Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

"Man is what he eats" is possibly one of the well-known sentences of German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. This phrase was highlighted in his review of physiologist Jacob Moleschott's book in 1850. (Turoldo et al., 2021, p. 762)

A common reference in the study of food and medicine, the above statement finds relevance till date as the relationship between food and humanity continues to be examined. While Feuerbach's assertion emanated from a materialistic standpoint, often interpreted within the area of health and nutrition, it raises broader questions about the symbolism of the food we consume and how food practices shape our identities. These inquiries look into the symbolic and cultural significance of food, moving beyond limited nutritional considerations.

Despite its significant impact on health, nutrition appears to play only a minor role in influencing our food choices (Fox, 2002). According to Barthes, our understanding of "food" goes well beyond nutrients, calories, and minerals. It represents more than just its nutritional components, but also embodies what he describes as "a system of communication, a collection of images, and a set of customs, contexts, and behaviors" (Barthes, 1961/2013, p. 24). Moreover, taste, memory, accessibility, cultural values, religion, and social influences often outweigh nutrition in shaping food choices, as food serves as a powerful symbol and a fundamental aspect of personal and cultural identity. Eating is not solely driven by biological needs, as Mintz argued, but rather a social practice that is "always conditioned by meanings" (Mintz, 1996, p. 7). Similarly, Murcott also wrote, "Eating is undeniably a biological necessity, but the practical definition of food is unavoidably social and cultural" (Murcott, 2019, p. 18). These assertions emphasise that eating is imbued with cultural, social, and symbolic meaning, making it far more than just a physiological necessity. This perspective invites a deeper exploration of how our food choices are influenced by traditions, social norms, and identities, highlighting the relationship between universal human needs (nutrition) and meaning in our daily lives.

Food and eating play an indispensable role in people's daily rituals, yet these activities are often overlooked, rendering their deeper socio-cultural implications unexplored. For Kikon (2021), food and consumption practices reflect sociocultural and political orders that stem from class and caste hierarchies. A study of food practices reflects valuable social interpretation

when examined in its context – the food we eat defines and re-defines us in various ways, thus forming an integral part of our individual and collective identity. Food can serve as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, while also maintaining and reinforcing social cohesion. Overall, our food choices, the way we prepare them, and the traditions and customs surrounding food and eating are connected to our sense of self and cultural heritage, collectively influencing our sense of belonging. Thus, this research seeks to explore Mizo culture through the lens of food by analysing its socio-cultural significance, examining how food acts as both a maker and marker of identity, influences social interactions, and shapes community dynamics—thereby offering deeper insights into the relationships between food, culture, and identity in Mizo society.

1.1 The Philosophy of Food

When something is very common or ordinary, it tends to be underestimated and neglected (Pathak, 2021). Philosophically, drawing on Kantian and Hegelian notions regarding the lesser senses, it is recognised that food can often be consumed mindlessly and superficially (Perullo, 2016). Korsmeyer (1999) similarly argues that taste and eating are so intimately tied to the "necessities of existence," which is why they are categorised as the "lower functions...operating on a primitive, near instinctual level" (p. 1). However, when approached with attention, care, and some expertise, food can become an aesthetic experience imbued with conceptual meaning. This mindful approach elevates eating beyond mere sustenance, transforming it into an act of sensory and existential appreciation, much like experiencing a work of art (Perullo, 2016). In this way, food allows for a deeper interaction with the world, encouraging us to savour the present moment and find beauty in the everyday. The new wave of philosophy seeks to emphasise the significance of these ordinary items, recognising that they are crucial for exploring deeper ontological and epistemological questions. Though philosophy came to consider food later than other disciplines (Perullo, 2016; Kaplan, 2012; Linares & Meskin, 2021), the idea of food is very much present even if it is not thematically addressed in the philosophical works. Perhaps, philosophers have come to understand that food is not merely fuel or material substance, as Feuerbach suggested, but also something more reflective. Interestingly, along with his famous quotation, Feuerbach noted that food is the missing link between the body and the mind. He wrote, "Food becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain, food for thoughts and feelings. Human food is the foundation of human development and feeling" (Grün 1874, as cited in Turoldo et al. 2021, p. 762). For Feuerbach, food consumption has a direct influence on how human beings behave and feel (Celimli-Inaltong,

2014, p.1849). He argued that food connects the mind and the body because it is the only part of the external world we consume, facilitating a continuous exchange between the internal and external through food (Perullo, 2016). This exchange has metaphysical or psychological consequences, not just material ones.

In fact, food is both a material and a metaphysical object. It holds significant meaning beyond its materiality as a source of nourishment. The foundational argument is that food is an essential prerequisite for life, representing a fundamental biological necessity. Without food, life cannot exist. Without life, there can be no thought, no science, and no philosophy (Perullo, 2016). Thus, food is foundational to the very possibility of philosophy. Several studies from psychology, anthropology, and sociology have demonstrated that food influences not only the physical body and bodily pleasures but also an individual's intellectual and social aspects. Levi-Strauss believed that for food to be good to eat, it has to be "good to think" (Murcott et al. 2013, p. 11). For a person to eat food willingly, it must fit within both the cognitive and perceptual frameworks that people use to make sense of their world. In other words, for something to be considered edible, it must first be recognised as food by human minds and accepted for its social meanings. This includes classifications of what is considered clean or dirty, sacred or profane, natural or unnatural, and other culturally specific dichotomies. People cognitively recognise something as food, but they only choose to eat it if it aligns with their cultural and personal values.

Food embodies social and cultural values and is also connected to religious identity as food holds significant symbolic value even in religion (Turoldo et al., 2021). In many religious traditions, food is imbued with symbolic significance that reflects and reinforces core beliefs and practices, as exemplified by the Christian Eucharist. Contrary to the claim that the symbolic importance of food is overlooked in Western culture, Christianity exemplifies the highest metaphysical values in symbols like wine and bread of the Eucharist (Perullo, 2016). This represents the body and blood of Christ, symbolising sacrifice, salvation, and communal unity. Similarly, fasting during Ramadan and the subsequent feasting signify spiritual cleansing and communal solidarity in Islam. These religious observations and considerations shape what is perceived as appropriate or desirable to eat and practice even within a cultural context. As Perullo (2016) remarks, religion has consistently emphasised the symbolic importance of food. It serves as a powerful medium for conveying deeper spiritual and ethical meanings. Through these symbolic acts, food becomes a means of expressing and experiencing the metaphysical

and moral dimensions of religious life, connecting the material world with the transcendent, and reinforcing both individual and collective values and identities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Mizos are an ethnic group that predominantly inhabit the state of Mizoram, in Northeast India. They are an agrarian society whose practice is *jhumming* or shifting cultivation. Mizoram (then Lushai Hills) was colonised by the British Indian government in 1890 (Reid, 2013). Following military expeditions, Christian missionaries entered the then-Lushai Hills in 1891 (Pachuau, 2014, p.158). These external encounters brought about profound transformations across all aspects of Mizo society. Within fifty years, by 1941, the majority of the Mizo population had embraced Christianity, which subsequently became a core element of their collective identity (ibid., p.159). Despite these changes, the Mizo ethnic group retains a distinct cultural heritage. Among its many facets, food holds a central place, serving not only as sustenance but also as a reflection of the community's sociocultural, economic, and religious life.

Like many other cultures, food plays a central role in Mizo society, particularly during meaningful events and celebrations, where it symbolizes hospitality, respect, and love. Community feasting has been a longstanding tradition among the Mizos, practiced since ancient times. At every social gathering, food and drinks are shared generously, often serving as a key component of gift exchange. The historical development of Mizo food practices is deeply intertwined with their agrarian lifestyle, cultural traditions, local biodiversity, and traditional knowledge systems. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of Mizo foodways thus requires an exploration of these interconnected elements, offering a holistic insight into the community's way of life.

Despite the significance of food in Mizo society, literature on Mizo food remains relatively scarce. Existing literature often overlooks the issues of Mizo culinary practices, their development, and their cultural significance. In studies on Mizo history, culture, and identity, the role and significance of food are often left unrecognised and marginalised, evident in both colonial writings and works by Mizos themselves. If at all mentioned, it occupies only a small portion of the work, without definite organisation and proper documentation. Even within academic discourse, there is a noticeable absence of comprehensive research dedicated to Mizo foodways. In particular, sociological discussions of Mizoram tend to understate the importance

of food, often relegating it to the domains of medical or health sociology. Given that food is an integral aspect of Mizo culture, its study should extend beyond nutritional and biological considerations. Moreover, the predominantly oral tradition within Mizo culture, wherein customs, knowledge, and social values are transmitted verbally across generations, presented an additional challenge. This reliance on oral transmission more or less hindered the availability of archival resources for reference and study. One could not help but ponder the potential loss of valuable cultural elements during the process of transition and transmission across generations. Thus, this study addresses the gap by providing an in-depth exploration of Mizo foodways. It seeks to understand the connection of traditional culinary practices with society, and how they have developed, continued, transformed, and been influenced by external factors such as globalisation, modernisation, and migration. Doing so will contribute to the broader field of food studies and cultural analysis. Questions regarding why Mizos consume the foods they do, how they define Mizo cuisine, and how their food preferences have evolved or remained consistent over time are significant. Addressing these questions can offer valuable insights into the social, cultural, economic, and political history of the Mizos, while simultaneously allowing these dimensions to inform and deepen our understanding of their food practices.

