in the seminar as well.

June 2025 – On 5th -6th June 2025, I attended the National Seminar on “Breaking Barriers: Paradigm Shift in the Socio-political and cultural discourse of northeast India” organised by Mizoram Christian College.

Later in the month on 14th -15th June 2025, I participated in an online workshop on Qualitative Analysis using Nvivo led by Dr. Shilpa Aggarwal, MAIMS, Delhi.

18.06.2025 – Arranged frequency table for chapter 5 and chapter 6 and Prof. Mohanty advised me to compile and merge tables that can come under one theme into a single table. Also completed the first draft of making the layout or framework of Chapter 5 and chapter 6.

20.06.2025 – 6th progress Report presented. After the presentation, discussion was held and Prof. Mohanty advised us to submit articles in peer-reviewed journals. Prepared an article to submit in the ATSK journal of Sociology and edited the article that was prepared earlier as per the suggestions of Prof. Mohanty. Moreover, the frequency table under each theme of chapter 5 and 6 were reorganised based on the objectives of the study.

01.07.2025- Started the month feeling determined. I opened the SPSS files again and reviewed the structure of the tables. At first, everything looked overwhelming, but once I categorized the variables, the work became slightly easier. Still, there is a long way to go.

3.07.2025 - Spent most of the day with Madiki and Takolong in the department. We shared a desk and worked quietly for hours. I focused on table formatting—aligning columns, checking frequency values, and correcting errors. Time-consuming, but necessary.

06.07.2025- Today felt slow. I tried interpreting the first batch of tables, especially those on food choices and cooking practices. Struggled with framing the interpretations clearly. Sent messages to a few classmates asking how they approached similar tables in their work.

15.07.2025- Met with two of my scholar friends at the library. They helped me understand how to break the table analysis into sub-themes. That clarity finally helped the writing move forward.

20.07.2025- A productive day. Completed analysis of two major tables and drafted

the first version of the interpretation section. Looking at the raw data transform into meaningful text gave me a quiet sense of progress. Finally finished analysis of the socio-economic profile tables. It took far longer than expected. The details were important, and I needed accuracy, especially when comparing totals and percentages across regions.

3.08.2025- Started the analysis of Chapter 5 tables. This chapter feels heavier because it involves food practices, rituals, and meanings—data that require not just reporting numbers but interpreting cultural significance. I reached out for guidance again. Met with friends and discussed formatting uniformity. Learned better ways to standardize Total (%) and region-wise comparisons. Sometimes the conversations with peers teach more than manuals. Completed the analysis of the first major thematic section finally. The relief was noticeable. Still, much remains.

10.10.2025- I have worked on incorporating and weaving in the respondent's voices under each table that I have already analysed. The weaving in of qualitative responses and identifying what fits best takes time. However, the addition of respondents' voices gives a rather meaningful depth to the study.

3.11.2025- I have toiled hard to complete my thesis writing. Getting immense help from HoD who sacrifice his time and energy so that my work comes together making a meaningful insights. He guides me constantly and helped me out wherever I am stuck and always ready to give solutions to the roadblocks that I have encountered.

18.11.2025- Met Sir Mohanty frequently and showed him my work progress and he always help me in rectifying my works.

24.11.2025- Today, pre-submission date has been given out and I am going to give presentation on 28th November 2025 at the Department of Sociology.

26.11.2025- Continued working on my abstract and preparing for my presentation.

28.11.2025- Pre-submission Viva

APPENDIX – II

SCHEDULE NO:

Date:

Place:

Time taken for interview:

Interviewer:

Phone number:

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOOD HABITS AND CULINARY PRACTICES OF MIZO SOCIETY

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Purely for Academic Purposes)

General profile of respondent and Household characteristics:

A. Name:

B. Age (in years):

C. Gender:

D. Present place of residence/Locality:

E. Permanent place of residence/Locality:

1. Types of ration card:

a) Priority household (PHH) ration card (Blue) b) Antyodaya (AAY) ration card (Pink)

c) APL (Above Poverty line) ration card (White) d) BPL ration card (Yellow)

e) None

2. Social Category: a) Gen b) SC c) ST d) OBC e) EWS

3. Types of households: a) Single person b) Single parent c) Nuclear Family

d) Joint Family

4. Monthly income of the family

a) Below 50000 b) 50000- 100000 c) 100000-250000 d) 250000 above

5. Head of the household:

a)Grandfather b)Grandmother c)Father d)Mother e)Others, specify:

6. Religion: a)Christianity b)Hindu c)Muslim d)Buddhist e)Others, specify:

7. If Christian, which denomination do you belong to?

a)Presbyterian b)Roman Catholic c)Baptist d)Salvation Army

e)United Pentecostal Church (NEI) f)United Pentecostal Church (MZ)

g)Seventh Day Adventist h)Kohhran Thianglim i)Lal Chhungkua

j)Mizo Kohhran

k)IKK

l)Israel

m)Others, specify:

8. Educational Background

a) Lower than Matric b) Matric c) Higher Secondary d)Graduate e) Post-Graduate f) Others

F. Type of House: a) Kutcha b) Pucca c) Assam-type

G. Source of Water:

H. Number of family members in the house:

I. No of bread earners:

J. Occupation:

K. Dependents:

L. Living rooms and ambience:

Food and cultural identity:

9. Is food an important part of the Mizo cultural identity?

a) Yes b) No

10. Do you associate certain foods or dishes or way of preparation with Mizo cultural background?

a) Yes b) No

10.A. Specify:

11. Have you learned how to cook traditional dishes from Mizo cultural background?

a) Yes b) No

11.A. Specify:

12. Do you feel a sense of pride in the foods and dishes that are associated with Mizo cultural background?
- a) Yes b) No
13. Do you feel that sharing traditional food with others is a way to share your culture and identity?
- a) Yes b) No
14. Do you feel that the availability of traditional ingredients and dishes is important to maintaining your cultural identity?
- a) Yes b) No
15. Have you ever felt pressured to conform to other food cultures or cuisines that are dominant in your region?
- a) Yes b) No
16. Have you ever felt that Mizo cultural food practices have been misunderstood or misinterpreted by others?
- a) Yes b) No
17. Have you ever felt that Mizo cultural food practices have been marginalized or excluded in social or public settings?
- a) Yes b) No
18. Have you ever felt that Mizo cultural food practices have been appropriated by others without proper acknowledgement or respect?
- a) Yes b) No
19. Do you feel that the food practices of Mizo cultural background are properly represented and celebrated in society and media?
- a) Yes b) No

20. Do you think that food and cuisine play a significant role in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and identity?
a) Yes b) No
21. Do you feel that the food and dishes associated with Mizo cultural background are valued and respected within your household?
a) Yes b) No
22. Are traditional dishes and cooking techniques from Mizo cultural background passed down through generations within your household?
a) Yes b) No
23. Are mealtimes within your household an opportunity to celebrate and share Mizo cultural identity through food?
a)Yes b)No
24. Are there certain foods or dishes from Mizo cultural background that are reserved for special occasions or holidays within your household?
a)Yes b)No
25. Are there certain cooking or serving traditions from Mizo cultural background that are followed within your household?
a)Yes b)No
26. What type of food practice do you follow?
a) Vegetarian b) Non-vegetarian c)Vegan
27. Do all family members follow the same food practice?
a) Yes b) No
27.A. If no, please specify:
28. How often do you consume leafy vegetables?
a) Never b) Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often
28.A. Specify the names of leafy vegetables consumed:

29. How often do you consume non-leafy vegetables (roots, tubers, vines)?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

29.A. Specify:

30. How often do you consume fruits?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

30.A. Specify:

31. How often do you consume red meat?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

31.A. Specify:

32. How often do you consume seafood?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

32.A. Specify:

33. How often do you consume white meat?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

33.A. Specify:

34. How often do you consume dairy products?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

34.A. Specify:

35. How often do you consume processed or packaged foods (frozen foods, taaza, canned, biscuits) in a week?

- a) Every day b) Several times a week c) Occasionally d) Rarely e) Never

35.A. Specify:

36. How often do you consume fast food or takeout meals?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

36.A. Specify:

37. How often do you cook your meals from scratch using fresh ingredients?

- a)Always b)Most of the time c)Sometimes d)Rarely e)Never

37.A. Specify:

38. Do you prefer to consume locally sourced and/or organic food products when available?

- a)Always b)Most of the time c)Sometimes d)Rarely e)Never

38.A. Specify:

39. How often do you consume fermented foods?

- a)Never b)Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often

39.A. Specify:

40. How often do you consume pungent food?

- a) Never b) Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often

40.A. Specify:

41. How often do you consume dried food items?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e)Very often

41.A. Specify:

42. How often do you consume chillies?

- a) Never b) Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often

42.A. Specify:

43. How often do you consume exotic food?

- a) Never b)Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often

43.A. Specify:

44. How often do you consume seasonal vegetables?

- a) Never b)Rarely c)Occasionally d)Often e)Very often

44.A. Specify:

45. How often do you consume and prepare traditional or culturally specific foods?

- a) Never b) Rarely c) Occasionally d) Often e) Very often

45.A. Specify:

46. How often do you prepare and consume meal at home in the morning?

- a) Every day b) Several times a week c) Occasionally d) Rarely e) Never

47. Which of the following items do you commonly consume at home in the morning?

(Select all that apply)

- a) Cereal b) Toast c) Eggs d) Pancakes or waffles e) Oatmeal

f) Others, specify:

48. How often do you prepare and consume lunch at home?

- a) Every day b) Several times a week c) Occasionally d) Rarely e) Never

49. Which of the following lunch items do you commonly consume at home? (Select all that apply)

- a) Sandwiches b) Salads c) Leftovers from dinner d) Soup e) Chhang

f) Others, specify:

50. How often do you prepare and consume dinner at home?

- a) Every day b) Several times a week c) Occasionally d) Rarely e) Never

51. Which of the following dinner items do you commonly consume at home? (Select all that apply)

- a) Pasta b) Rice c) Meat or poultry d) Seafood

e) Vegetarian or vegan options f) Others, specify:

52. How often do you prepare and consume desserts or sweets at home?

- a) Every day b) Several times a week c) Occasionally d) Rarely e) Never

53. Which of the following do you commonly consume at home? (Select all that apply)

- a)Cookies b)Cake c)Ice cream d)Fruit e)Sweets
f)Others, specify:

54. How often do you use a recipe or follow a specific cooking method when preparing meals at home?

- a)Every time b)Most of the time c)Occasionally d)Rarely e)Never

55. How important is it to you that the meals you prepare at home are budget-friendly?

- a)Very important b)Somewhat important c)Neutral
d)Somewhat unimportant e)Very unimportant

56. On average, how many meals do you eat together as a family in a week?

- a)0-2 b)3-5 c)6-8 d)9 or more

57. How often do you eat takeout or delivery food in a week?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

58. A. What is the typical time of day for your family's main meal?

- a)Breakfast b)Lunch c)Dinner

59. How often does your family eat meals together at a table in a week?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

60. How often does your family eat fast food in a week?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

61. Is the typical meal timing for your family on weekdays and weekends the same?

- a)Yes b)No

61.A. Specify:

62. Does your family consume snacks in between meals?
a)Yes b)No
62.A. If yes, what are the types of snacks consumed?
63. A. Are there any factors that influence your family's meal timing or types of meals consumed, such as work schedules or preferences?
64. What cooking methods do you typically use to prepare meals at home?
a)Grilling b)Baking c)Boiling d)Frying e)Other (please specify)
65. How often does your family use herbs(pardi,bahkhawr,dhania) and spices to flavor meals?
a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
66. How often does your family use oil or butter in cooking?
a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
67. How often does your family eat meals that are fried?
a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
68. How often does your family use rice cooker or instant pot to prepare meals?
a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
69. How often does your family use a grill to prepare meals?
a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
70. How often does your family use a microwave to prepare meals?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

71. How often does your family eat meals that are baked?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

72. How often does your family eat meals that are boiled?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

73. How often does your family use a pressure cooker to prepare meals?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

74. How often does your family use a wok or stir fry pan to prepare meals?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

75. How often does your family use a blender or food processor to prepare meals?

- a)Every day b)Several times a week c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

76. How often does your family freeze leftover food?

- a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

77. How often does your family can or jar food?

- a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

78. How often does your family dry food for preservation?

- a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

79. How often does your family use vacuum sealing to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

80. How often does your family use chemical preservatives, such as sodium nitrate, to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

81. How often does your family use refrigeration to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

82. How often does your family use fermentation to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

83. How often does your family use smoking to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

84. How often does your family use pickling to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

85. How often does your family use dehydration to preserve food?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

86. How often does your family use canning as a food preservation method?

87. How often does your family use freezing as a food preservation method?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
88. How often does your family use vacuum sealing as a food preservation method?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
89. How often does your family use refrigeration as a food preservation method?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
90. How often does your family use salting as a food preservation method?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
91. How important is it for you to maintain traditional food practices in your household?
a)Extremely important b)Very important c)Somewhat important d)Not very important
e)Not at all important
92. How often do you eat meals with your family or community members?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
93. How often do you celebrate special occasions with traditional food and drinks?
a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never
94. How important is it for you to use locally sourced ingredients in traditional dishes?

a)Extremely important b)Very important c)Somewhat important d)Not very important e)Not at all important

95. How often do you consume traditional meals during festive occasions?

a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

96. How important is it for you to consume traditional meals during festive occasions?

a)Extremely important b)Very important c)Somewhat important d)Not very important e)Not at all important

97. How often do you incorporate traditional cooking techniques into your everyday cooking?

a)Every time b) Often c)Occasionally d)Rarely
e)Never

98. How often do you consume carbonated soft drinks?

a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never

98.A. Specify: 1)Coca cola 2)sprite 3)pepsi 4)miranda 5)Others

99. How often do you consume energy drinks?

a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never

100. How often do you consume coffee?

a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never

100.A. Specify: Black or Milk coffee:

101. How often do you consume tea?

a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never

- 101.A. Specify: which tea and how? Do you take it with jaggery?
102. How often do you consume fruit juices?
a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never
103. How often do you consume milk?
a)Every day b)A few times a week c)A few times a month d)Rarely or never
104. Which food should be the biggest portion on your plate?
a) Staple food b) Main dish c) Side dish d)Soup d)Others, specify:
105. Do you use ajinomoto for seasoning for cooking purpose?
a) Yes b) No
106. Do you have a specific kitchenware used for cooking purpose in your household?
a) Yes b) No
106.A. If yes. Specify:
107. Do you think food enhance the bond between families?
a) Yes b) No
107.A. If yes, Give reasons:
108. Do you think food provides learning opportunities for families?
a) Yes b) No
109. Do you consider family meal to be important?
a) Yes b) No
109.A. If yes, state your reason:
110. Do you have any family rituals which you followed before or after every meal?
a) Yes b)No
110.A. If yes, specify:

a) Yes b) No

a) Sitting around the dining table b) Sitting on the floor
c) Sitting around the kitchen island table d) Members take their own food from the kitchen and have it elsewhere inside the house depending on their convenience.

a) Passed around the table b) Served by one particular person
c) Buffet-style d) The practice of sitting down at the dinner table (Kil)

114.A. If yes, who leads the conversation and what is it about?

115.A. If yes, who is it and give reasons:

116.A. If yes, please specify:

117.A. If yes, please specify:

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- a) Stainless steel b) Ceramic c) Melamine d) Earthenware
e) Porcelain f) Vitrelle g) Others, please specify:

119. How do you eat food in your household?

- a) Using hands b) Using spoon and fork c) Using chopsticks
d) Others, specify:

120. Do you have any particular Mizo food item that makes you feel nostalgic when you travel outside Mizoram?

- a) Yes b) No

120.A. If yes, please specify:

121. Do you often express your gratitude and appreciation to others through food?

- a) Yes b) No

121.A. If yes, specify:

122. Do you still practice the tradition of giving homemade food as a family to neighbors and loved ones?

- a) Yes b) No

122.A. If yes, please specify:

123. Do you usually serve special menu when guests are invited over for dinner?

- a) Yes b) No

123.A. If yes, please specify:

124. Do you offer any food items when you have someone coming over to your house?

- a) Yes b) No

124.A. If yes, please specify:

125. Do you consider it compulsory to have meat as one of the main dishes on Sundays in your household?

- a) Yes b) No

125.A. If yes, Give reasons:

126. Do you have any dietary restrictions that you observe as an individual or as a family due to religious beliefs?

- a) Yes b) No

126.A. If yes, specify:

127. Is there any particular food that is considered 'unclean' by your religion or denomination to which you belonged to?

- a) Yes b) No

127A. If yes, please specify:

128. Are there any members in your family who take dog-meat?

- a) Yes b) No

129. Do you take dog-meat in your household?

- a) Yes b) No

130. How often do you take dog-meat within your household?

- a) Always b) Very Frequently c) Occasionally d) Rarely
e) Very Rarely f) Never

131. Who prepares dog meat in your family?

- a) Grandfather b) Grandmoth c) Father d)Mother
e) Daughter f) Children (Female) g) Others, specify: h)None

132. Are there any members in your family who avoid taking dog-meat?

- a) Yes b) No

132.A. If yes, specify your answer:

133. Can dog-meat be eaten and served and prepared within the vicinity of your Church?

- a) Yes b) No

134. Which age groups do you think usually consider consuming dog-meat?

- a) Children- Male b)Children- Female c)Youth- Male d)Youth- Female
- e) Adult- Male f)Adult-Female g)Senior- Male h)Senior- Female

135. Do you consider the activity of preparing meals together as a family important?

- a) Yes b)No

136. Do you prepare meals together as a family?

- a) Yes b)No

136.A. If no, give reasons:

137. Who usually buys groceries?

- a) Grandfather b)Grandmother c)Father d)Mother
- e) Children (Male) f)Children (Female) g)Maid h)Others, specify:

138. Who decides what kinds of groceries to buy?

- a) Grandfather b)Grandmother c)Father d)Mother
- e) Children (Male) f)Children (Female) g)Maid h)Others, specify:

139. Who is in-charge of deciding the amount of money to be spent on buying groceries?

- a) Grandfather b)Grandmother c)Father d)Mother
- e) Children (Male) f)Children (Female) g)Maid h)Others, specify:

140. What are the factors considered while purchasing food?

- a) Cost b)Availability c)Likes/Dislikes d)Nutritional requirement
- e) Ethics f)Health g)Others, specify:

141. Who is in-charge of planning the food items to be made at home?

- a) Grandfather b)Grandmother c)Father d)Mother
- e) Children (Male) f)Children (Female) g)Maid h)Others, specify:

142. Do you plan your family meal based on the likes and preferences of any members in your family?

- a) Yes b) No

142.A. If yes, please specify:

143. Who usually cooks meal for the entire family on a daily basis?

- a) Grandfather b) Grandmother c) Father d) Mother
e) Children (Male) f) Children (Female) g) Maid h) Others, specify:

144. Who is responsible for setting up the dining table when having family meal?

- a) Grandfather b) Grandmother c) Father d) Mother
e) Children (Male) f) Children (Female) g) Maid h) Others, specify:

145. Who is responsible for clearing up the table after every meal?

- a) Grandfather b) Grandmother c) Father d) Mother
e) Children (Male) f) Children (Female) g) Maid h) Others, specify:

146. Who is responsible for washing the dishes after every meal?

- a) Grandfather b) Grandmother c) Father d) Mother
e) Children (Male) f) Children (Female) g) Maid h) Others, specify:

147. Do you divide the household chores done in the kitchen among the family members?

- a) Yes b) No

147.A. If yes, please specify:

148. Do you think women of the family must wait and serve the male members first at the dinner table?

- a) Yes b) No

148.A. Give reasons:

149. Do you think the head of the family should eat first when a family sits down together?

157. Among the family members in your household, who skips dinner more often?
a) Male members b)Female members c)Both d)None
158. Among the family members in your household, who consume meat more?
a) Male members b)Female members c)Both d)None
159. Among the family members in your household, who spends more time preparing meal in the kitchen?
a) Male members b)Female members c)Both d)None
160. Among the family members in your household, who consume more beverages?
a) Male members b)Female members c)Both d)None
- 160.A. Please specify:
161. Which outside cultures have had the biggest influence on Mizo food culture?
a)East-Asian b)European c)Indian d)American e)Others,specify:
162. Do you prefer traditional cuisine or dishes that incorporate outside influences?
a)Traditional b)Outside influenced c)No preference
163. Has the influence of outside culture on food led to more variety in the cuisine?
a)Yes b)No
164. Have restaurants and food establishments adapted their menus to cater to outside influences?
a)Yes b)No
165. Has the influence of outside culture on food led to a decrease in the popularity of traditional cuisine?
a)Yes b)No

166. Have you noticed an increase in the availability of ingredients from outside cultures in grocery stores?
a)Yes b)No
167. Do you think the influence of outside cultures on food has led to cultural fusion or appropriation?
a)Fusion b)Appropriation c)Both d)Neither
168. Has the influence of outside culture on food led to the creation of new, unique dishes?
a)Yes b)No
169. Have you noticed a change in the way people consume and enjoy food due to outside influences?
a)Yes b)No
170. Has the influence of outside cultures on food affected the way your family cooks and eats at home?
a)Yes b)No
171. Do you and your family regularly cook dishes from outside cultures at home?
a)Yes b)No
172. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to more experimentation in your household's cooking?
a)Yes b)No
173. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a greater appreciation of different cultures within your household?
a)Yes b)No

174. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to conflicts or disagreements within your household about what to cook or eat?
a)Yes b)No
175. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to more diverse and inclusive family meals?
a)Yes b)No
176. Do you think the influence of outside cultures on food has led to changes in the way families bond and spend time together at meals?
a)Yes b)No
177. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to the creation of new family traditions or rituals related to food?
a)Yes b)No
178. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to the adoption of new cooking techniques or utensils in your household?
a)Yes b)No
179. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to changes in the ingredients used in your household's cooking?
a)Yes b)No
180. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a shift in the overall dietary habits of your household?
a)Yes b)No
181. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to more conversations and learning opportunities about different cultures within your household?
a)Yes b)No
182. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a change in the way your household celebrates holidays or special occasions?

a)Yes b)No

183. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to the introduction of new foods or dishes that have become family favorites?

a)Yes b)No

184. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a greater sense of open-mindedness and curiosity within your household?

a)Yes b)No

185. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a change in the way your household interacts with people from different cultures?

a)Yes b)No

186. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a change in the way your household approaches travel and exploration of different cultures?

a)Yes b)No

187. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a greater appreciation and respect for different cultures within your household?

a)Yes b)No

188. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to the creation of more opportunities for cultural exchange within your household or community?

a)Yes b)No

189. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a change in the way your household values and consumes food as a cultural artifact?

a)Yes b)No

190. Has the influence of outside cultures on food led to a change in the way your household views cultural identity and belonging?