Furthermore, the representation of Mizo food in cookbooks, food blogs, and online platforms is currently sparse and often inaccurate. Existing portrayals are primarily created by non-Mizo authors who may lack direct experience with traditional Mizo culinary practices, leading to widespread misrepresentation. These sources commonly depict Mizo food as “bland” or overly simple, omitting the diverse flavours, ingredients, and cooking methods that define authentic Mizo dishes. Additionally, some online sources label unfamiliar or unrelated dishes as “Mizo food,” contributing to misconceptions about the cuisine and disappointing audiences seeking genuine information. These inaccuracies highlight the need for research to document, clarify, and present authentic Mizo culinary practices, ensuring that the distinctive culture of Mizo cuisine is accurately and respectfully represented to a broader audience.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

1.3.1 Food and Culture

Cultural influence seems to play a significant role in shaping one’s perception of food. Whit (1995) argues that food has important cultural and symbolic meanings in society. ‘Cultural’ in

the sense that it maintains a connection to one's traditional foodways. The cultural importance of food and eating also centres on the social values, beliefs, and meanings associated with them. Food also carries 'symbolic meaning' as it is often regarded as a gift—exchanged and shared among family and friends, reinforcing bonds and social cohesion. These meanings also indicate the desired degrees of closeness and bond of interpersonal and group relationships. Beardsworth and Keil (1997) also argue that when people eat, they do not merely consume nutrients, but they also consume meanings and symbols.

The symbolic aspects of food are so attached to some people that, in extreme cases, people may choose to starve rather than consume what their culture deems taboo. As people from different societies have different relationships to food, their food choices are impacted by their cultural and belief systems. Food considered a delicacy by one culture could be disgusting and taboo by another culture. While every society devotes considerable effort to securing preferred food sources, they often overlook nearby and potentially valuable alternatives due to cultural or religious taboos. For example, Hindus abstain from eating beef, while Jews and Muslims avoid pork. Regardless of circumstance, people will not consume foods that their culture or religion deems forbidden—even in cases of extreme hunger or scarcity. In India, despite widespread poverty and starvation, many Hindus will not consider beef a viable food option, as the cow is regarded as sacred, even when such food sources are freely roaming the streets (Whit, 1995, p. 114).

These dietary restrictions underscore how ethical beliefs, and cultural norms play a powerful role in shaping food choices—arguably the most visible expression of food's metaphysical dimensions. Since culture plays such an important role in eating habits, Mead (2008) argues that recommending nutritionally healthy foods will not change one's eating habits on their own. She emphasises the need to understand how the community pursues and accepts food, their family food habits, their notions of sharing food, the emotions associated with their food, and methods of preparation and presentation. Moreover, it is also important to be knowledgeable about the food habits of other cultures in order to learn from them or help them accordingly. Even though certain foods and food habits may be unhealthy, they are considered a tradition in one culture. For instance, the Northeast region shows the highest cancer incidence rates in India, with Mizoram reporting the highest age-adjusted rates for all cancers among males (Ngaihte, 2019, p.251). Numerous studies have attributed this high incidence of cancer and other diseases to the excessive consumption of tobacco as well as fermented and smoked food items, which studies have believed detrimental to health (Ngaihte, 2019; Lalrohlui et al, 2021).

Despite their health implications, these dietary habits have been embedded in their culture for generations. Moreover, in the past, their physically demanding agricultural lifestyle, including walking long distances, seems to have balanced their diet. However, the modern sedentary lifestyle, combined with unchanged food practices, can result in the development of diseases and declining health. It could be challenging to bring change without disrupting the entire community because of the socially acceptable ways of eating and using food that have developed in the social surroundings since childhood.

These culturally and socially recognised foods are attached to a certain level of identity. Since different cultures attach different meanings to food, it is often regarded as a means of retaining their cultural and historical identity. Indeed, in Northeast India, various ethnic groups have an ethnic heritage food with a unique way of preparation resulting from long-term practices. The Khasis of Meghalaya are famous for their *jadoh*, the Manipuris for *eromba*, the Nagas for *akhuni,* and the Mizos for *bai*, to mention a few. Their ingredients and preparation processes have been transmitted from generation to generation, becoming deeply rooted in cultural traditions and family rituals. Generally, these food items and practices have been passed down from mothers to daughters and so on. Like one's grandmother's cherished recipe, which had been a favourite dish within the family, holds significant value and is attached to many memories. However, these traditions evolve over time, incorporating new influences while maintaining core elements, such as specific ingredients and techniques, that define a culture.

1.3.2 Food and Identity

According to Kaplan (2012), food serves as a powerful marker of identity. Identity encompasses various elements that define who we are, including our personal preferences, sense of self, taste, family and ethnic background, and our memories about certain foods and past events. Cultural identity includes shared values, ideas about the good life, and specific food preferences and practices that set one community apart, like how some groups enjoy certain foods that others dislike (Belasco, 2008, p.8). This relationship between food and identity poses various social and philosophical concerns. Yes, food does symbolise one's identity, but it still does not explain everything. No particular food that we consume determines our identity. Yet, our food preferences undeniably define us in many ways, forming an integral part of who we are individually and collectively. Food and eating influence our pleasures and anxieties, memories and desires, and feelings of belonging or detachment from one's cultural heritage (ibid.).

In examining the relationship between food and identity formation, Fischler (1988) asserts that "food is central to individual identity," as the choices individuals make about what they eat shape their biological, psychological, and social selves, ultimately contributing to the formation of who they are (p. 275). He introduces the concept of the "omnivore's paradox," which highlights the contradictory nature of being an omnivore – having the autonomy to consume a wide variety of foods, yet being constrained by societal norms and culinary rules that dictate what is acceptable to eat and how it should be prepared and consumed. According to Fischler, the process of incorporation, where food crosses from the outside to the inside of the body, is a fundamental aspect of identity formation. He also explains disgust as a "socially constructed biological safeguard" where the mouth functions as a safety chamber (p.282). The process of eating involves not just consuming food, but also evaluating it based on cultural origins, as culinary systems dictate food combinations and menus, which help place food in a broader cultural context. This process not only involves the physical act of consuming nutrients but also the integration of beliefs, values, and representations, which, as Feuerbach suggested, forms a critical connection between the mind and body. Through this lens, food becomes a vital component of self-expression and identity construction.

However, Fischler (1988) warns that in modern society, where food is increasingly processed and globalised, this connection between food and identity is at risk. Modern foods, often referred to as "unidentified edible objects," lack clear origins, leading to anxiety and insecurity in food consumption (p. 289). Fischler interprets this as a sign of the breakdown in the regulatory functions of traditional culinary systems. His concept of the "omnivore's paradox" and the impact of modern food systems on identity offer critical insights into the changing nature of food consumption and its broader implications for society.

1.3.3 Taste and Identity

Various scholars including Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), Mary Douglas (1972), Pierre Bourdieu (2019/1979), Claude Fischler (1988), and David E. Sutton (2010), among others, have effectively demonstrated that taste has long been essential in the construction and expression of socio-cultural identity. In the last two decades, philosophers including Carolyn Korsmeyer (1999), Nicola Perullo (2016), David Kaplan (2012), and Barry Smith (2016) have deliberately worked on the philosophy of taste, senses, and food in general. These scholars have illustrated how taste and food preferences are not merely individual choices but are closely intertwined with cultural norms, social structures, and symbolic meanings.

Eating involves the senses—taste, smell, sight, touch, and sometimes sound—which create strong emotional connections and memories. Sensory experiences are tied to significant moments and rituals, reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging. Although a particular smell can cause significant discomfort and aversion in individuals, leading them to repel and distance themselves, an aromatic smell, on the other hand, can be linked to aesthetics and emotional attachments to home and memories, illustrating its importance in defining what is considered odorous or pleasant. For instance, the smell of a traditional dish can evoke memories of home and family, strengthening emotional ties. Every individual has encountered at least one moment where the taste or smell of a particular food evokes a memory so powerful that it transports them back in time, enveloping them in vivid recollections of the past. In French, that moment when a fond memory intrudes, triggered by taste, smell, or even sound is called *une madeleine de Proust*, known as the "madeleine moment," or the "Proust phenomenon" (Smith, 2016, p.38). This phenomenon highlights the connection between taste and identity, illustrating how sensory experiences with food are intertwined with our sense of self, memory, and cultural narratives.

The concept of taste in food, as David Kaplan argues, encompasses both "epistemological and aesthetic" dimensions (Kaplan, 2020, p.5). According to him, it is epistemological as it concerns acquiring knowledge through our sense of taste (ibid.). When we taste food, we use our sensory experience to identify and learn about its flavour, ingredients, and texture. Aesthetic pertains to the pleasure, preferences, and judgments we make when tasting food. Eating a well-prepared meal involves appreciating its flavours, presentation, and overall culinary creativity. Especially in Western philosophy, the concept of taste is essential to the idea of aesthetics in interpreting art, beauty, and sensory experiences. On the other hand, Pierre Bourdieu analysed the contribution of aesthetic elements of taste to the construction of social distinction and hierarchy between social groups. He described taste based on the embodied cultural capital in which food choices or preferences in taste reflect one's socio-economic positioning and cultural background (Bourdieu, 2019). By mediating through these senses, food and eating shape identities and cultures which "create a hierarchy of values" (Kikon, 2021, p.377).

Kikon (2021) argues that sensory perceptions must be contextualised, as what one culture finds unpleasant might be considered delightful and culturally significant in another. For instance, among the Mizo community of Northeast India, *saum* (a fermented pork fat) is a savoury food item found in every Mizo household. *Saum* has a unique sensorial element due to its

fermentation process, which releases a distinct, delectable aroma from the fat, infusing the dish with a rich umami flavour. While this delicacy is highly valued within the Mizo community, the pungent aroma and the consumption of pork are often avoided in the broader Indian region, where it may even be considered unclean. As Belasco puts it, "Our tastes are as telling as our distastes" (2008, p.1). This shows that the food we like and dislike reveals who we are. In other words, recognising what one enjoys and resists can offer a comprehensive understanding of one's preferences and identity. However, there is a distinction between the physiological need for food and the cultural aspects that shape our preferences and perceptions of taste. Even though hunger and the desire for food are often perceived as natural and universal among human beings, taste is culturally constructed. Certain traditional foods have an acquired taste due to their distinctive flavours and textures. As people become adapted to its distinctive flavour, their palates develop an appreciation for taste. Celimli-Inaltong (2014) asserts that the acquisition of taste is a learned process, shaped by social and historical contexts. It serves not only as an indicator of individual identity but also reflects one's socio-economic and cultural position.

Similar to social and cultural values, religious principles predominantly influence taste and disgust. Douglas (1972) argues that certain food taboos and symbolism are based on religious conceptions, such as pure or impure, edible or inedible. In this context, she discusses the Hebrew dietary laws, which revolve around the concepts of holiness and defilement. She highlights the example of the pig—deemed abominable and prohibited not only from consumption but also from contact—based on its classification as unclean in the book of Leviticus. She argues that the social and religious values that govern human relationships are not abstract but manifest in everyday practices, such as our food choices. These values influence what we eat and do not eat, embedding themselves in our daily lives. Douglas further states that the meaning of food transcends its physical elements and is embedded in a system of "repeated analogies" (ibid.). These analogies create a network of meanings that connect the metaphysical realm of values and beliefs to the physical act of eating, suggesting that our food practices symbolise our larger metaphysical and social worlds.

The Interconnectedness of Culture, Identity, and Taste

The three fundamental concepts discussed illustrate that food has cultural meanings, food is a marker of identity, and taste is socially and culturally constructed. These three concepts embody the non-materialistic perspective in contrast to what Feuerbach opines as "man is what

he eats", particularly shedding light on how people make sense of food and eating, how foods shape identity, and how sensory experience functions. Though the given materialistic aspects of food cannot be overlooked, a comprehensive understanding of food must consider both its material and non-material qualities. All these are related to and influence one another in the meaning-making process of food. The interplay between culture, identity, and taste in food studies is a complex and dynamic process that cannot be reduced to a simple cause-and-effect relationship. They are inseparable in understanding human experience and are found in almost every traditional culture around the world. Thus, based on these interconnected concepts, the food culture of Mizo society is explored in this thesis.

1.4 Overview of Literature

1.4.1 Locating the Sociology of Food

Food studies, as Miller and Deutsch (2009) describe in *Food Studies - An Introduction to Research Methods*, is "not the study of food itself but rather the study of the relationships between food and the human experience" (p. 3). They further assert that these relationships can be analysed from multiple perspectives and across various food systems, from "production to consumption, or from farm to fork" (ibid). They claimed that, in academic discourse, the term food studies encompass two distinct meanings, characterised by both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. Accordingly, food studies as a multidisciplinary field involves a collective of scholars from various humanities and social science disciplines, who convene to discuss their research. Journals like *Gastronomica*, which publish a wide array of scholarly and artistic works on food and its cultural significance, exemplify the multidisciplinary nature of this field. Whereas in its interdisciplinary form, food studies integrate insights from multiple humanities and social science perspectives to examine the relationships between food and culture. Scholars in this field often combine theories and methodologies from disciplines like sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, history, and philosophy etc. Therefore, this research employs an interdisciplinary approach to food studies, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of food and its role in society. By integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies, this approach enriches the research, resulting in more rigorous and impactful outcomes.

Scholars across various disciplines have overlooked the significance of food over the years. However, in the last few decades, food studies have become a growing area of interest in several fields of study contributing to an understanding of food and its related matters (Borghini

et al., 2021; Belasco, 2008; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Neuman, 2019; Murcott et al., 2013; Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Scholars from diverse disciplines—anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, history, archaeology, geography, philosophy, and psychology—increasingly recognised the need for an interdisciplinary approach to studying food. By engaging with and drawing upon methods, approaches, and themes from various other fields, scholars are better situated to understand food and its web of relationships (Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Such an interdisciplinary approach enriches philosophical discourse by broadening the scope of inquiry, demonstrating that food is a critical topic for intellectual exploration. Positioning the study of food, culture, and identity in a diverse setting enhances our understanding of how food practices shape and reflect who we are as individuals and the broader community.

Though food and eating are inevitable in human survival and always a part of our daily lives, they were not considered to be of central importance or interest in the field of sociology until recently. In fact, most of the classical sociologists scarcely addressed food and eating in their work. Though the works of Marx, Engels, Weber and Durkheim did not neglect food as such, but refer to it only as an indicator of something else, such as social inequality, hunger, religion or class distinction, rather than a distinct area of study (Mennell et al. 1992). Emile Durkheim mentioned food in his work mainly in the context of prohibitions regarding sacred and profane in relation to his theory of religion. Likewise, Herbert Spencer also mentioned food in the context of religion and made certain references to offerings of food to the deceased (ibid.). However, food as such is only a passing interest to these major sociologists, where the ideas and practices concerning food seemed to be of little significance to them because it was generally seen as merely a nutritional and biological need.

Although Georg Simmel has talked about the common yet individuality of eating in his short essay *The Sociology of the Meal* in 1910, which was translated to English in 1994 by Michael Symons (1994), it was only in the late 20th century that sociologists became interested and sensitive to such food-related issues. Eating may be an individual act, as Simmel argued, and a basic human need, but the way we approach food is shaped by social factors, such as what, where, and with whom we eat, reflecting cultural values that differ significantly from one society to another. Except in studies such as poverty and deprivation, or agriculture and industry, ideas and practices concerning food seemed to be of little significance to sociologists because it was generally seen only as nutritional and health concerns. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, sociological interest in food started to develop from the "growing

social and cultural significance of food in affluent industrial societies" (Scott, 2014, p. 398). A range of social, cultural, and academic influences have collectively contributed to an interest in understanding the complex relationship between food, culture, and society, giving rise to the growth of sociological studies in food and eating.

By the 1980s, scholars were paying increasing attention to the sociology of food, as reflected in the growing number of publications on the topic, particularly in Western countries. In 1983, food sociologist Anne Murcott published an edited volume titled *The Sociology of Food and Eating: Essays on the Sociological Significance of Food*, which introduced the idea of developing a sociological study of food. After contributing several articles and book chapters on the subject, she published another book in 2019, *Introducing the Sociology of Food and Eating*. This book aims to clarify sociological thinking and help improve research on food and eating. Between these two significant works, several authors have published introductory books on the subject. Among them are *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* by Jack Goody (1982), *Food and Society: A Sociological Approach* by William C. Whit (1995), *Food, the Body and the Self* by Deborah Lupton (1996)*, Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* by Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil (1997), *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition* by John Germov and Lauren Williams (2017), *The Sociology of Food: Eating and the Place of Food in Society* by Jean-Pierre Poulain, (2002), and *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture* by Michael Carolan (2012) to name a few.

DeSoucey (2017) identified two intersecting themes that define sociological studies on food in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The first theme is what he calls "food systems," which originates partly from research on agricultural production and is linked to "environmental, developmental, and rural sociology." The second theme, "food politics, identity, and culture," reflects the influence of social anthropology and cultural history. DeSoucey also noted that sociologists focusing on food studies primarily explore issues related to "food and inequality, culture, trade, labour, power, capital, and technological innovation," often through the interdisciplinary field of food studies.

One of the initial studies on food was done by Claude Levi-Strauss, in his analyses of the relationship between nature and culture through food in *The Culinary Triangle* (1966/2013) and *The Raw and The Cooked* (1970). His structuralist approach viewed food similarly to language, explaining that humans assign symbolic meanings to food, making it a medium of communication. He argues that, like language, food holds different social and cultural

meanings in various groups. He introduces the concept of the "culinary triangle," adapted from what he calls the vowel and consonant triangles. This triangle has three points—the raw, the cooked, and the rotten—which define the "semantic field" of food (Levi-Strauss, 1966/2013, p.41). He explains that cooking has transformative cultural power, with the three cooking methods—boiling, roasting, and smoking—rooted in either nature or culture. He emphasises that different cultures assign distinct social meanings and rituals to these categories. For example, boiling might be understood differently across societies, highlighting that these practices are culturally specific. Levi-Strauss concludes that cooking functions like a language, unconsciously reflecting the structure of a society. While his structuralist approach remains influential in food studies, critics argue it is insufficient, as it overlooks internal social differences, external sociocultural influences, historical contexts, and material factors. Although some critics questioned specific elements of his contribution, the lasting influence of his focus on food's symbolic significance in subsequent research is undeniable. Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle is more accurately described as a concept rather than a formal theory. While not a comprehensive theory, it sheds light on the transformation of food across cultures.

In the article *Deciphering a Meal* (1972), Mary Douglas explored the patterns and context of everyday meals. Douglas treated food as a code, noting that food categories reflect social events and relationships. She suggested that the meaning of a meal can be understood through a system of "repeated analogies" (p. 69). This means that what is culturally identified as a meal follows specific patterns, and these patterns are repeated in the different courses, in weekday and weekend menus, and in both special occasions and everyday meals. Douglas's central argument is that the structured system of a meal reflects the broader systems of order to which it is connected. While she was influenced by Lévi-Strauss's structuralist views, Douglas differed by emphasising the dual nature of food as both a vital source of nourishment and a symbol with social significance (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Douglas argued that meals encompass both physical sustenance and social interaction and that a careful analysis can reveal the deeper norms and values of that society.

Marvin Harris (1985/2013) challenged Douglas' symbolic theory about the Hebrew dietary law regarding pigs as inedible. From a materialist perspective, he explains food prohibition through the lens of ecological and economic practicality. Harris argues that pigs are not inherently unclean due to their habits but because they cannot sweat, leading them to roll in mud to cool off. He also notes that pigs are not the only animals with unclean behaviours, which creates a contradiction in singling them out for condemnation. Additionally, both the Old Testament and

the Koran specify that only animals that chew cud and have split hooves are permissible for consumption, which excludes pigs. Harris points out that pigs are only useful for meat, unlike ruminants, which can digest grass and straw, making them more versatile. Pigs also cannot be used for clothing or for pulling ploughs, further reducing their utility compared to ruminants. According to him, the aversion to pigs can be better explained by ecological and economic factors rather than concerns about cleanliness.