a)Yes b)No

191. Do you think that contemporary Mizo society places more importance on traditional foods and dishes or on incorporating new foods and cuisines from other cultures?
- a)Traditional foods and dishes b)Incorporating new foods and cuisines
c)Both equally
192. Do you think that food can be used as a way of maintaining and promoting Mizo culture and identity in contemporary society?
- a)Yes b)No
193. Do you think that efforts should be made to preserve and promote traditional Mizo foods and dishes in contemporary society?
- a)Yes b)No
194. What is the main cooking fuel used in your household?
- a)Wood or crop residue b)Charcoal c)LPG d)Electric
e)Combination
195. What are the types of stoves owned in your household?
- a) One stove b)Two stoves c)Three stoves d)Four stoves
e) Five stoves f)More than five stoves
196. Do you own kitchen garden?
- a) Yes b)No
197. From where do you get groceries?
- a)Local market b)Online c)Using delivery services d)House vendors
e)Kitchen garden e)Others, specify:
198. How would you describe the taste preference of your family?
- a) Mostly traditional b)Western c)Indian d)Mixture of various cuisines
e) Others, specify:

199. Do you think the food outside are tastier than home cooked meal?
 a) Yes b)No
 199.A. If yes, give reasons:
200. Which section of the Mizo society do you think is more likely to consume non-mizo food, eat out and order takeaways?
 a) More affluent section of the society b)Less affluent section of the society
 c)Everyone d) Others, specify:
201. Which age group of the Mizo society do you think is more likely to consume non-mizo food, eat out and order takeaways?
 a) School Children b)Youth c)Young professionals d)Others,specify:
202. Do you eat takeaway food item as the main dinner item in your house?
 a) Yes b)No
 202.A. If yes, please specify:
203. How often do you supplement your daily home cooked meal with takeaway items in your household?
 a) Daily b)Sometimes c)Rarely d)Never e)Others, specify:
204. Do you see fast food intake as a daily intake?
 a) Yes b)No
 204.A. If yes, give reasons:
205. Do you consider your household to be health-conscious about the food you consume?
 a)Yes b)No
206. Are there specific dietary requirements or restrictions in your household due to health concerns?
 a)Yes b)No

207. Do you pay attention to nutritional information, such as calorie or fat content, when purchasing food for your household?
a)Yes b)No
208. Do you try to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your household's diet for health reasons?
a)Yes b)No
209. Do you limit your household's intake of processed or packaged foods due to health concerns?
a)Yes b)No
210. Do you purchase organic or locally grown foods for your household due to health and environmental concerns?
a)Yes b)No
211. Do you try to avoid or limit the consumption of sugary or high-fat foods in your household?
a)Yes b)No
212. Do you use supplements or vitamins to enhance the health benefits of the food consumed in your household?
a)Yes b)No
213. Do you involve your family in planning and preparing meals to promote healthy eating habits?
a)Yes b)No
214. Do you seek advice or information from healthcare professionals, such as doctors, nutritionists or dieticians, on how to improve your household's diet and health?
a)Yes b)No

215. Are there any specific health concerns, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, that influence the food choices and intake in your household?
a)Yes b)No
216. Does the age of household members influence the food choices and intake in your household?
a)Yes b)No
217. Do you try to balance your household's intake of different food groups, such as carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, to promote overall health?
a)Yes b)No
218. Are there any cultural or religious beliefs that influence the food choices and intake in your household?
a)Yes b)No
219. Do you believe that consuming certain types of foods or drinks, such as herbal teas or bone broth, can have health benefits?
a)Yes b)No
220. Do you monitor the portion sizes of the food consumed in your household to promote health?
a)Yes b)No
221. Do you think that improving the health and wellness of your household through food intake is a priority?
a)Yes b)No
222. Do you think that consuming certain types of foods or beverages, such as sugary drinks or processed snacks can have a negative impact on your household's health?
a)Yes b)No

223. Do you make alterations in your daily eating habits within the household due to health issues?
a) Yes b)No
223.A. If yes, please specify:
224. Do you think veganism can be adopted as a lifestyle in Mizo society?
a) Yes b)No
225. Do you think the practice of veganism clash with the Mizo food culture?
a) Yes b)No
225.A. Give reasons:
226. Do you consider yourself as health-conscious regarding food intake?
a) Yes b)No
226.A. If yes, give reasons:
227. Do you think the practice of health-conscious diet is expensive?
a) Yes b)No
228. Do you have any food intolerance that you develop while growing up?
a) Yes b)No
228.A. If yes, please specify:
229. Are you worried about health issues while consuming food?
a) Yes b)No
229.A. If yes, give reasons:
230. Do you think social media triggered eating disorder on one hand, and healthy eating on the other?
a) Yes b)No
230.A. If yes, give reasons:

231.Are you more inclined towards buying food items which are labelled as branded more than unbranded labelled food items?

a) Yes b)No

231.A. If yes, give reasons:

232.Do you take meals out of urgency without considering the health impact?

a) Yes b)No

232.A. If yes, give reasons:

Photo Plate



Figure 1: Fieldwork at Lungleng village



Figure 2: Sundrying chillies at rural areas



Figure 3: Sachek (Mizo dish)



Figure 4: Laisua Bai (Mizo dish)



Figure 5: Baibing tlak (Mizo dish)



Figure 6: Rawtuai tauh (Bamboo shoot chutney style)



Figure 7: Behlawi bai, saum nen (Mizo Bai with saum)



Figure 8: Pasi al thak



Figure 9: Typical Mizo meal set

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2	Cultural Significance And Ecological Context Of Traditional Mizo Food: Lensing Through Folktales And Beliefs	ATSK Journal of Sociology 2025 Volume 3, Issue 1, Article 7, 72-82.	ISSN: 3005-3676	Single author

Papers Presented in Workshop/Seminar

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1	Revisiting the Culinary Diversity of Northeast India: A Secondary source-based exploration	Social Sciences in the Contemporary World: The Way Forward 8-10 November, 2023	School of Social Sciences, Mizoram University	International
2	Understanding the Cultural significance and ecological context of Mizo traditional food through folktales and indigeneity	Indigeneity & Sustainable Development: Locating the Local in the context of G20 30th-31st May 2023	Department of Sociology; Mizoram University ICSSR	National

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1	Research Publication and Ethics (7 Days)	UGC, Human Resource Development Centre, Mizoram University	2021
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3	Academic Writing workshop on Everyday Practices and Meanings of Food in India (from 01 to 23 August 2025)	Indian Sociological Society (virtual-mode)	2025



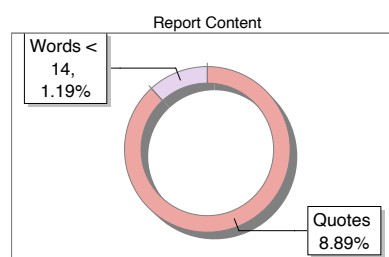
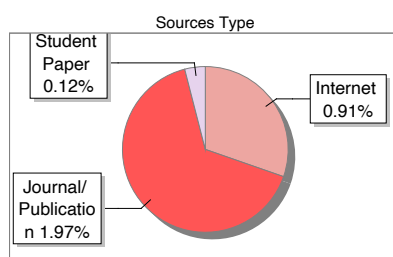
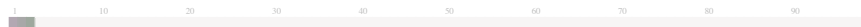
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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOOD HABITS AND CULINARY PRACTICES IN MIZO SOCIETY

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOOD HABITS AND
CULINARY PRACTICES IN MIZO SOCIETY**

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Submitted

**In partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Sociology of Mizoram University, Aizawl**

This Thesis explores the culinary practices and food habits across urban-rural areas in Mizoram. Food serves not only as a means of survival but also plays a critical role in shaping human identity and culture. It intertwines with social interactions, as highlighted by Mintz and Bois (2002), noting that eating is essential to social life. Barthes (2008) posits that food multifacetedly shapes identities, while changes in culture influence dietary habits (Visser, 1999). Culture is described by Freeman (2006) as a complex set of societal values, helping distinguish different groups. Through food, we can explore societal values and dynamics, with various culinary practices reflecting cultural identities (Katz et al., 2003). Long et al. (2017) define food culture as encompassing practices, beliefs, and the systems surrounding food production and consumption, influencing group identity and societal roles. Global cuisines exhibit significant variations based on nationality and cultural heritage, reflecting the uniqueness of cooking styles and ingredients across ethnicities. The study examines Mizo culture through contemporary food practices. It analyses changes in food habits, culinary techniques, consumption patterns, and social nuances related to food. By focusing on food norms, cooking styles, dietary choices, and the division of labor in households, the research aims to reveal how food influences social prestige and health consciousness. Additionally, it seeks to understand the symbolic meanings of food within Mizo cultural identity, highlighting cultural exchanges and adaptations in response to evolving food dynamics.

Chapter I introduces the study, followed by Chapter II, which reviews the state of the art. Chapter III outlines the methodological framework, while Chapter IV presents the socio- economic profile of the sampled respondents. Chapter V examines Mizo food culture in urban and rural areas. Chapter VI investigates issues of identity and cultural adaptation. Finally, Chapter VII concludes with a summary and contextual discussion of the text.

Chapter I: Introduction

A general introduction of the cultural and ethnic identity, particularly in relation to food studies is provided in this chapter. It discusses key concepts such as cultural identity and ethnic identity, referencing notable authors like Cooley, Mead, Erikson, Goffman, and Giddens, among others. The chapter emphasizes the role of food as a marker of cultural identity, illustrating how it intertwines with customs and values, and serves as a reflection of heritage. Food is portrayed not just as sustenance but as

a symbolic medium that fosters community and empathy, offering insights into societal customs and rituals. The text argues that food encapsulates a culture's way of life and is essential for understanding social identity. It also notes the academic exploration of food studies, positing that food reflects social class and cultural features, and looks into food culture within various contexts, including global, Indian, Northeast Indian, and specifically Mizoram. The discussion concludes by asserting the vital role that food culture plays in shaping identity and community.

Chapter II: The State-of-the-Art Review

This chapter presents a literature review focused on the social and cultural aspects of food consumption, structured under three headings: Theoretical Perspective, Methodological Review, and Thematic Review. The Theoretical Perspective encompasses eight theories: Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, the Theory of McDonaldisation, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Bourdieu's Habitus, Food as Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism. Each theory is critically examined and applied within the study, enhancing the understanding of food habits and culinary practices while situating the findings within a broader theoretical context. Functionalism views society as a structured system where food practices maintain social stability through relationships and cultural norms. Structuralism analyzes the symbolic meanings behind food, while Structural-Marxism examines food's role in reinforcing social hierarchies and economic inequalities. McDonaldisation highlights the impact of globalization on culinary diversity. Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class connects food consumption to social status through conspicuous consumption. Bourdieu's habitus theory associates taste with social differentiation, portraying it as a reflection of class. Mauss's concept of 'The Gift' emphasizes food as a medium of social obligation and reciprocity. Lastly, Symbolic Interactionism focuses on how daily interactions shape the meanings of food, impacting identity and social relationships.

Under the methodological review, various methods and techniques used by prior researchers on similar themes have been analysed to aid in developing the current study's methodological framework. Those studies employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which were effective, prompting the current research to adopt a descriptive and exploratory research design. Specifically, it utilizes

ethnography and interview schedules, positioning the study primarily within qualitative research while also incorporating basic descriptive quantitative techniques. The thematic review explores eight categories related to food culture: Culturing food, culinary practices and cultural identity; Culture, Kitchen and Eating patterns of family; Sociology of food and eating and the role of taste; Food Choice; Eating Rituals and Symbolism; Food as fashion; Indian society and food; Mizo society and food; and Western impact on food habits. These themes provide insights into food culture, examining food norms, rituals, cooking styles, dietary habits, food choice, and preservation techniques. The review highlights the domestic division of labor and gender roles within households, the negotiation of cultural identity through food symbolism, and the influence of external and global forces on food habits. Ultimately, it identifies key concepts and concludes with a research gap, justifying the need for further investigation into changing food dynamics.