Roland Barthes (1961/2013) presents the idea that food is more than a means of nourishment; it serves as a complex system of communication and symbolism. According to him, food conveys meanings through images, social rituals, and behavioural codes. It plays a role in expressing emotions, identities, and social distinctions, which vary depending on context. He also observes that food preferences can reflect class differences—for example, in French society, working-class families often favour sweet and smooth foods, while upper classes tend to prefer bitter flavours. Rather than focusing on its physical attributes, Barthes urges us to interpret food through the meanings it conveys. He argues that food tends to transform into a social situation, exemplified by how advertising reshapes the symbolic value of items like coffee, shifting it from a stimulant to a symbol of relaxation. He notes that food features in nearly all areas of life—work, leisure, sport, and effort—suggesting that its function increasingly extends beyond sustenance to encompass feelings, experiences, and activities. As he concludes, food "will lose in substance and gain in function" (p. 29), pointing to a shift from its nutritional role to a more symbolic one. Barthes' semiotic approach to food as a cultural signifier complements this study's exploration of Mizo foodways, reinforcing the idea that food operates not merely as sustenance but as a medium of identity, memory, and socio-cultural expression.

Douglas and Gross (1981) examine the characteristics of food through fundamental sensory oppositions, arguing that these sensory dichotomies—such as sweet versus savoury—are more closely related to the structure of meals and the formation of social identity than to purely cognitive frameworks. They suggest that these contrasts shape how meals are organised and experienced, highlighting, for instance, how sweetness connects everyday meals with festive or special-occasion foods, as seen in the example of puddings. As cited in Sutton (2019), Douglas's analysis extends beyond flavour to include other sensory dimensions like texture, temperature, colour, and visual arrangement. These sensory elements are organised into oppositional categories that help define not only the structure of individual meals but also their cultural meanings and the relationships between different types of meals. This sensory-based

framework resonates with the present study's emphasis on taste and embodied food experiences in Mizo culture, where traditional dishes and preparation techniques are similarly structured through sensory contrasts and symbolic associations that contribute to cultural identity and continuity.

Janet Siskind, in her 1992 paper, wrote about how the American ritual of thanksgiving has powerfully shaped a sense of nationality "through the consummation of a sacred meal". She explained how the early practice of Thanksgiving was deeply religious by tracing its historical development and analysing the meanings and symbols of the ritual. She analysed the symbolic implications of the Thanksgiving turkey, a species that is native to North America, arguing that it powerfully symbolises native American Indians. She wrote: "Like the turkey, Indians were either wild or domesticated. Although feared, wild Indians were more admirable in a sense, or flavourful, more 'game', an enemy to be respected, if also to be killed" (Siskind, 1992). From this metaphoric lens, it is evident why the natives who strive to decolonise beliefs such as Thanksgiving are criticised for being radical and becoming "others." On the contrary, the importance of the stuffed turkey has continued to be the main symbolic object at Thanksgiving, shared and consumed by the family. She then argued how the joys and tensions, pleasures and pains of the family are activated in the preparation and joint participation of the feast, and highlighted the traditional responsibility of women in the household. As Whit (1995) also asserted, Thanksgiving provides an element that is more relevant to idealist than materialist analysis. Siskind's analysis is particularly relevant to the study of Mizo feasts, as it demonstrates how shared meals function not only as sites of consumption but as powerful rituals that reflect, reinforce, and contest broader cultural and political identities.

A significant work with regards to feasting is Brian Hayden's (2009) work, *The Proof Is in the Pudding*, where he connects feasting to human behavioural ecology, and refers to it as 'paleopolitical ecology'. He further proposes the 'Feasting Model of Domestication' in which surplus on an individual lies in the successiveness of the feast. He argues that feasting, supported by surplus, served as a strategic tool—especially among elites—for reducing food-related risks and maintaining social networks. Different types of feasts, such as competitive, reciprocal, and solidarity feasts, reflect how individuals leveraged food for social and political advantage. This perspective supports the thesis by showing that, as in Mizo society, feasting is not merely a communal activity but also a dynamic socio-cultural strategy for reinforcing identity, negotiating status, and managing social relationships.

Among the earliest sociological works on food is *Food and Society: A Sociological Approach* (1995) by William C. Whit. He claims it to be the first publication to adopt a "self-consciously sociological approach" to studying the relationship between food and society (p. xii). Beginning with consumption, Whit's main objective is to trace the history of food back to its production by examining its preparation, distribution and storage. However, even though he asserts taking a sociological approach, it is evident that he consciously and subconsciously engages in an interdisciplinary approach to develop the interrelationships of food and society. This framework is valuable for understanding food studies, as it allows for an analysis that moves beyond mere consumption to explore how food practices are shaped by, and in turn shape, the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of everyday life.

In their book, *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* (1997), the authors, Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil provide a conceptual framework for food studies. They also try to encourage the readers to consider new ways of thinking about the obvious "everyday act of eating" (p. 7). They emphasise on the everyday, often overlooked experiences of choosing, preparing, and sharing food and see people's habits, choices, preferences, and dislikes within a larger cultural context. They analyse food and eating on different levels, including "the system level," which looks at the complex framework of production and distribution, and "the cultural level," which sees food as an expression of ideas, symbols, and meanings (p. 69). This book provides significant tools and guidance in analysing foodways, particularly for the current study.

Sociological approaches to food often highlight how class differences shape access, consumption, and taste. Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) remains central in showing how food preferences function as markers of social distinction. Through the concept of habitus—internalised dispositions formed through socialisation—Bourdieu explains how taste is learned and reflects one's position in the social hierarchy. These preferences, or tastes, act as forms of cultural capital, distinguishing social groups and reinforcing class boundaries. Eating habits, therefore, are not merely personal but socially learned and class-specific. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding Mizo foodways, where shared tastes, culinary knowledge, and feasting practices function as markers of cultural capital, reinforcing community belonging and social cohesion.

Germov and Williams (2017) explain that the sociology of food focuses on the complex factors that shape our eating habits, including social norms, politics, economics, and philosophy, to

understand the underlying reasons for our food choices, habits, and practices. They argue that by analysing the social dynamics of food production, distribution, and consumption, sociologists identify the relationships between societal structures and individual behaviours, which they describe as the "social appetite" (p. 5). While individual choices and tastes matter, a sociological perspective helps explain the social determinants of our eating behaviours.

According to Anne Murcott (1982), sociologists recognise food and eating not only as a matter of nutritional concerns but also as a cultural matter since individuals consume food in a socially organised way. She argues that the "elaboration of the cultural significance of food and eating focuses on social values, meaning and beliefs rather than on dietary requirement and nutritional values" (p. 203). In analysing three studies on eating habits, Murcott illustrates a sociological approach to understanding the cultural dimensions of food and eating. Each study draws on Levi-Strauss' concept of the culinary triangle, focusing on the symbolic and social meanings of food related to "the raw, the cooked, and the rotten." The first study examines the "symbolic" importance of "health food" and "whole food," which represent "the raw" in Levi-Strauss' framework (p. 204). The second study explores the "cultural" importance of food through the different meanings of words. It highlights the use of the local term "ket," which in North East England refers to sweets when used by children but means rubbish when used by adults, linking it to "the rotten" in Levi-Strauss' triangle (p. 205). The third study investigates the "literal" importance of the concept of a "cooked dinner" in South Wales. The meal, which is cooked by transforming simple ingredients through specific methods, represents "the cooked" in the culinary triangle. These studies suggest that people's food practices reveal the "social relationships and cultural identities" they come from. By applying Levi-Strauss' culinary triangle, the studies show how food practices reflect broader cultural patterns and social norms, offering valuable insights into the symbolic, cultural, and literal significance of food in different communities.

In her interview with Zofia Boni (2019), Murcott asserted that the sociology of food is beyond the surface activities of eating, cooking, growing, processing, or selling food. Instead, it involves a deep, logical exploration of how these processes are put together into the nature of society (p. 11). This field of study requires rigorous thought to understand the relationships between food practices and societal structures, revealing how food influences and reflects cultural, economic, and social dynamics. She claims that it is not just about food itself, but about the broader societal implications and connections that these activities create. Moreover, according to Murcott, researchers in the sociology of food and eating have focused too much

on the symbolic meaning of food and neglected its physical aspects. She believes we need to pay attention to the material world too, including the physical properties of food and our own bodily experiences, like taste, smell, and decay. This includes exploring the sociology of the senses, which is still a new and developing area (p. 5).

Goody (1982), Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo (1992), Beardsworth and Keil (1997), Poulain (2002), and Murcott (2019) identify major theoretical approaches that sociologists employ in order to analyse food systems. These can be classified as - the functional approach, the structural approach, the cultural approach, and the developmental approach. These approaches analyse food mainly in terms of the food's symbolic properties, and material characteristics, as well as the social relationships and processes that shape and express them. Whether the studies are about lack of food, too much food, the quality and safety of food, or the symbolic meanings attached to different types of foods, the central issue is that human beings have to eat in order to survive (Ward et al., 2010). Therefore, the symbolic significance (Levi-Strauss), the structure of the meal (Douglas), social practices (Bourdieu, 1984), and material and non-material context (Mintz, Murcott) of food and eating provide a rich field for sociological analysis.

In terms of literature on Indian food, several scholars studied food cultures from different perspectives. Some of the classical works like Om Prakash's *Food and Drinks in Ancient India from Earliest Times to 1200 A.D*. (1961), McKim Marriott's *Caste Ranking and Food Transactions* (1968), R.S. Khare's "*The Hindu Hearth and Home* (1976) and others, Chitrita Banerji's *Life and Food in Bengal* (1991) and K.T Acharya's *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* (1994) and his other books to name a few focus primarily on caste, regional cuisines, and historical developments in the culinary practices of what is often considered "mainstream" Indian society. While these studies offer rich insights into Indian food culture, they largely exclude the diverse food practices of the Northeast, including Mizoram, treating the region as peripheral or invisible within the national culinary discourse.

One significant article that talks about the food culture specifically of Northeast India was an article by Hoineilhing Sitlhou (2020), *Food Culture and Identity in Northeast India: Prospects for Social Science Research*, where she writes about food and food culture that bears an identity of one's social status quo. The article is structured into three thematic sections, each examining the sociocultural dimensions of food. Firstly, it highlights food as a cultural and religious symbol that binds society, reflecting identity through traditional practices and rituals. Secondly,

it discusses the emotional role of food for students living away from home, portraying it as a source of comfort and communal bonding. Lastly, the author critiques the cultural divide between Northeast Indian cuisine and that of mainland India, noting how prejudice against the former reveals deeper issues of discrimination and exclusion. Ultimately, the article argues that food serves as a medium for fostering understanding and unity in India's diverse society. Sitlhou's work is one of the few that attempts to highlight the socio-political dimensions of Northeast Indian foodways. However, her article functions as a broad overview and does not offer in-depth, community-specific ethnographic data.

In a broader South Asian context, Arjun Appadurai (1988) critically examines the evolution of culinary practices in post-colonial India, focusing on the role of cookbooks in shaping national cuisine. He focuses on the complexities faced by middle-class housewives who navigate modern cooking trends while adhering to traditional family expectations. Appadurai emphasises the emergence of diverse cookbooks, both in English and vernacular languages, which reflect the link of regional, ethnic, and historical influences. By comparing historical and contemporary cookbooks, he looks at how they contribute to the construction of national identity, "the boundaries of edibility," and "the logic of meals," thereby linking culinary practices to broader cultural and "domestic ideologies" in a context increasingly shaped by globalisation and urbanisation.

Pathak and Das (2019) provide insights into how food production and consumption are shaped by the socio-political and cultural dimensions of development in their work *Introduction: Developmentalism – On a Trope of (Dis)Enchantment*. Their work highlights developmentalism as a multifaceted ideological framework that integrates economic, cultural, and political elements, particularly in the context of postcolonial India. They argue that developmentalism is not just an economic process but a broader cultural and political ideology that influences societal values, identities, and power dynamics. This perspective sheds light on the connections between development and food practices, offering a more comprehensive understanding of their impact.

Furthermore, Das (2022) contends that societies in Northeast India are characterised by complex and multi-layered social formations. These layers comprise various cultural, historical, political, and economic factors. Understanding social events and processes in the region, therefore, requires attention to these intricate and intersecting dimensions. Homogenising interpretations risk overlooking the region's internal diversities and

specificities. A nuanced analytical approach is essential for capturing the full complexity of social life in Northeast India. Building on this perspective, recent contributions, such as *Seed and Food Sovereignty: Eastern Himalayan Experiences* (Deka et al., 2023), highlight the significance of food sovereignty in indigenous communities in the Eastern Himalayas, including Northeast India. These works emphasise the connections between food, ecology, and cultural survival, areas highly relevant to the Mizo context but still lacking in-depth, localised analysis.

1.4.2 Food Studies in the Context of Mizoram

Despite a growing body of scholarship on Indian food, the sociological study of Mizo foodways specifically remains nascent. While colonial official writings occasionally mention food and drinks in their books and records, they offer little cultural insight into the lived experiences or meanings of these practices. Some of these are *The Lushai Chrysalis* by A.G. McCall (1949/2015), *The Lushei Kuki Clan* by J. Shakespear, (1912/2008), and *The Lakhers* by N.E. Parry (1932/1976), which briefly mention some food items and drinks while writing about the agricultural and hunting practices. Parry (1928/2008) wrote about certain sacrifices and feasts in his book *A Monograph on Lushai Customs & Ceremonies*. Post-colonial academic works occasionally reference food mostly in their reflection on traditional sacrificial practices, but comprehensive studies are lacking.

For instance, Sangkima (1992) describes how colonialism and Christianity brought social changes to Mizo society in his book *Mizos: Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*. However, he briefly mentions changes in food habits in just one short paragraph, arguing that the impact on food habits was minimal because people were largely unaware of their eating habits (p. 146). He also states that the traditional rituals and sacrificial had been abandoned and disappeared when Christianity entered Mizoram. However, in *The Camera as Witness*, Joy Pachuau and Willem van Schendel (2015) briefly mention how these rituals and slaughtering of animals for feasts were incorporated into the Mizo Christian principles, which continue to be practised till today. In addition to Pachuau and van Schendel's works, Kyle Jackson's book *The Mizo Discovery of the British Raj* (2023) and Roluahpuia's *Nationalism in the Vernacular* (2023) provide constructive insights for understanding Mizo colonial and political history, respectively. Additionally, numerous works on Mizo history authored by indigenous writers in the Mizo language provide valuable sources for contextualising foodways within Mizo history.

While these texts do not extensively detail food practices, they serve as useful secondary sources for tracing the historical background of the Mizos.

The works of C. Nunthara, such as *Impact of the Introduction of Grouping of Villages in Mizoram* (1989) and *Mizoram: Society and Polity* (1996), are indispensable when analysing Mizo society. Although he does not directly address Mizo food culture, his studies on Mizo society, economy, and polity offer valuable sociological insights. In his 1981 paper, *Grouping of Villages in Mizoram: Its Social and Economic Impact*, Nunthara examines the structural effects of the 1967 village grouping in the Mizo Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram), a strategy implemented to combat insurgency in the region. He analysed how the dislocation of lands and the shortening of jhum cycles affected agricultural production and increased social tension. The insurgency that resulted in the grouping of villages stemmed from the Indian government's inadequate relief efforts during the Mautam famine, triggered by the cyclical bamboo flowering that occurs every fifty years in the region. Several works on famine and insurgency have been published in both Mizo and English. Notably, Sajal Nag's works *Bamboo, Rats and Famines: Famine Relief and Perceptions of British Paternalism in the Mizo Hills (India)* (1999) and *Tribals, Rats, Famine, State and the Nation* (2001) where he addresses bamboo flowering, rat famines, and their exploitation by colonial officials, missionaries, and Mizo nationalists. Although these works mark significant contributions to Mizo historiography and offer insights into food crises caused by bamboo flowering, they largely overlook food as a cultural and symbolic system embedded in everyday life and ritual practices.

Apart from this literature, a few scholars have recently attempted to write about the foodways of the Mizos. These limited existing studies offer valuable knowledge on Mizo food and culture in various contexts. Jagdish Lal Dawar's (2019) monograph on *Food in the Life of Mizos: From Precolonial Times to the Present* is the only book written exclusively on Mizo food practices so far. In this book, Dawar briefly explores the production, distribution and consumption of food in the context of Mizoram from the 19th century to the present. While his emphasis is on Mizo food consumption patterns, he broadly explores the negotiation with colonial and post-colonial modernity by focusing more on bakery products, milk and restaurants. Rather than studying the Mizo food items in particular, he looks at the colonial impact that the British and the missionaries had in introducing and shaping new tastes to the Mizos, and how the Mizos negotiated and constructed their accounts of modernity.

Lalrofeli (2019), in her doctoral dissertation, *Colonialism and Food Culture in the Lushai Hills*, examines the colonial influence on Mizo food culture, where she, like Dawar, focuses on themes of history and colonialism. She argues that several scholars have examined colonialism and "imperial rule in the Lushai hills" using various theories, revealing its effects on the local people. However, the fundamental cause of colonialism, i.e., food scarcity leading to raids that conflicted with British economic interests, and the cultural impact of food have been largely overlooked (p. 2). She also contends that the "Mizo food culture was simple and unsophisticated" (p. 168), due to the gender-based division of labour where women took care of all the domestic chores, as well as weeding and harvesting their agricultural land, leaving little time for culinary development. Although she conducted extensive research on how colonialism influenced food culture, her focus remains confined to the colonial era and does not give sufficient attention to contemporary social contexts.

In contrast to Lalrofeli's argument, Lalnienga Bawitlung (2022), in his paper, *The Taste of Salt: Identity, Memory and Food Culture of the Mizo Tribe*, explains how the traditional food practices of the Mizos serve as a reflection of their ability to cope with struggles, revealing a connection between their "simple" way of life and their "memory functions." He argues that Mizo people rarely stayed in one place for long before they arrived in what is now Mizoram; the most likely causes were feuds and conflicts. Because they had to move from one spot to another, they had to adopt a basic lifestyle that required them to cook their meals as simply, easily, and quickly as possible to save time. He also explained the word *Chibai*, a Mizo greeting and farewell gesture that translates as "to cook with salt," contrasted the salt value in history and the gesture to express "treasured bonds between themselves". Bawitlung employs a historical approach "to understand the influence of food culture on the workings and functions of memory" (p. 87).

By discussing about the traditional feast, Margaret Ch. Zama (n.d.) briefly analyse how the traditional Mizo feast of merit which was performed to attain the most prestigious *Thangchhuah* title has transformed into the "glorification" of Christian God in the post-Christian era. Her main argument is that feasting culture and feasts of merit have played a meaningful role in various cultures, including the Mizo tribe in India by providing a comparative perspective and examining feasting culture in other cultures and regions. Zama explores the historical and cultural significance of these feasts, as well as how they have evolved over time to adapt to changing belief systems and ideologies. She argues that these

feasts continue to serve an important social function, bringing people together for solidarity and networking.

Cherrie L. Chhangte (2009) argues that globalisation has significantly transformed Mizo food culture, influencing food choices through cultural, ecological, biological, and economic factors (p. 393). By drawing from Lévi-Strauss's concept of transforming raw ingredients into culturally meaningful dishes through cooking, she briefly analyses traditional Mizo food before its exposure to external cultural elements. While traditional Mizo cuisine, characterised by "simple" cooking methods and local ingredients, remains important for cultural identity, the younger generations are increasingly adopting new food trends, including fast food and packaged meals. According to her, the Mizo palate has become more "sophisticated" due to globalisation (p. 398). Despite external influences, she suggests that traditional cooking methods are healthier and more culturally developed, although this claim lacks empirical evidence. Ultimately, she contends that Mizo's identity is portrayed as an "amalgamation of traditional and newly-acquired influences" shaped by ongoing globalisation (p. 389).