Table 7.1. Research Gap and Rationale for the study

Sl No	Research Gap	Rationale
1.	Dearth of studies capturing the cultural symbolism of food.	To enrich sociological literature.
2.	Lack of scholarly attention on cuisine and food rituals as indigenous cultural practice.	Food and cuisine act as cultural indices in affirming cultural indigeneity.
3.	Lack of focus on cultural identity in existing food studies.	There is a need for grounded, identity-focused analysis from a sociological lens.
4.	Limited research on Mizo cultural identity through food.	To establish the significance and nuances of food habits in Mizo society and culture.
5.	West- centric studies both theoretically and methodologically.	Need for study in India, the Northeast, and Mizoram.
6.	Limited methodological clarity in identifying Mizo cultural identity through food culture.	To implement a grounded qualitative approach suitable for exploring Mizo cultural identity through food culture.
7.	Lack of focus on cultural connotations and social symbolism of food.	To interpret food as a living cultural text and a marker of unique Mizo identity.
8.	Little focus on intra-household gender roles, decision-making, and food- related division of labour amidst Christian modernity.	To understand how gender roles and domestic responsibilities get negotiated, revealing, food as a medium for care and authority.

9.	Absence of comparative data between urban and rural food practices within Mizoram. Minimal attention to the link between food habits and rising health awareness.	To uncover the continuity and transformation of food culture across different spatial and economic settings. To examine how health consciousness influences food choices and related practices.
10.	Lack of documentation and analysis on how Globalization, Westernization, and Korean culture influence on Mizo food.	To investigate culinary hybridization and cultural negotiation through the localization of foreign trends.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in the study, detailing the processes and techniques utilized. It begins by stating the Objectives of the study and progresses to the Research Design, describing the universe and sample selection, alongside the Principles of exclusion and inclusion that guided the research. The chapter also covers the Operationalization of concepts, which clarifies how theoretical constructs were translated into measurable variables. Sources of Data used for information gathering are discussed, leading into discussions of the Pilot Study conducted to test the study's procedures. The Interview Schedule is detailed, explaining the structure and content of the questions posed to respondents. The chapter recounts Field Experiences, providing insights into the practical aspects of data collection and any challenges faced. Following this, it outlines the Analysis of the data, describing the methods used to interpret the results. Research ethics adhered to during the study are emphasized, ensuring that participant rights and confidentiality were respected. Lastly, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the study, recognizing potential constraints and biases that might affect the findings.

Based on the identified research gap, the study outlined specific objectives for processing.

- 1) To prepare a socio-economic profile of the sample respondents.
- 2) To study the urban-rural differentiation in relation to food culture such as their contemporary food norms and rituals regarding food consumption, cooking styles, dietary habits, food choice, eating practices, food preservation techniques and food hygiene in Mizoram.
- 3) To analyze the food related domestic division of labor and gender roles within household structures.

- 4) To examine the shaping and negotiation of Mizo cultural identity through the symbolic meanings of food, culture content of food, fashion substance, external and global influences, cultural exchange, and the ways households reconcile with changing food dynamics.

The study employs a descriptive and exploratory research design, focusing on Aizawl and Kolasib districts in Mizoram. It selects Aizawl Urban and Kolasib Urban as urban sites, with two villages from each district identified as rural sites: Sihphir and Lungleng (Aizawl) and Thingdawl and Pangbalkawn (Kolasib). A total of 400 households were purposively sampled, with 200 from each district across urban and rural areas using a multi-stage quota sampling process. Urban localities were classified into centrally located and peripheral areas to capture socio-economic variation. Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, with Microsoft Excel employed for analysing the quantitative data, while qualitative findings were presented as narratives and quotations. The chapter concludes with a discussion on research ethics and the limitations faced during the study.

Chapter IV: Socio-economic Profile

This chapter analyses the socio-economic profile of respondents in urban and rural areas, focusing on variables such as age, gender, social category, type of ration card, household type, family size, head of household, living conditions, housing type, water source, resources and infrastructure, occupation, monthly income, number of earners, religious affiliation, and educational background.

The age distribution of respondents predominantly features younger individuals, with those under 30 years making up 63.25% of the sample, notably higher in Kolasib Urban (90%) and Kolasib Rural (66%). In contrast, respondents aged 31 and older constitute 36.75%, with low representation in older age bands, especially in urban areas. Younger respondents show greater enthusiasm for engaging in modern food discussions, reflecting their adaptive culinary preferences and lifestyles. Older respondents, while knowledgeable about traditional practices, often see the study's focus as more relevant to younger generations. This generational divide illustrates how food acts as both an identity marker and a cultural expression, emphasizing younger participants' engagement with evolving food narratives. Overall, the findings highlight the relationship between age, food culture, and participation in culinary

discussions, setting the stage for further exploration of gender and lifestyle influences in subsequent sections.

The survey respondents exhibited a significant gender imbalance, with 62.75% women and 37.25% men. This trend was especially strong in urban areas, where women's participation reached 66%, compared to 59.5% in rural regions. Notably, both Aizawl Urban and Rural had the highest female representation at 73%, while Kolasib Rural was unique for having slightly more male respondents (51% vs 49%). The predominance of female respondents is tied to the study's focus on household food practices, as cultural norms often associate women with food knowledge. Many men, when present, chose not to participate, believing women were better suited to answer food-related questions. Additionally, the survey was conducted during the day, coinciding with women's availability at home. This gender pattern not only reflects participation but also highlights women's critical role in food labor, decision-making, and the transmission of culinary practices within Mizo households.

The study, conducted with 400 respondents exclusively from Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Mizoram, reflects the state's demographic reality where over 94% are classified as ST. The absence of Scheduled Caste (SC) representation is indicative of the homogeneity of the cultural community, focusing on food practices and household behaviours among indigenous populations. However, this limits the generalizability of findings to broader caste-based food consumption patterns in India. The ration card is highlighted as a crucial factor, revealing economic disparities and informing the socio-economic dynamics that shape food-related behaviours and cultural meanings. The distribution of ration cards in the study areas reveals a socio-economic hierarchy. The majority of respondents hold APL (white) cards, indicating stable incomes and reduced reliance on state-subsidised grains, particularly in urban areas like Aizawl Urban. The PHH (blue) cards are primarily seen in rural areas, signifying continued dependence on food subsidies due to agrarian lifestyles and limited urban job access. BPL (yellow) and AAY (pink) cards are scarce, indicating minimal extreme poverty or challenges in eligibility. Overall, the data highlights a divide where urban households favor market-based food purchasing, while rural counterparts lean on state subsidy systems, affecting food access and household decision-making.

The study on household composition in Mizo society reveals that nuclear families are predominant, comprising 61.25% of households, with urban settings showing 59%

and rural 63.5%. This trend indicates a shift towards smaller, self-contained units. Joint families represent 25.25% of the total, particularly in Kolasib Rural (31%) and Aizawl Urban (29%), where cultural traditions and economic responsibilities fuel these arrangements. Single-parent households account for 11.25%, peaking at 20% in Kolasib Urban, pointing to socio-cultural changes linked to migration and separation. Single-person households are rare at 2.25%, typically associated with elderly individuals or temporary residents in rural areas. Overall, while the nuclear family has become the dominant structure, joint families still play a crucial role in certain regions, highlighting an evolving landscape in family dynamics amidst social changes that influence household size and food management practices.

Looking at the size of the respondents' households, the majority of households are medium-sized, with families of 4-6 members making up 58.5%. This trend is evident in both urban (54.5%) and rural (62.5%) areas, indicating that mid-sized family structures are the norm in modern Mizo society. Households with 7-9 members represent 22.25% of the total, showcasing the persistence of extended or semi-joint families, especially in districts where kinship support is significant. Smaller households of 1-3 members comprise 13% of the sample and are more prevalent in Aizawl Urban due to housing limitations and changing family dynamics. Conversely, very large households (10 or more members) are uncommon (6.25%) and mainly found in rural areas like Kolasib Rural, where agricultural activities promote collective living. The data reveals a demographic transition towards smaller, nuclear family units, particularly in cities, influenced by work-life changes and living conditions, while rural areas maintain varied family structures linked to land-based livelihoods and kinship. This shift also affects household food practices, meal organization, and cooking frequency, which are further discussed in later sections.

The study on head of the household reveals that male leadership dominates household structures in the study areas, with 67% of households headed by fathers, particularly notable in rural areas like Aizawl Rural (76%) and Kolasib Rural (73%). This trend is largely supported by traditional gender norms and agricultural roles. Urban areas demonstrate some variation, indicating emerging shifts in household leadership potentially influenced by evolving family dynamics and employment trends. Mother-headed households make up 15.25% of the sample, predominantly found in Kolasib Urban, reflecting scenarios such as widowhood, separation, or increased economic

involvement of women in single-parent or nuclear households. Elder-led households, including those headed by grandfathers and grandmothers, constitute 16.75% of the sample and highlight intergenerational living arrangements, particularly in urban settings where older family members maintain decision-making authority. While father-led households remain the norm, the presence of mother- and elder-led households underscores changing family arrangements and varied pathways of responsibility. These developments have significant implications for understanding food choices, budgeting, and domestic routines within Mizo households, setting the groundwork for further exploration of the spatial and material dimensions of domestic life.

The study of living rooms and ambience in various regions reveals that household space in Mizo society transcends mere physical structure, embodying cultural values that reflect economic status, lifestyle aspirations, and the importance of hospitality. In urban settings, especially Aizawl Urban, homes are characterized by distinct and attractive spaces, with modern furnishings and well-equipped kitchens indicating upward mobility and international design influences. These kitchens function as social hubs, emphasizing cultural practices of hospitality. In contrast, Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural households have more flexible layouts, with multifunctional spaces serving as living, dining, and activity areas. Here, the furniture is simpler and cultural decor focuses on practical items, complementing a lifestyle that integrates food preparation with agricultural activities. Outdoor spaces play a critical role in food-related tasks, showcasing a practical approach to subsistence living. Kolasib Urban presents a blend of urban and rural characteristics, with compact living areas that maintain a connection between cooking and social interactions. Although material resources vary from the capital, the centrality of food and conversation persists. Across all settings, the essence of home remains a space filled with warmth and community, highlighting the role of food in fostering relationships. Traditional practices, such as offering unsweetened red tea, illustrate the deep-rooted values of generosity and community connection. Overall, despite variations in material conditions across socio-economic contexts, the cultural significance of household space in everyday food practices is a defining characteristic of Mizo identity, where kinship and hospitality are interwoven into daily life.

The distribution of housing types in the study areas reveals a significant shift towards permanent and structurally stable dwellings, with pucca houses constituting 70.75% of the surveyed households. Assam-type houses account for 28.25%, while kutchha houses are rare, comprising only 1% and found solely in rural areas. This trend indicates an overall improvement in housing conditions and access to durable construction materials across both districts. In urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, pucca housing dominates at 84%, reflecting economic stability and modern infrastructural development. Kolasib Urban showcases a mix of pucca and Assam-type houses, signifying a transitional phase from traditional to permanent structures, with kutchha houses absent, underscoring better housing standards. Rural regions show contrasting patterns. Aizawl Rural has nearly transitioned to pucca housing (99%), also indicating strong structural stability. Conversely, Kolasib Rural is diverse, with 66% of households living in Assam-type homes and 4% in kutchha houses, highlighting disparities in material access, economic capability, and lifestyle. Overall, these housing distributions indicate broader infrastructural development and modernization trends in Mizoram, while regional variations are influenced by resource access, levels of urbanization, and local livelihood practices. These material living conditions also impact domestic routines related to cooking, ventilation, food storage, and kitchen design, linking home structures to everyday food practices.