Lalthansangi Ralte (2022) discusses the various aspects of Mizo cuisine and its connection with tradition, memory, and identity in her paper *Food, Memory and Identity: Tracing Mizo Foodways*. The author briefly explores a wide scope of topics, including traditional dishes, influence of Christianity and fast food, role of memory in food practices, and the importance of food in constructing social identities and maintaining cultural practices. While a more in-depth exploration of these factors could have provided a more detailed insight into the food practices and culture of Mizoram, this paper provides a concise yet broad analysis of how food practices reflect and shape Mizo identity and culture.

When talking about Mizo identity, one could not leave out Joy Pachuau's work, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* (2014). Pachuau explores how Mizo social customs and practices shape and reflect the identity and sense of belonging among the Mizo people. She highlights that religion plays an important role in understanding the Mizo identity arguing that who you are is dependent upon the religion that you adopt. This means that the adoption of Christianity has shaped the community and the lifestyles of the Mizos, which led to identification in terms of religion. Pachuau also mentions the important role played by the Church in life-cycle rituals such as marriages and deaths. She argues that the Church also have influence on the state and the administrations of the society as well as the family. By analysing the death rituals in the creation of identity, Pachuau found that death and death practices are

important ways of bringing people together. The Mizo identity was formed through a historical process in which social classifications such as clan, tribe, and nation, along with territorial divisions, collectively contributed to the creation of a distinct category known as the Mizo. According to her, similar to Chhangte (2009) and other scholars, Mizo identity is not viewed as something inherent and static but rather as an ongoing process that must be continuously renewed through the production and reproduction of historically developed materials and practices. While there are no specific mentions of food and foodways, this book offers valuable insights into the development and preservation of Mizo identity, reinforcing the relevance of food as an understudied yet integral aspect of cultural expression.

In the article titled *Traditional food processing techniques of the Mizo people of Northeast India*, Lalthanpuii et al. (2015) highlight some of the most familiar Mizo traditional food processing techniques practised by the Mizos residing in Mizoram. The authors classify these techniques into two categories; food used as seasonings and food consumed directly with or without seasonings. These foods are processed and prepared in a way that allow for longer preservation, especially due to seasonal unavailability and the absence of refrigeration. Although some of the foods described in the article might no longer be consumed or may have undergone changes, the study contributes to the scientific documentation of the traditional Mizo foods. The authors note that different Mizo clan groups, such as Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Pawi, Paite and others, possess different traditional processing techniques, though a detailed analysis of these differences is not provided in the article.

The literature on Mizo society's specific food practices and their embedded meanings remains relatively scarce. Most existing literature focuses on colonial history or broad sociocultural changes, with food often treated as a secondary theme rather than examining foodways as a central lens for understanding identity, culture, and change in Mizo society. As evident from the literature mentioned, it is only in the past five years that food as a topic has been found in research papers and theses. The majority of such materials came out only after I began my research journey. Despite these recent contributions, the existing literature remains sparse, fragmented, and lacking in sociological depth. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address this gap by examining foodways as a form of social practice and symbolic meaning in Mizo society. It aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary field of food studies by highlighting the cultural, religious, and identity-forming dimensions of food practices in a region. By documenting both historical and contemporary food practices of the Mizo society, this study contributes to regional studies of Northeast India and enriches the broader discourse in food sociology.

1.5 Defining Key Terms in the Context of the Present Study

Based on the conceptual framework and the overview of literature, the study defines key terms such as "foodways" and "traditional food" to ensure clarity. These definitions provide an understanding of the concepts used throughout the research, avoiding ambiguity and ensuring consistent interpretation.

1.5.1 Foodways

In the *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, "foodways" is defined as "the connection between food-related behaviour and patterns of membership in cultural community, group, and society" (Camp, 2003, p. 29). In general terms, foodways refers to the different ways people from various cultures understand and express their relationship with food. Counihan (1999) explains foodways as "the beliefs and behaviour surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food" (p. 2). She further states that "In every culture, foodways constitute an organized system, a language that—through its structure and components—conveys meaning and contributes to the organization of the natural and social world" (p. 19). According to the 4-H Folkpatterns series, as cited in Darnton (2012):

> foodways are "all of the traditional activities, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors associated with the food in your daily life. Foodways include customs of food production, preservation, preparation, presentation, gathering, marketing (both buying and selling), uses of food products other than for eating and food folklore."

Based on these definitions, the term "foodways" is used in this study to refer to the cultural and social practices, beliefs, and behaviours surrounding food, encompassing how people produce, distribute, prepare, consume, and relate to food, which conveys meanings and shapes identities within communities and societies. In essence, it encompasses the intersection of food-related cultural practices and cultural expressions that incorporate food. The term "foodways" is considered to be more inclusive, with a broader focus on the entire food system (from farm to table). It is a widely used term in food studies, but there are also plenty who do not use it. Several studies have also used the terms "food culture" and "culinary practices" to refer to what we have described as foodways.

In this study, the terms "food culture" and "culinary practice" are used synonymously with "foodways" to refer to the same concept, which encompasses the social, cultural, and traditional elements of food and eating. The choice of terminology may vary depending on the

context in which they are used, but they all convey the same meaning. While most of the other terms for food studies usually focus on contemporary groups, the focus of this study is not only on the contemporary but also on its historical significance as well. Therefore, among the multiple terms, the term "foodways" is used in the title to reflect the broader socio-cultural practices and ideas surrounding food and eating across time.

1.5.2 Traditional Food

In sociology, tradition means a set of customs and practices that aim to preserve and transmit specific values and norms, often by connecting them to the past and using rituals and symbols that are widely recognised and accepted (Scott, 2014). Generally, tradition involves passing down knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to the next, typically dealing with the study of culture. In essence, tradition encompasses the shared beliefs, rituals, customs, and habits of an ethnic group or society that are transmitted from one generation to another, playing a vital role in defining their cultural identity.

In many cultures, certain food habits are an essential part of traditional practices. The use of certain ingredients and cooking methods has been passed down through generations, known as "traditional food." These traditional foods have been integral to the cultural heritage for many years, often featuring locally sourced ingredients and age-old preparation techniques that are deeply rooted in tradition and identity. Despite the common use of the term "traditional food," there is a lack of clear definitions of what it means, leaving it open to individual understanding. Moreover, several works that have addressed traditional food within various societies often fail to define the term, either due to their limited engagement with traditional food culture or from an assumption that the concept is universally understood, rendering a definition unnecessary. Humphrey (1989) suggests that within a memory culture that preserves traditional recipes and food stories, the term "traditional foods" can represent either the authentic heritage and history that exists or an idealised version that is desired. He further states that describing food as traditional is often intended as a mark of approval (p. 163). Humphrey argues that the term and notion of "tradition" inherently denote power, "the power of continuity and stability." Therefore, labelling a recipe or a product as "traditional" enhances the power, status, and significance of the food (p. 168). However, Bertozzi (1998) describes a traditional food product as a community symbol, tied to a specific geographic area, and integral to a culture that relies on the collective efforts of the people within that region (as cited in Jordana, 2000). Jordana (2000) extends this sociological perspective by stating that for a product to be recognised as

traditional, it has to be associated with a particular region and embedded within a set of customs that inherently guarantee its continuity over time. Moreover, traditional foods have significant cultural meanings attached to them as they are eaten not simply for their nutritional benefits, but also for the "symbolic values" they embody which are "related to the customs, ideas, and uses of the cultural complex in which they are located" (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021).

Thus, for this study, "traditional food" is defined, based on the above discussions, as a food item that embodies the cultural heritage and identity of a specific community, characterised by its unique flavour, use of certain ingredients, and methods passed down through generations, ensuring continuity and stability and are attached to cultural meanings. Traditional foods are not only linked to a particular territory but are also embedded in the collective traditions and practices of the people within that region, often serving as a representation of their cultural identity.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore and document the traditional food culture of the Mizo people. This includes examining the types of foods consumed, methods of preparation, and the cultural meanings attached to these practices. Secondary aims include analysing the aspects of change and continuity in the food culture and assessing the role of food in social and cultural identity (food as an identity marker) among the Mizo community. Thus, the objectives of the study are listed as follows:

- To explore the historical influences and socio-cultural dynamics that have shaped the development of Mizo foodways.
- To understand the symbolic meanings associated with dishes, ingredients, and cooking practices in Mizo culture, and to analyse how these meanings are conveyed, expressed, and preserved within the community.
- To explore the function and significance of communal feasts in Mizo society and analyse the impact of modern influences on the feasting tradition.

1.6.1 Basic Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following key questions:

1. What are the traditional foods and culinary practices of the Mizos?

2. How have these food practices evolved over time?
3. What cultural significances are attached to specific foods and culinary practices?
4. In what ways does food and feast contribute to social and cultural identity in Mizo society?
5. How have external influences such as globalisation and modernity affected Mizo feasting culture?

1.7 Research Methodology

This research originated from questions I have contemplated since my undergraduate and master's studies outside my home state. I wondered why we struggle to adjust to unfamiliar foods, why we crave home-cooked meals, why we eagerly return home for holiday feasts, and why we bring our food when travelling, despite numerous options in metropolitan areas. Do other cultures experience this as well, or is it unique to us (Mizo)?

Whenever I leave home for studies, I miss home-cooked food, particularly Mizo cuisine. I often improvised with available ingredients to recreate these dishes whenever I crave them, often calling my mother for ingredients and cooking instructions. Even when returning to our study place after holidays, my friends and I would bring food items that are not available in the state where we study. This practice is common among Mizos living in other parts of India and abroad; we always bring our Mizo food with us. During holidays when we return home, the first thing we often do is eat authentic Mizo food right outside the airport gate upon reaching Mizoram. There is even an inside joke among the Mizos that whenever we travel out of our state, as soon as we reach our destination, we say, "*Mizo bai ngei mai ei ava chakawm ve*," meaning "How I wish to eat real Mizo *bai* (a typical Mizo stew)."