The study on source of water indicates that all four study locations rely entirely on piped water supplied by the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department, with 100% of households designating it as their primary source. This complete access denotes a significant achievement in infrastructure, highlighting the integration of both urban and rural areas into state-managed water systems. The transition away from wells, hand pumps, and natural sources signifies a substantial reduction in the labor traditionally undertaken by women for water collection.

Despite universal access, respondents reported modifications to their daily routines to manage the inconsistent flow of water, such as filling tanks and buckets when it is available. This shift illustrates that while dependence on PHE water has alleviated physical burdens and enhanced hygiene, households continue to navigate daily activities around the water supply schedule. From the perspective of food culture, the presence of piped water has significantly influenced domestic practices by providing a clean and consistent water source for preparing rice, washing vegetables, making

tea, and ensuring kitchen sanitation. This availability reduces contamination risks and waterborne illnesses, streamlining meal preparation and enhancing the efficiency of household food routines. In summary, universal piped water access not only reflects infrastructural growth but also signifies changes in domestic life, hygiene, and food preparation, reinforcing households' integration into modern services while necessitating adaptable practices in daily life.

When studying household and infrastructure, the section is divided into two key areas of analysis. The first focuses on fuel and cooking equipment, examining the types of energy sources and tools households use for food preparation. The second explores food sources and kitchen practices, looking at how ingredients are obtained, stored, and cooked in daily life. The analysis of cooking fuel usage in Mizo households reveals a blend of modern and traditional practices. LPG is the predominant fuel, utilized by 36% of households, indicating a transition to cleaner cooking methods. Despite this, many rural households maintain a mixed-fuel approach, combining LPG, electricity, and firewood, driven by both practicality and cultural preferences for traditional cooking methods. Urban households rely heavily on LPG and electric appliances, while rural areas show a significant dependence on biomass. The diversity in fuel usage reflects socio-economic factors and the importance of cultural identity in cooking practices, highlighting that traditional methods remain valued for their authenticity and flavor alongside modern conveniences.

The analysis of stove distribution in Mizoram reveals a prevalent use of multi-stove setups, with 71.75% of households utilizing two stoves. This reflects cultural cooking practices and the need for efficiency in preparing traditional Mizo meals. A significant 22.25% of households have three stoves, accommodating larger family sizes and diverse cooking methods. Only a small percentage use four or more stoves (3.5% and 0.5%), while single-stove households are rare (2%). Urban areas, particularly Aizawl, tend to adopt modern configurations, while rural households often combine LPG with firewood. The presence of multiple stoves is influenced by culinary identity, household dynamics, traditional practices, and economic factors, highlighting the integration of modern conveniences with cultural cooking expectations.

The study on kitchen garden indicates that the practice of owning kitchen garden is still a prevalent and culturally significant practice in Mizoram, with 72.25% of households participating 72.5% in urban areas and 72% in rural settings. This suggests

that gardening transcends rural traditions and remains embedded in urban life. Households continue to prioritize home-grown produce for its reliability and cultural relevance despite urbanization and increased market access. Urban households adapt by utilizing limited spaces such as balconies and terraces, while rural households manage larger and more productive gardens, particularly in regions like Aizawl Rural, where 93% of households have kitchen gardens. In contrast, Kolasib Rural has only 51% garden prevalence, highlighting differences in land availability and settlement patterns.

Feedback from respondents reveals the reasons behind the significance of kitchen gardens. Home-grown vegetables ensure freshness, reduce costs, and provide consistent access to essential ingredients like chillies and leafy greens, crucial for traditional Mizo dishes. These gardens serve as buffers against market price fluctuations and food scarcity, enhancing household resilience. Urban respondents often miss the taste of village-grown produce, while rural respondents underscore the economic and cultural importance of their daily harvests. Overall, the prevalence of kitchen gardens in Mizoram represents a balance between self-sufficiency and market dependency, allowing Mizo households to preserve culinary identities while adapting to changing environments. They not only supply food but also uphold cultural continuity, sustaining the flavors and practices integral to Mizo cuisine.

The data indicates that kitchen gardens are a prevalent practice in Mizoram, with 72.25% of households participating, including 72.5% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas. This reflects a cultural tradition that persists despite urbanization. Urban households utilize limited space for gardening, while rural households, particularly in Aizawl Rural (93%), maintain more productive gardens. Kitchen gardens provide fresh ingredients, reduce food costs, and ensure access to staples important for Mizo cuisine. They also serve as a buffer against market fluctuations, highlighting their role in household resilience and cultural continuity in cooking practices.

Upon looking at the Economic aspects, the occupational landscape in the study regions demonstrates a clear urban-rural divide. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, are characterized by salaried employment in government and private sectors, leading to a market-dependent food system with limited agricultural engagement. This reliance on purchased groceries is driven by time constraints and dense living

conditions. Conversely, rural areas like Aizawl Rural and Kolasib Rural focus on agriculture for food and income, relying on rice and vegetable farming, with households consuming and selling surplus crops. Wage labour supplements income but does not replace farming as the primary livelihood. Semi-rural areas, such as Lungleng and Kolasib Urban, exhibit hybrid occupational structures where families engage in both farming and diverse income-generating activities like teaching and shop-keeping. Overall, occupational structures significantly impact food access, cooking practices, and the preservation of traditional foodways, highlighting the differences in food sourcing and cooking time between urban and rural households.

The study on monthly income of the respondents' family showed income disparities between urban and rural households often influenced by livelihood opportunities, employment stability, and economic structures. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl, have higher income levels due to the concentration of government offices and businesses offering stable, salaried jobs. The availability of diverse employment pathways contributes to higher earnings, with Aizawl Urban having the most households earning above ₹50,000. Conversely, rural areas like Kolasib Rural face lower income levels as they rely mainly on agriculture and seasonal labor, which are subject to external variables such as climate and market access. This reliance results in many households being confined to low-income brackets, heavily dependent on government programs like MGNREGS. Semi-urban towns, such as Kolasib Urban, present a mixed scenario with moderate economic activities but limited high-income prospects, typically skewing towards middle-income households. Educational access significantly impacts income potential, with urban households generally possessing higher education levels that enable access to better-paying jobs, in contrast to rural households that face educational and institutional restrictions. Overall, these dynamics highlight the stark economic divide shaped by geographic and infrastructural factors.

When studying Types of Household of the respondents, Households in Mizoram are predominantly reliant on a single income earner, with 74% of families fitting this profile. This trend is more pronounced in urban areas (79.5%) compared to rural ones (68.5%), as urban jobs typically center around one primary wage earner. Rural areas, where agricultural and wage labor allow more members to contribute, exhibit a

slightly higher prevalence of two-earner households (19.75%), particularly in contexts where shared labor is common. Only a small fraction of households employs three earners (6%), and four earners are exceedingly rare (0.25%), indicating limited job opportunities and a societal norm of having one main provider. These employment patterns significantly affect food practices. Single-earner households, facing tighter budgets, tend to prioritize basic staples and simpler meals, cutting down on meat consumption during price increases, and relying on homegrown or seasonal produce, especially

in rural settings. Conversely, households with two or more earners enjoy greater dietary flexibility, enabling them to purchase meat more frequently and maintain a varied diet with a wider array of vegetables and packaged foods. Urban two-earner households particularly benefit from the increased purchasing power necessary to cope with higher living costs and better market access. In contrast, rural multi-earner households, especially those in Aizawl Rural, demonstrate greater food stability due to the combined contributions from various family members to both cash and homegrown resources. Thus, the number of earners directly correlates with employment opportunities, livelihood strategies, and economic tactics employed by households, ultimately influencing food security, dietary diversity, and the sustainability of traditional Mizo food practices.

The study on Dependency reveals that across Mizoram, household dependency patterns significantly influence economic stability and food practices. Most households, whether urban or rural, are characterized by a primary earner supporting dependents, including children, elderly parents, and non-earning adults. This creates a vertically layered dependency structure, where upward care for aging parents and downward care for children intersect, placing considerable pressure on the breadwinner. Urban dependency is driven by factors such as high living costs, prolonged education for youth, and elderly migration for healthcare, which leads to educated young adults and elders remaining financially dependent, thus burdening working parents. Consequently, urban households often operate on tight budgets, prioritizing essential expenses over nutritional needs, resulting in simplified meals and greater reliance on markets instead of home-grown produce. In contrast, rural households depend on agricultural livelihoods and multi-generational structures. Although farm work involves multiple family members, it rarely yields stable or

adequate income, which increases reliance on one or two cash earners, particularly during lean seasons. Larger households often depend on kitchen gardens and foraged greens to manage food insecurity, demonstrating resilience during financial difficulties. In regions like Aizawl Rural, extended household dynamics result in more dependents and shared labor systems, alleviating some economic pressure on main earners. Overall, the dependency patterns across Mizoram illustrate that the balance between earners and non-earners shapes a household's food security and dietary diversity. Households with more dependents face tighter budgets and increased reliance on home-produced food, leading to simpler meal patterns. In contrast, those with fewer dependents and more earners can afford greater resilience, enabling frequent market purchases and the maintenance of culturally significant Mizo dishes. This interplay between dependency structure and food practices reflects how economic responsibilities are distributed within families and influences daily eating habits in both urban and rural settings.

The study on Religious Affiliation reveals that all surveyed households in Kolasib and Aizawl are entirely Christian, reflecting Mizoram's demographic trend, where Christianity, introduced by missionaries in the late nineteenth century, is integral to Mizo culture. This religious homogeneity influences daily life, particularly in food-related customs such as hospitality and communal meals. The lack of other religious influences indicates that alternative dietary practices have minimal impact on the region's food customs, with Christianity fostering a shared cultural framework characterized by collective eating and values of simplicity and generosity.

Upon studying denominations, the data indicates that Presbyterianism is the dominant religion in the study areas, representing 54% of households, particularly strong in rural regions (73%) compared to urban areas (35%). This dominance is attributed to the historical influence of Welsh Presbyterian missionaries in rural villages. Urban areas, particularly Aizawl Urban, showcase greater religious diversity due to migration and various church networks, evidenced by the presence of Baptists (14%), Roman Catholics (3%), and UPC groups. Kolasib Rural displays notable presence of Salvation Army (7%) and UPC-NEI (10%). Smaller denominations are less prevalent, indicating localized congregations. While Christianity in Mizoram has no strict food restrictions, denominational affiliation influences household routines, meal types for church events, and hospitality patterns. Thus, the religious landscape reflects a blend

of strong Presbyterian tradition with urban diversity influenced by education and mobility.

The study on educational background highlights the education profile of respondents in Mizoram reveals significant disparities between urban and rural regions. The largest group consists of individuals with Higher Secondary education at 30.25%, followed by Graduates at 24.5% and Matric completers at 22.5%. Additionally, 22.75% have not reached Matric, highlighting uneven educational advancement. Urban areas display a more robust educational landscape, with 34% of graduates, 33% having completed Higher Secondary, and only 11% lacking Matric qualifications. In contrast, rural regions struggle, with 34.5% below Matric and only 15% graduates, evidencing limited access to advanced education. The data indicates Aizawl Urban leads in tertiary education, with 17% post-graduates, while Kolasib Rural exhibits the lowest educational attainment, with 60% below Matric and merely 1% graduates. Aizawl Rural achieves a middle ground due to its proximity to the capital, benefiting from better educational resources. Several factors contributing to these patterns include urban areas' superior access to educational institutions, such as high schools and colleges, which encourages prolonged education. Urban families often prioritize schooling because of the necessity of

qualifications for stable jobs, while rural dependence on agriculture leads children to leave school early to assist with family work. Proximity to Aizawl also enhances rural education levels due to better transportation and access to superior educational facilities. The historical influence of missionary education in urban centers has also created lasting educational advantages. Additionally, economic constraints persist, with families in poorer districts struggling to afford educational costs, affecting academic outcomes. Lastly, differing levels of exposure to competitive education and career opportunities in urban areas foster higher aspirations for education than in rural households, which are more focused on immediate economic needs.

Chapter V: Mizo Food Culture at Rural-Urban Domestic Spaces

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of food culture within Mizo households in both rural and urban environments, positioning the home as a critical space for food production, sharing, and their interconnected roles in identity, memory, and social relationships. Using data from various localities in two districts, the study illustrates how household food practices are influenced by resource availability,

migration patterns, exposure to new cuisines, and evolving socio-economic conditions. Food is perceived not merely as sustenance but as a cultural practice through which societal values, power dynamics, and meanings are expressed. The chapter is organized thematically into six sections that address dietary habits, culinary practices, food norms, preservation techniques, health-conscious eating, and gendered domestic responsibilities.

In Mizo dietary habits and practices, it notes a strong preference for meat-based diets, with 94.75% of households identifying as non-vegetarian. Meals are structured around rice, complemented by vegetables and a limited amount of meat, highlighting communal eating patterns deeply woven into family life. Urban households tend to incorporate more processed foods and fast food due to convenience and modern influences, while rural households maintain traditional three-meal patterns with home-cooked, fresh meals.

The culinary techniques prevalent in Mizo kitchens describe cooking methods include boiling and frying, with urban households leaning more towards frying. Fresh ingredients are paramount, with a reported 94% of families prioritizing them over processed food. While traditional cooking knowledge is primarily passed down through generations, modern influences and the use of social media for recipe guidance are appearing, though to a limited extent.

Studies on cultural food norms and rituals emphasise the social importance of shared meals. Pre-meal rituals, such as collective family prayers and discussions, serve to strengthen family ties and instil values. The section also discusses the attitudes surrounding dog meat consumption, highlighting a shift in perceptions influenced by contemporary views on animal welfare.

The analysis shifts to food preservation practices, revealing a blend of traditional methods like fermentation and modern refrigeration technologies. While traditional techniques persist for certain foods, urbanization has prompted a shift toward more contemporary methods of food storage, creating a dynamic preservation landscape that blends new technologies with established cultural practices.

The emergence of health-conscious eating among the Mizo has been addressed, characterized as reactive rather than proactive. Rural families often consider their diets healthy, relying heavily on fresh produce, while urban households adapt to dietary changes primarily due to medical advice.

Finally, gendered patterns in domestic food responsibilities delineates where women predominantly assume roles related to food procurement and cooking, while men's involvement remains minimal and often framed as assistance rather than obligation. Despite some urban trends toward shared responsibilities, cooking and food-related tasks continue to be primarily associated with femininity, reinforcing traditional gender roles within Mizo households. Overall, the chapter elucidates that Mizo food culture is not static but rather a complex interplay between tradition and change, influenced by a myriad of cultural, economic, and societal factors.

Chapter VI: Identity and Intercultural Adaptation Issues

This chapter shows how food in Mizoram operates as a key marker of cultural identity while simultaneously serving as a site of intercultural adaptation. The study on Traditional Food as a Cultural Symbol demonstrates that traditional food continues to function as a powerful symbol of cultural identity in Mizoram. The majority of respondents associate food with belonging, memory, and shared cultural meaning, though rural and urban interpretations differ. Rural households emphasise food as a lived connection to land, labour, and generational continuity, whereas urban households increasingly rely on symbolic association, nostalgia, and selective performance of tradition. Despite these differences, the findings show that traditional dishes remain emotionally and culturally significant, anchoring identity amid social change and external influences.

Viewing Food as Cultural Language, the finding explains how food practices operate as a non-verbal form of communication that expresses affection, respect, memory, and cultural values. Rituals such as Sunday meat, sharing homemade dishes, and mealtime hospitality reflect social expectations and emotional bonds. Nostalgia for home-cooked Mizo food is especially strong among urban respondents, revealing how food can carry memory and identity across distance and mobility. Through everyday acts i.e. serving, eating together, showing gratitude, or offering food to guests, households reaffirm belonging and the moral ethos of *tlawmngaihna*, positioning food as a lived language rather than simply sustenance.

Studying Food Heritage Transmission, the data highlights kitchen as a vital cultural space where culinary knowledge, memory, and identity are passed down through lived experience rather than written instruction. Rural households show the strongest continuity, treating cooking as a shared responsibility tied to cooperation and moral

values, while urban households maintain the practice more selectively due to changing routines. Respondents describe learning through watching, tasting, and repetition, expressing pride in preserving family recipes and techniques. Cooking together serves not only practical needs but also strengthens relationships and preserves cultural memory, positioning food heritage as an emotional, embodied inheritance.

The study on Intercultural Adaptation of Food Practices illustrates that external culinary influences are increasingly present particularly in urban areas, yet traditional Mizo foodways retain prominence in daily life. Fast food and global cuisines appear mainly in cafés, special occasions, or youth trends rather than replacing staple meals. Households adopt outside dishes selectively, often modifying them to suit taste and familiarity, signalling a pattern of negotiation rather than displacement. Rural kitchens act as cultural anchors where traditional food remains dominant, while urban spaces become sites of experimentation and fusion, reflecting uneven but active adaptation. Studying Food as Fashion Commodity shows how food has expanded beyond nutritional or cultural meaning to become a tool of self-expression, particularly among digitally engaged youth. External cuisines are increasingly tied to aesthetics, trend participation, and social signalling, amplified by social media visibility. Respondents associate takeaway foods, branded packaging, and café culture with aspiration, status, and modern identity, suggesting a shift in how food is evaluated and consumed. However, this performative food culture exists alongside traditional food values, demonstrating that food identity among younger generations is layered, dynamic, and influenced by global cultural flows.

The study on Negotiated Cultural Boundaries in Domestic Foodways reveals that while global food trends reshape public eating spaces and individual preferences, household food routines

remain largely grounded in tradition. Urban respondents experience greater pressure to participate in fashionable food culture, yet home meals continue to follow established patterns centred on rice, local produce, and familiar dishes. Rural households report minimal influence from external trends, underscoring food as a site of cultural stability and resilience. Even when new ingredients, tools, or hybrid dishes are introduced, they rarely replace the foundational structure of Mizo cuisine, demonstrating that change is incorporated gradually and selectively rather than fully absorbed.

Chapter VII: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter gives a summary of all the chapters in the thesis, providing the key findings of the study on food as a cultural and social system in contemporary Mizoram. It outlines socio-economic characteristics of participants, revealing how demographic conditions influence food practices and noting patterns in rural and urban settings. The discussion addresses cultural identity and the interplay of traditional and global food influences. Sociological theories, including the Culinary Triangle model, provide a framework for understanding food choices and cultural values. The chapter concludes by suggesting future research opportunities based on identified gaps.

Sociological Implications of the study

The overall picture of the study highlights a complex interplay of socio-cultural traditions, modernity, household economies, rural-urban differences, kinship and gender relations, generational memories of scarcity, and global food flows, all of which interact to shape contemporary Mizo food culture and the ways food expresses identity, status, care, and belonging. Besides presenting these empirical findings, it is essential to examine and theoretically contextualise why food practices take these particular forms and to understand their wider sociological meanings. To do that, eight theories have been employed, Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, the theory of McDonaldisation, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Bourdieu's concept of Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism. By using these perspectives, the study seeks to develop a grounded sociological understanding of Mizo food culture as both a system of everyday practice and a living cultural text.

Table 7.1. Culture of food: Theoretical Text and Study Context

Theory	Key Theorists	Key parameters	Study Context
Functionalism	Durkheim (1893) Malinowski (1939); Radcliffe-Brown (1940s); Audrey Richards (1939); Jack Goody (1982);	(1) Culture of food serves a social function and maintains equilibrium. (2) Rituals strengthen cooperation and solidarity. (3) Linkage with kinship, gender, and social order. (4) Reinforcing sentiments and emotional bonds. (5) Modernity manifests hierarchy and cohesion amidst adapting to change.	Traditional meals and feasting in Mizoram, the Sunday Meat Ritual, and the longing (nostalgia) for traditional foods fulfil the function of reinforcing family cohesion. The organized roles of men and women in preparing, serving, and consuming these meals maintain the existing kinship structure and social equilibrium, Mechanical Solidarity is maintained through rigid female roles, ensuring structural continuity. Conversely, the Public sphere utilizes Male (Fa Tu) specialization, led by the son-in-law, to establish Organic Solidarity and reinforce crucial kinship alliances.
Structuralism	Lévi- Strauss (1969); Mary Douglas (1972, 1975); Jack Goody (1982)	(1) Food transformations (raw-cooked-rotten) and the nature-culture relationship. (2) Meal rules and taboos (3) Food as a system of symbols of ideology and identity. (4) Cultural classifications and norms evolve	Mizo food distinctions, rice as the “proper meal” boiling as a culturally valued cooking method, and shifting meanings of dog meat reflect symbolic boundaries. Pre-meal rituals transform eating into a symbolic act that reinforces moral order, sacred meaning, and collective identity before food is consumed. In Mizo society, meat is essential for a proper meal, especially during hosting occasions. The absence of meat makes a meal culturally improper when guests are invited. Global foods (ramen, kimbap, kimchi, bubble tea) introduce new cultural codes, marking modernity and identity negotiation.

Structural Marxism	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Tucker, (1978)	(1) Food symbolism and class distinctions indicating social hierarchy. Reproduction of inequality and class distinctions. (2) Food is structured by habitus and capital. (3) Commodification of food under capitalism.	Access to trendy foods (cafés, bakery items) is higher among urban youth and middle-class households. Preferences in tea consumption indicate class distinctions, with households using Lopchu for red tea showcasing cultural capital. Dining practices reinforce distinctions, as households with branded crockery, coordinated table settings, and dining etiquette exhibit symbolic capital. Rural reliance on seasonal, local foods demonstrates class-linked differences in taste. The rise of fast food commodifies eating, making it a purchase rather than a domestic labor, thereby deepening the rift between classes who can afford convenience and those who must rely on subsistence/local production.
Theory of McDonaldization	George Ritzer (1993); Max Weber (1921)	(1) Fast-food principles, efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. (2) Globalization and local adaptations. (3) Rationalization of eating habits, convenience culture, and consumer identity.	Takeaway food, instant noodles, and delivery apps are common in Aizawl. Youth favor value meals and combos, Local cafés provide fixed menus with consistent flavors. Ordering has become systematized and fast food acts as a supplement to traditional home-cooked Mizo meals. This rationalised system contributes to individualised eating practices.

Theory of the Leisure Class	Thorstein Veblen (1899); Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Johnston & Baumann (2010)	(1) “conspicuous consumption” and exhibitionism (2) Linked culinary taste to class reproduction and social prestige. (3) Ethical food trends as moral and cultural markers of distinction.	Posting bubble tea, brewed coffee, kimchi, kimbap and branded bakery items online serves as aesthetic and social signalling especially among urban Mizo youth. Food becomes performative, expressing modern self-assumed identity and distinction rather than only satisfying hunger. These items serve as aesthetic marker as well as a form of belongingness to a particular sub-culture or culture.
Bourdieu’ s Theory of Habitus	Pierre Bourdieu (1984); Ehlert (2021)	(1) Habitus indicating food preferences and internalised class dispositions. (2) “Taste of necessity” and “taste of luxury” (3) Food, body, and gender practices expressing embodied social distinctions.	Rural households demonstrate practical, memory-based food practices rooted in necessity (e.g., preference for filling <i>Bai</i> or smoked meat <i>Vawksa Rep</i>). Urban and youth populations adopt hybrid tastes combining traditional dishes with modern global foods, reflecting embodied shifts in food preference and lifestyle.
Gift and Reciprocity	Marcel Mauss (1925); Sarmiento (2017); Hawkins & Kuntsman (2021)	(1) Obligations to give, receive, and reciprocal exchange, (2) Symbolic inclusion and hierarchy within communities. (3) Renewal of social connection and ethical exchange.	Practices such as sharing food (cooked and uncooked) with neighbours, reserving guests the best available food, and gifting meat or homemade dishes reinforce kinship, hospitality norms, and the moral ethic of <i>Tlawmngaihna</i> . This circulation of food maintains social connections.