These experiences have sparked my interest in exploring our food culture, even though I was initially unsure how to proceed. When I searched for literature on Mizo cuisine, I found very limited research available. The absence of substantial studies highlighted the need for reliable documentation. After consulting with my supervisors and senior scholars from Mizoram, I was advised to begin with foundational exploration. Given the apparent absence of prior sociological research, this study aims to provide an initial exploration into fundamental aspects, particularly the core food items and culinary traditions of the Mizos. Additionally, I chose to

focus on feasting practices as one of the objectives of my study because I believe they offer invaluable insights into food, traditions, and community dynamics within the Mizo culture.

The research approach is qualitative, involving a broad cross-section of respondents, including academicians, church leaders, senior citizens, caterers, and youths. The study employs a descriptive research design to provide context and background information for more in-depth studies. A combination of primary and secondary data was employed for this research. This research is interdisciplinary in nature, albeit inexpertly, which provides for a broader scope of concepts and methods. Qualitative methods, including participant and non-participant observations, open-ended interviews, and informal conversations, were used to gather primary data. Ethnographic methodologies such as sensory ethnography, *charlas culinarias* (culinary chats), and autoethnography are also employed to collect and interpret the data. Another revealing method for gathering data is what Carol Counihan called "informant documentation" (Miller & Deutsch, 2009, p. 175), where informants provide or produce materials such as descriptions of their food, food logs, old handwritten recipe books, journals, and old photos. These documents offer rich insights. The secondary sources of data for this study include books, journals, published articles, e-resources, cookbooks, photographs, and other available records. A literature survey was undertaken, and this information was integrated with the insights gained from fieldwork and the researcher's personal experiences. Respondents took part in one-on-one interviews or were either present at group discussions or observations, as well as casual conversations with the researcher, both in-person and virtual/online. To ensure confidentiality, some names of the respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms, while others who gave permission for their names to be used are included.

The trajectory of sensory ethnography was outlined by Sarah Pink (2015). She argues that sensory ethnography is not an ethnography of the senses, but rather an approach to ethnography or an ethnographic methodology that is influenced and guided by an understanding of the senses. Pink describes sensory ethnography as:

> …a way of thinking about and doing ethnography that takes as its starting point the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice. Sensory ethnography is used across scholarly, practice-based and applied disciplines. It develops an approach to the world and to research that accounts for how sensory ways of experiencing and knowing are integral both to the lives of people who

> participate in our research and to how we ethnographers practise our craft. (2015, p. xi)

Walmsley argued that the senses should not be studied as isolated subjects but, as David Howes (2005) suggests, they serve as powerful mediums for experiencing and understanding other aspects of social life (as cited in Walmsley, 2019). Sensory ethnography seeks to explore and reveal the often-overlooked bodily practices, experiences, skills, and implicit knowledge. As Walmsley (2019) argued, in this study, by closely examining taste, in conjunction with its associated sensory experiences, can reveal valuable perspectives on how cultural identities are constructed and expressed.

Participant observations, the principal technique of ethnographic research (Scott, 2014, p. 358), were carried out during social and religious events such as Christmas and New Year feasts, wedding and pre-wedding feasts, and death-related rituals. The cooking process as well as the behaviours around the preparation process were also observed during the fieldwork. Visual documentation through photographs and videos complemented the observations, which Pink (2013) termed "visual ethnography." This approach has been employed to facilitate easy re-engagement with the fieldwork, enabling the analytical process and recollection of sensory experiences. This has been particularly useful, allowing me to both observe and document the engagements of others simultaneously.

Conversations over food have been an effective way to gain knowledge. In *Deciphering a Meal*, Douglas (1972) reflects on her own experiences in domestic settings, using conversations and interactions around meal preparation and consumption as a basis for understanding the social meanings encoded in food practices. This approach allows her to explore how different meal structures and categories reflect social relations and hierarchies within specific contexts, particularly within her home environment. Abarca (2007) termed these kitchen-based discussions as *charlas culinarias*, meaning culinary chats. While Abarca's approach of *charlas culinarias* was initially developed to gather "women's stories through the lens of food" (Abarca, 2007, p. 189) and influence the formation of food consciousness, I have adapted it more broadly to gain insights from both women and men. Talking with people while they cook or engaging in conversations about food often leads to revealing discussions about certain issues and narratives that might not emerge in traditional interviews. There have been instances where I have unexpectedly engaged in rich, unplanned conversations on the topic, which were

not originally intended for recording. A significant portion of the knowledge for this study has been derived from such spontaneous, casual encounters.

In December 2019, a pilot study was conducted at a Christmas feast, with the intention of commencing ethnographic fieldwork in 2020. However, as the fieldwork was about to begin, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, leading to a nationwide lockdown starting in March 2020. The pandemic persisted into 2021, during which I contracted the virus and had to undergo isolation. Following my recovery, I faced additional health challenges that required major surgery. Consequently, I was unable to conduct the scheduled fieldwork throughout 2020 and 2021 due to pandemic-related restrictions and personal health issues. These circumstances led to feelings of demotivation and a mental pause due to uncertainty about the future. Nevertheless, there were positive aspects during this period. The pandemic-induced suspension of fieldwork marked a significant turning point for the study. It necessitated adjustments to the research methodology, resulting in changes in data collection and the adoption of alternative approaches, leading to a shift towards autoethnography[1] and secondary data collection. Besides the negative experiences, I had the opportunity to learn cooking skills, experiment with different recipes, and even create a small rooftop garden to grow vegetables. These activities, learned from my parents and other relatives, enriched my knowledge about Mizo food culture.

The primary challenge was that the government restricted hosting feasts or participating in public gatherings involving food, making it difficult to gather substantial data. Travel restrictions and the inability to conduct face-to-face interviews for a significant period led to increased reliance on autoethnography as well as secondary data sources such as books and news reports. Observations were further constrained by restrictions on social and religious events, resulting in a lower-than-anticipated number of recorded respondents. Consequently, data collection had to be supplemented through social media, telephone conversations, and my own experiences.

[1] Cooper and Lilyea (2022) described autoethnography as "a unique qualitative methodology that draws upon several qualitative traditions, including narrative research, autobiography, ethnography, and arts-based research" (p.197).

In an effort to engage with my research, I had numerous conversations over and about food and cooking with family, relatives, neighbours, and local community members during and after lockdowns. Informal observations were made during family gatherings and within my household. Whenever possible, I spontaneously asked acquaintances about their favourite Mizo food and their knowledge about cooking and food-related matters, often to the point of annoyingly repetitive questions. Listening to people's narratives, their fond memories and recollections of the past provided valuable insights into the topic.

The actual fieldwork was only carried out for a limited time in 2022 and early 2023. Not being able to continue as planned created a useful opportunity to return to the analysis with fresh eyes. I had originally planned to visit rural areas, conduct interviews, and participate in their community feast not just in the urban areas. But when the first pandemic lockdown began, travelling to rural areas for a community feast experience was no longer possible due to restrictions and limited time.

Despite these challenges, efforts were made to obtain valuable information from the limited sample size and observations conducted. The experience highlighted the need for adaptability in research methodologies in response to unforeseen circumstances, and the data gathered, albeit limited, provided meaningful insights into the foodways of Mizo society. However, this period of adaptation and reflection ultimately enriched the study, providing a deeper understanding of Mizo food culture.

1.8 Chapterization

The thesis is divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis, which discusses the key concepts for the study and provides a brief literature review. It discusses the research problem, research objectives, and the research methodology of the study along with a brief outline of the chapters discussed in the thesis.

The second chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of the historical and cultural context of Mizoram, offering a brief overview of Mizo culture and society through secondary sources. Starting with a brief description of the state and its geographical attributes, and by looking at the place of food and its influences on daily and religious life, it explores the traditional cultural practices of the Mizos. Lastly, this chapter also provides a brief overview of some of the traditional rituals and sacrifices that involve food items and their significance in such rituals.

The third chapter examines the intersection of faith, food, and socio-political changes during transitional periods in Mizo history. It traces the shift from indigenous religious practices to Christianity and how this transformation influenced food traditions and cultural values. The chapter also explores the impact of colonial encounters on Mizo cuisine, highlighting the introduction of new ingredients and practices. It also addresses the politics of hunger and conflict, shedding light on how famine and socio-political struggles shaped the relationship between food and survival in Mizo society.

The fourth chapter presents the traditional food items of the Mizos, highlighting their cultural significance and diverse flavours. By delving into the tastes and classifications of Mizo dishes, from staple rice and comfort food like porridges to stews and boiled vegetables, the chapter emphasises the inherent connection between Mizo food and their cultural identity. The discussions on meat, including the controversy surrounding dog meat, further illustrate the interconnection of tradition, preference, and modern reaction. Finally, the inclusion of side dishes like chutneys demonstrates the versatility of Mizo cuisine, rooted in tradition yet evolving with time.

The fifth chapter presents the traditional and evolving methods of food preservation and culinary practices among the Mizos. It explores traditional preservation techniques such as fermentation, smoking, and sun drying, highlighting their roles in ensuring food longevity and shaping cultural preferences. The chapter also discusses the blending of local and cross-border culinary elements from the neighbouring areas and how they have shaped Mizo cuisine, exemplifying the evolution and adaptability of Mizo foodways in a modern context.

The sixth chapter illustrates the practice of feasts in Mizo society. It highlights the evolution and adaptation of traditional feasts to the modern context by examining the Christmas feast. By analysing the introduction of the catering system in Aizawl, it discusses the influence of catering in the Mizo feast. The third research objective i.e. to explore the function and significance of communal feasts in Mizo society and analyse the impact of modern influences on the feasting tradition, has been explored in this chapter.

The seventh chapter is the concluding chapter where a summary of the thesis and the major findings are presented.

1.9 References

Abarca, M. E. (2007) *Charlas culinarias*: Mexican women speak from their public kitchens. *Food and Foodways*, 15(3-4), 183-212. 10.1080/07409710701620094

Appadurai, A. (1988). How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30(1), 3-24.

Barthes, R. (2013) Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption. In C. Counihan & P.V. Esterik (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd Edition (pp. 23–30). New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1961).