Symbolic Interactionism	George H. Mead (1934); Herbert Blumer (1969)	(1) Meanings through interaction and shared symbols. (2) Sense of belonging, and moral order. (3) Globalisation and digital media and shared understandings of food and identity.	The practices of <i>eirawngbawl</i> (culturally meaningful act of preparing a complete traditional meal) and the serving of rice (<i>buh</i>) by a specific family member operate as symbolic acts. The practice of <i>Kil</i> (cultural norm of gathering around the table to eat together) and <i>chaw-eikhawm</i> (collective act of eating together as a group) affirm belonging, family and group identity.

Viewed holistically, the theoretical perspectives synthesised in Table 7.1. illustrate that food in Mizoram is a multi-layered sociocultural system rather than a merely nutritional or domestic

activity. Food practices operate at the intersection of structure and agency, where cultural meaning, social order, identity formation, and historical memory are continually produced and reproduced.

Functionalism helps illuminate how shared meals, ritualised commensality, and patterned roles such as who prepares, serves, or leads prayer stabilise family cohesion and maintain social continuity. These practices are not incidental; they function as mechanisms through which kinship, belonging, and intergenerational alignment are enacted. Structuralism extends this by showing that Mizo foodways are governed by cultural classification systems seen in distinctions such as what constitutes a “proper meal,” acceptable vs. taboo ingredients, and ritualised behaviours like *Chhung-inkhawm*. These categories structure meaning and establish symbolic boundaries between purity and modernity, home and outside influence, and tradition and change. Structural Marxism and theories of consumption foreground the role of class, access, and inequality in emerging food distinctions. The rise of cafés, branded snacks, and global cuisines among urban youth demonstrates how food operates as cultural capital and a form of symbolic display, increasingly linked to lifestyle rather than subsistence. Ritzer’s McDonaldization and Bourdieu’s reconstruction of habitus further reveal how globalisation and convenience culture reshape food behaviour particularly through fast food, delivery apps, and instant cooking yet do not entirely replace

traditional practices. Instead, old and new coexist, producing hybrid food identities that mirror broader social transformation.

At the micro-interactional level, Symbolic Interactionism and theories of reciprocity show how food mediates social relationships and shared meaning. Everyday embodied acts such as sitting together (*Kil*), sharing food (*chaw-eikhawm*), gifting meat, or culturally meaningful preparation (*eirawngbawl*) function as symbolic performances through which respect, ethical obligation, and belonging are communicated and affirmed.

Taken together, these theoretical framings reveal that Mizo food culture is not static. It is adaptive, negotiated, and socially patterned. Continuity and change operate simultaneously, with tradition acting as an anchor while modern influences reshape tastes, meanings, and practices. Thus, food provides a clear window into broader social change in Mizoram. Patterns of eating, cooking, serving, and sharing as seen in everyday culinary practices and food habits reflect the influence of modernisation, rising class-based consumption, and global cultural adaptation, while traditional practices continue to sustain cultural identity and belonging. Thus, Mizo food culture represents an evolving system where long-standing meanings coexist with new aspirations shaped by changing lifestyles and social conditions.

The Study Perspective: Culinary Triangle

After an in-depth analysis of the Theoretical Text and the Study Context in relation to Culture of food, the study in the overall context aligns with the theory of Culinary Triangle advanced by the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.

I. Foundation of the Model: Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle

The development of the proposed model emerges from the conceptual groundwork laid by Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose Culinary Triangle provides a structuralist approach to understanding how societies symbolically organise food transformation. Lévi-Strauss conceptualised cuisine as a cultural language in which cooking processes mediate the relationship between Nature (Raw) and Culture (Cooked), assigning symbolic meaning to the technique's humans use to transform food. His framework positions culinary processes along three poles:

- 1) Raw (Nature): Food in its untouched form, representing the unelaborated beginning from which transformation occurs.

- 2) Cooked (Culture): Food transformed intentionally through human knowledge, technique, and heat.
- 3) Rotten (Nature's Transformation): Food altered through natural decomposition or fermentation, where nature not human agency directs the process.

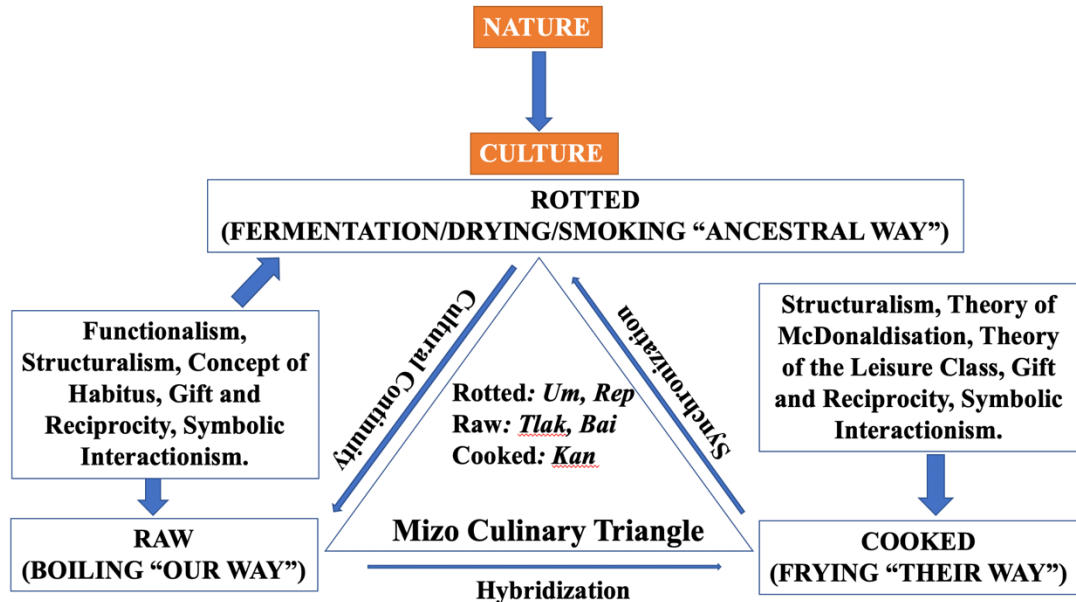
Table 7.3. Lévi-Strauss's Foundational Culinary Triangle Structure

Pole	State	Transformation Agent	Implication
Raw	Unelaborated	None	Nature
Cooked	Elaborated	Culture (Human Activity)	Culture
Rotten	Elaborated	Nature (Decomposition)	Nature

Lévi-Strauss argued that food transformation is never arbitrary. Rather, it follows a cultural logic. He positioned food along three symbolic points, the Raw, the Cooked, and the Rotten. In the Lévi-Strauss framework, the Raw represents nature in its untouched state, the Cooked represents human culture through deliberate transformation assisted by heat, tools, and knowledge, and the Rotten represents transformation directed by nature itself rather than by intentional human intervention. His broader argument is that cooking operates as a cultural language and that culinary methods such as boiling or roasting carry symbolic meaning. For example, roasting is associated with public and ceremonial contexts, masculinity and social status, whereas boiling is positioned within the everyday domestic sphere, associated with nurture, family, and femininity.

II. The Model: The Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle

Figure 7.1. Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle



The Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle is a conceptual model developed to deepen the understanding of Mizo food culture by demonstrating not only what Mizos eat, but how food practices communicate identity, history, belonging, and cultural exchange. This model begins with the foundational work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist who proposed the original Culinary Triangle. However, during the analysis of the empirical findings of this research, it became evident that while Lévi-Strauss's structural framework was analytically useful, it did not fully capture the complexity of Mizo food culture. In the context of Mizoram, culinary practices cannot be understood solely as techniques of transformation; rather, they are deeply shaped by history, identity, and continuous processes of cultural negotiation. The original Culinary Triangle does not sufficiently represent the distinctiveness of Mizo foodways and therefore requires expansion to reflect the specificity of Mizo cultural reality. In the Mizo context, food transformation reflects three additional and interconnected layers: time, referring to the movement from past to present; cultural origin, signifying internal versus external influence; and identity formation, articulated through the relational distinction between what is defined as '*our food*' and '*their food*'.

Drawing from research findings, the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle has thus been developed, retaining the structural logic of Lévi-Strauss while reframing and

extending it through the lived realities of Mizo culinary practice. This expanded model positions food not merely as a material object or cooking process, but as a cultural system embedded in memory, negotiation, identity and belonging.

At the apex of the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle is positioned Nature, which represents the untouched state of food before any human intervention. In the Mizo context, Nature refers specifically to the field, the jhum, and the forest, the spaces where food originates and where ingredients exist in their raw, unprocessed form. This apex therefore acts as the conceptual and material starting point of the model. The vertical axis extending from Nature downwards is identified as the Time Axis, representing a progression from nature to culture. This conceptualisation aligns with Lévi-Strauss's foundational Nature-Culture binary, wherein nature denotes what is given, and culture signifies what is transformed through human knowledge, technique, and social meaning. In this model, the lower end of the vertical axis is labelled the Ancestral Way, referring to traditional culinary methods passed down through generations, particularly those employed for survival and preservation such as fermentation, smoking, and drying. These practices embody a historical continuum rooted in indigenous ecological knowledge and adaptive resilience. Moving upward along the axis leads back to the apex of Nature, symbolising ingredients in their original state, prior to any cultural modification. This vertical dimension therefore enables a visual understanding of how culinary transformation involves movement through time, from raw natural materials, to traditional and contemporary practice, and ultimately into expressions of cultural identity. By embedding the Nature-Culture conceptual divide of Lévi-Strauss within a temporal and ethnographically grounded framework, the Emerging Mizo Culinary Triangle illustrates how food in Mizo society evolves from its natural origin, through inherited techniques, toward contemporary interpretations linked to identity, memory, and cultural negotiation.

Thus, the model does not merely categorise cooking techniques based on prevalence, but rather situates them within a broader sociocultural and historical framework. Boiling and frying are grounded in empirical data demonstrating present culinary patterns, while fermentation/smoking/drying represents a mode of preservation and identity-making rooted in collective memory, traditional knowledge systems, environmental adaptation, and ancestral survival strategies. In this sense, the choice of these three modes reflects the intersection of contemporary practice, cultural

continuity, and historical consciousness, making the Mizo Culinary Triangle both analytically rigorous and culturally resonant.

The selection of the three culinary modes i.e. boiling, frying, and fermentation/smoking/drying within the Mizo Culinary Triangle is deliberate and theoretically informed rather than arbitrary. These categories emerge organically from both the empirical findings of the study and the deeply embedded cultural logic that structures Mizo food practices. Boiling is selected because, according to the study, it stands as the primary cooking method adopted by households and statistically represents the highest frequency of usage. Frying is incorporated as the second node because it appears as the second most commonly used cooking method across the surveyed contexts. The third node, fermentation/smoking/drying, is included not due to high frequency of everyday usage but because it holds substantial historical weight, symbolic density, and cultural significance within Mizo culinary heritage.

The first node, Boiling, positioned at the central vertex and labelled “Our Way,” represents the dominant and most widely practiced culinary method among Mizo households today. The data demonstrates that boiling is integral to defining the sensory identity of Mizo cuisine which is simple, mild, minimally seasoned, and reliant primarily on water-based preparation such as *bai*, *tlak*, and similar dishes. This method produces what is often described as the natural, authentic, or “bland” taste that characterizes Mizo food. As such, boiling signifies continuity, home, familiarity, and the core culinary identity of the Mizos, symbolizing an uninterrupted lineage of tradition and food-based belonging. Theories such as Functionalism, Structuralism, Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism align with this node because boiling reinforces social structure, collective identity, emotional bonds, everyday practice, and shared cultural meaning. Boiling signifies continuity, stability, and identity, connecting present households to long-standing culinary traditions. As this mode aligns with theoretical frameworks such as Functionalism (as it reinforces equilibrium and social cohesion through shared meals and norms), Structuralism (through binary oppositions such as natural vs. artificial, simple vs. elaborate, home vs. outside), Habitus (as boiling represents embodied everyday practice transmitted through generations), Gift and Reciprocity (through communal eating and resource sharing), and Symbolic Interactionism, which helps explain the meaning-making process behind valuing boiled food as morally and culturally ‘authentic Mizo.’

The second node, Frying, identified as “Their Way,” represents the next most widely adopted method according to the study’s findings. Its growth marks the influence of external culinary practices brought through increased access to resources, modernization, migration, exposure to new cuisines, and the circulation of food through media and global consumption platforms and signals broader processes of social and cultural transformation influenced by increased accessibility to cooking oil, expanding markets, exposure to media, migration, and the penetration of global cuisines. Historically, oil was scarce and expensive. Thus, frying symbolically marks aspiration, modernity, novelty, and external influence. Although now integrated into everyday culinary life, it retains the perception of being externally influenced and culturally negotiated. Theories including Structuralism, the Theory of McDonaldization, the Theory of the Leisure Class, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism are relevant here as frying represents consumption patterns linked to modern consumer culture, status-based distinctions, external influences, and evolving symbolic meanings. This category aligns with Structuralism (modern vs. traditional), McDonaldization (standardization and speed associated with convenience foods), Theory of the Leisure Class (where fried foods signify luxury and prestige), Gift and Reciprocity (frying is strongly associated with hospitality and celebration), and Symbolic Interactionism (as meanings around frying reshape identity in response to modern influences). Thus, frying becomes a site of cultural negotiation between rooted identity and cosmopolitan exposure.

The third node, Fermentation, Smoking, and Drying, is included not because it is most frequently used in the contemporary period, but because it remains culturally and historically invaluable. These techniques constituted essential survival strategies during earlier eras marked by hunting, shifting cultivation, seasonal scarcity, and environmental challenges. Items such as *bekang*, *sa-um*, and *sa-rep* serve as powerful sensory markers connecting contemporary Mizos with ancestral memory, ecological intelligence, and lineage. Excluding this category would erase the depth of Mizo food heritage and oversimplify culinary identity. Thus, this mode embodies ancestral knowledge, resilience, and cultural rootedness, aligning with theories such as Functionalism, Structuralism, Habitus, Gift and Reciprocity, and Symbolic Interactionism due to its role in maintaining social unity, transmitting cultural knowledge, and preserving symbolic continuity. Theories such as Functionalism

(supporting collective survival), Structuralism (nature vs. culture transformation through preservation), Habitus (embodied ancestral knowledge), Gift and Reciprocity (exchange of fermented products during social relationships), and Symbolic Interactionism (heritage encoded through sensory meanings) provide interpretive depth. To exclude this category would risk erasing heritage and flattening the depth of Mizo culinary identity.

Conceptual Meaning of the Three Directional Arrows

The arrows connecting the three nodes, rotted to raw; raw to cooked; and cooked to rotted carry deep conceptual significance that reflects the processes guiding the transformation and continuity of Mizo food culture. The movement from rotted to raw represents cultural continuity, demonstrating how ancestral culinary knowledge persists into the present. Although fermentation, smoking, and drying are less frequently practiced in everyday cooking today, they continue to hold symbolic and cultural value. Importantly, boiling has always coexisted alongside these ancestral preservation methods and remains the most dominant culinary practice in contemporary Mizo households. This coexistence illustrates continuity rather than rupture. In connection to Lévi-Strauss's Nature-Culture framework, the ancestral node (*rotted*) reflects transformation through natural processes (where change is guided by nature itself), whereas the raw node reflects the untouched state of nature prior to human intervention. The arrow between them demonstrates how Mizo culinary practices move from nature to culture without abandoning their foundational heritage. Thus, cultural continuity here reflects the ability of Mizo society to maintain its indigenous culinary identity through the ongoing dominance of boiling "*Our Way*" even while ancestral preservation practices have gradually declined in everyday frequency.

The second arrow, from raw to cooked, represents hybridization, signifying the negotiation between cultural protection and external adaptation. The movement from boiling (*Our Way*) to frying (*Their Way*) captures the increasing influence of external forces, new ingredients, technologies, exposure to global cuisines, and modern food markets. Frying, a technique that historically required scarce resources such as oil, symbolizes aspiration, novelty, modernity, and the acceptance of external culinary identities. This directional shift also functions as an identity arrow, representing the space in which Mizo culinary identity is actively negotiated. Here, one sees neither

rejection nor passive absorption of external practices, but a hybrid middle zone where the community balances the safeguarding of cultural roots with adaptive innovation. The negotiation between Our Way and Their Way therefore becomes a living process through which contemporary Mizo identity is shaped and re-defined.

The third arrow, from cooked back to rotted, signifies synchronization, capturing the way ancestral culinary methods continue to operate alongside modern practices rather than being overridden by them. In sociological terms, synchronization refers to a situation where two or more cultural practices operate at the same time within the same social space, with neither displacing the other, but instead being actively maintained together. Despite the growing dominance of frying and the normalization of external cuisines, practices such as fermentation, smoking, and drying persist as active and meaningful components of everyday food culture. These ancestral methods remain especially significant for culturally symbolic foods such as *bekang*, *sa-um*, and *sa-rep*, where preservation techniques carry historical memory and cultural value beyond mere utility.

Synchronization within the Mizo Culinary Triangle thus illustrates how culinary change unfolds through coordination rather than displacement. Old and new practices are not positioned as oppositional but function interdependently, allowing tradition to remain embedded within contemporary foodways. This cyclical return reinforces Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion that culinary systems operate as symbolic languages through which societies encode meaning, memory, and identity. In the Mizo context, synchronization reveals how food practices continuously move between nature, culture, and heritage, producing a dynamic yet resilient culinary landscape where continuity is maintained through coexistence rather than resistance.

Taken together, the three directional arrows articulate that Mizo food culture is not static or linear but circular, negotiated, and evolving. Cultural continuity (rotted → raw), hybridization (raw → cooked), and acculturation (cooked → rotted) collectively demonstrate how Mizo culinary identity is continuously shaped through interaction between past and present, self and other, and tradition and transformation.

Ultimately, the Mizo Culinary Triangle demonstrates that Mizo cuisine is not merely a matter of food preparation, but a complex cultural system that speaks to history, identity, negotiation, collective memory, and symbolic meaning. It visualises how food moves through time from nature to practice to identity, echoing Lévi-Strauss's

framework of nature versus culture, where ingredients shift from natural states to culturally encoded forms. The Triangle articulates how Mizo culinary identity is continuously shaped, neither static nor fully transformed, but evolving through continuity, hybridization, and synchronisation.

When viewed holistically, the Mizo Culinary Triangle demonstrates that Mizo cuisine is not organised solely around the binary distinction between raw and cooked food, as proposed in Claude Lévi-Strauss's classical model, but is instead structured around deeper layers of identity, belonging, historical memory, and cultural transformation. Within this expanded framework, the model foregrounds three symbolic anchors-

- 1) Boiling as the cultural self.
- 2) Frying as the cultural other, and
- 3) Fermentation/smoking/drying as the cultural past.

Each point carries meaning that extends beyond the material preparation of food and speaks to the ways in which culinary practice expresses who the Mizos understand themselves to be.

Through this reading, the model reveals that Mizo culinary practice transcends the functional act of preparing food, it becomes a symbolic language through which identity is lived and negotiated. It reflects a way of life shaped by the land, the field, and the ecological rhythms of jhum cultivation, forest harvests, and community subsistence. The triangle is therefore not a static structure but a dynamic and living cultural system. It evolves as Mizos engage with historical memory, contemporary social change, and global culinary influences. As such, the Mizo Culinary Triangle illustrates that Mizo cuisine holds the past, speaks to the present, and gestures toward the future demonstrating who the Mizos were, who they are today, and who they are becoming.

Correspondingly, the three culinary modes within the model operate as symbolic currents of social meaning. Boiling protects cultural continuity, representing simplicity, home-based identity, and the sensory essence of Mizo cuisine. Frying represents adaptation, aspiration, and global connection, capturing the influence of external food cultures and shifting tastes shaped by modernity and mobility. Fermentation, smoking, and drying represent memory and heritage, functioning as sensory and emotional reminders of ancestral knowledge, environmental resilience, and collective history. Together, these three modes form a narrative of movement

between past and present, between self and influence, and between nature and cultural meaning. Perhaps this idea is best captured in the words of one rural respondent, who poignantly stated,

“When we talk about Mizo identity, it is not just the name of the dish, the final product that identifies us. . .it started from the land that produces such food. The whole journey of food is linked to Mizo identity.”

This reflection reinforces that the Mizo Culinary Triangle is not merely a theoretical model but a lived cultural reality embedded in identity, memory and everyday practice.

Future areas for research

Future researchers may consider exploring the following dimensions to expand understanding of the changing food culture, culinary practices, and food-related identities in Mizoram:

- 1)The present study was limited to selected urban and rural locations across two districts. Future studies may include additional districts and localities across Mizoram to generate a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of food practices and cultural patterns across regions.
- 2)While this study analysed households as the primary unit of inquiry, future research could categorise the universe based on socio-economic strata, ethnic sub-groups, or religious denominational differences to understand whether food habits, culinary identities, and cultural practices diverge across social groupings.
- 3)Comparative research incorporating equal representation of age groups could offer deeper insight into generational differences particularly how younger urban populations negotiate global food trends alongside traditional culinary identities.
- 4)Longitudinal studies would be valuable in assessing whether emerging consumption patterns, convenience food culture, and digital food environments continue to reshape commensality, meal structure, gendered labour, and cultural food identity over time.
- 5)Further research could examine the intersection of food, class, and aspiration particularly the relationship between income, food access, food spaces (cafés, restaurants, street food), and symbolic consumption in shaping identity and social distinction.

- 6) While this study focused on domestic consumption and household practices, future work may also explore institutional and public food spaces such as hostels, schools, workplaces, church feasts, or community events to understand how food practices shift beyond the household environment.
- 7) Another potential area of study includes the environmental and agricultural dimensions of food culture, analysing how changing farming patterns, food availability, and sustainability concerns impact traditional ingredients, cooking practices, and seasonal food habits.
- 8) Research may also explore specific cases where traditional food norms encounter newer lifestyle demands such as digital food delivery, food entrepreneurship, wellness culture, and dietary shifts to understand how cultural negotiation occurs in everyday settings.

In conclusion, this study highlights that food in Mizoram is not merely dietary but a social and cultural system through which identity, memory, belonging, and modern aspirations are expressed and negotiated. As food practices continue to evolve, further research remains essential to trace how culinary traditions, food habits, and cultural identities adapt, persist, or transform within the rapidly changing social landscape of Mizoram.

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