Bawitlung, L. (2022). The taste of salt: Identity, memory and food culture of the Mizo tribe. *New Literaria*, 3(1), 82-89. https://dx.doi.org/10.48189/nl.2022.v03i1.009

Beardsworth, A., & Keil, T. (1997). *Sociology on the menu: An invitation to the study of food and society*. London: Routledge.

Belasco, W. (2008). Why study food? *Food: The key concepts* (pp 1–14). Bloomsbury Collections. Berg. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350042148-ch-001

Borghini, A. (2021, September 9). *Philosophy of Food*. ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/philosophy-of-food-2670489

Borghini, A., Piras, N., & Serini, B. (2021). From Philosophy to Ontology: Rethinking Food Concepts. In JOWO Joint Ontology Workshops, Episode VII(l).

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2019). Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste (Richard Nice, Trans.). In C. Counihan, P.V. Esterik, & A.P. Julier (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 4th Edition (pp. 141-150). New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1979).

Camp, C. (2003). Foodways. In S. H. Katz, & W. W. Weaver (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*. New York: Scribner.

Carolan, M. (2012). *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*. New York: Routledge.

Celimli-Inaltong, I. (2014). You are what you eat. In P.B. Thompson, & D.M. Kaplan (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, (pp. 1845-1849). New York: Springer.

Chhangte, C. L. (2009). Globalization and Mizo food culture. In K. Robin (Ed.), *Chin: History, Culture and Identity* (pp. 393-399). New Delhi: Dominant Publishers and Distributors.

Cooper, R., & Lilyea, B. (2022). I'm interested in autoethnography, but how do I do it? *The Qualitative Report,* 27(1), 197-208. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5288

Counihan, C. M. (1999). *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*. Great Britain: Routledge.

Darnton, J. (2012*). Foodways: When food meets culture and history*. Michigan State University Extension. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/foodways_when_food_meets_culture_and_history

Das, A. K. (2022). *Grassroots Democracy and Governance in India: Understanding Power, Sociality and Trust*. Singapore: Springer.

Dawar, J. L. (2019). *Food in the Life of the Mizos: From Precolonial Times to the Presen*t. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

Deka, D., Rodrigues, J., Kikon, D., Karlsson, B. G., Barbora, S., & Tula, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Seeds and Food Sovereignty: Eastern Himalayan Experiences*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre.

DeSoucey, M. (2017). Food. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved 13th May 2019 from https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0072.xml

Douglas, M. (1972). Deciphering a meal. *Daedalus*, 101(1), 61-81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024058

Douglas, M., & Gross, J. (1981). Food and culture: Measuring the intricacy of rule systems. *Social Science Information*, 20(1), 1-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901848102000101

Fischler, C. (1988). Food, self and identity. *Social Science Information*, 27(2), 275–292.

Fox, R. (2002). *Food and eating: An anthropological perspective*. Social Issues Research Centre.

Germov, J., & Wiliams, L. (2017). *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite* (4th ed.). Australia: Oxford University Press.

Harris, M. (2013). The Abominable Pig. In C. Counihan & P.V. Esterik (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd Edition (pp. 59–71). New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1985).

Humphrey, L. T. (1989). Traditional Foods? Traditional Values? *Western Folklore*, *48*(2), 162–169. https://doi.org/10.2307/1499690

Jackson, K. (2023). *The Mizo Discovery of the British Raj: Empire and Religion in Northeast India, 1890–1920*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Jordana, J. (2000). Traditional foods: challenges facing the European food industry. *Food Research International*, 33(3-4), 147-152. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-9969(00)00028-4

Kaplan, D. M. (2012). *The Philosophy of Food*. California: University of California Press.

Kaplan, D. M. (2020). *Food philosophy: An introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kikon, D. (2015). Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the Nation's Table in India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38(2), 320-335. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1031936

Kikon, D. (2021). Bamboo shoot in our blood: Fermenting flavors and identities in Northeast India. *Current Anthropology*, 62(24), 376-387. https://doi.org/10.1086/715830

Korsmeyer, C. (1999). *Making sense of taste: Food and philosophy*. Cornell University Press.

Lalrofeli. (2019). *Colonialism and Food Culture in the Lushai Hills.* [Doctoral dissertation, Mizoram University]. Shodhganga@INFLIBNET. http://hdl.handle.net/10603/285942

Lalrohlui, F., Ghatak, S., Zohmingthanga, J., Hruaii V., & Kumar, N.S. (2021). Fermented pork fat (Sa-um) and lifestyle risk factors as potential indicators for type 2 diabetes among the Mizo population, Northeast India. *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 40(32). 10.1186/s41043-021-00257-8

Lalthanpuii, P.B., Lalruatfela, B., Zoramdinthara, & Lalthanzara, H. (2015). Traditional food processing techniques of the Mizo people of Northeast India. Science Vision, 15(1), 39-45.

Levi-Strauss, C. (2013). The Culinary Triangle. In C. Counihan & P.V. Esterik (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd Edition (pp. 40-47). New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1966).

Linares, P.A., & Meskin, A. (2021). Food, art and philosophy. *Crítica,* 53(157), 3–11. 10.22201/iifs.18704905e.2021.1243

Lupton, D. (1996). *Food, the Body and the Self*. New Delhi: Sage.

McCall, A.G. (2015). *Lushai Chrysalis*. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute. Department of Art & Culture. (Original work published 1949).

Mead, M. (2008). The problem of changing food habits. In C. Counihan & P.V. Esterik (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 2nd Edition, pp. 36-43). New York: Routledge.

Mennell, S., Murcott, A., Otterloo, A. H. (eds.). (1992). *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet, and Culture*. Belgium: Sage.

Miller, J., & Deutsch, J. (2009). *Food studies: An introduction to Research Methods.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Mintz, S., and Du Bois, C. (2002). The Anthropology of Food and Eating. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31(1): 99-119.

Mintz, S. W. (1996). *Tasting food, tasting freedom: Excursions into eating, culture and the past*. Beacon Press.

Murcott, A. (1982). The Cultural Significance of Food and Eating. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 41(2): 203-210. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1079/PNS1982003

Murcott, A. (1983). *The Sociology of Food and Eating: Essays on the Sociological Significance of Food.* England: Gower Publishing Company Limited.

Murcott, A. (2019). *Introducing the Sociology of Food and Eating*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury.

Murcott, A., Belasco, W., & Jackson, P. (Eds.). (2013). *The Handbook of Food Research*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Nag, S. (1999). Bamboo, rats and famines: Famine relief and perceptions of British paternalism in the Mizo Hills (India). *Environment and History*, 5(2), 245-252. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20723104

Nag, S. (2001). Tribals, Rats, Famine, State and the Nation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(12), 1029-1033. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4410428

Neuman, N. (2019). On the engagement with social theory in food studies: cultural symbols and social practices. *Food, Culture & Society*, 22(1), 78-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2018.1547069

Ngaihte, P., Zomawia, E., & Kaushik, I. (2019). Cancer in the North East India: Where we are and what needs to be done? *Indian Journal of Public Health*, 63(3), 251-253.

Pachuau, J. L. K. (2014). *Being Mizo: Identity and belonging in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Pachuau, J. L. K., & van Schendel, W. (2015). *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Parry, N.E. (1932). *The Lakhers*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Parry, N.E. (2009). *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute. (Original work published 1928).

Pathak, D. N., & Das, A. K. (2019). Introduction: Developmentalism—On a trope of (dis)enchantment. In D. N. Pathak, & A. K. Das (Eds.), Investigating developmentalism: Notions of development in the social sphere (pp. 1–34). Palgrave Macmillan.

Perullo, N. (2016). *Taste as experience: The philosophy and aesthetics of food*. Columbia University Press.

Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2nd Edn.). London: Sage.

Poulain, J.P. (2017). *The Sociology of Food: Eating and the Place of Food in Society.* London: Bloomsbury.

Ralte, L. (2022). 'Food, Memory and identity: Tracing Mizo Foodways.' *Litinfinite Journal*, 4(1), 13-20. https://doi.org/10.47365/litinfinite.4.1.2022.13-20

Ransome, P. (2010). *Social Theory for Beginners*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Reid, R. (2013). *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam: From 1883-1941*. Guwahati: Bhabani Books.

Ritzer, G. (2011). *Sociological Theory*. (5th ed.). Chennai: McGraw Hill Education (India) Private Limited.

Roluahpuia. (2023). *Nationalism in the Vernacular: State, Tribes, and the Politics of Peace in Northeast India*. India: Cambridge University Press.

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - National Centre for Disease Informatics & Research (2021). *Profile of Cancer and Related Health Indicators in the North East Region of India*. https://ncdirindia.org/All_Reports/NorthEast2021/resources/NE_chapter1.pdf

Sangkima. (1992). *Mizos: Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications.

Scott, J. (2014). *A Dictionary of Sociology* (4th ed.). United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Shakespear. J. (2008). *The Lushei Kuki Clans*. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute. Department of Art & Culture. (Original work published 1912).

Smith, B.C. (2016). Proust, the madeleine and memory. In Groes, S. (Ed.), *Memory in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences* (pp. 38-41). UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 10.1057/9781137520586_3

Sitlhou, H. (2020). Food culture and identity in Northeast India: Prospects for Social Science Research. *Explorations*, 4 (2), 49-66.

Symons, M. (1994). Simmel's gastronomic sociology: An overlooked essay. *Food and Foodways*, 5(4), 333-351. 10.1080/07409710.1994.9962016

Turoldo, F., Luce, S., Manzato. G., & Tuono, M. (2021). Man is what he eats: The philosophy and ethics of eating. *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, 23(2), 761-778.

Walmsley, E. (2019). Race, place and taste: Making identities through sensory experience in Ecuador. In C. Counihan, P.V. Esterik, & A.P. Julier (Eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 4th Edition (pp. 110-126). New York: Routledge.

Whit, W. C. (1995). *Food and Society: A Sociological Approach*. New York: General Hall, Inc.

Zama, M.C. (n.d.) 'Feasting Culture: The Morphing of Feast of Merit.' *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 9-24.