

# Westernization of Food Culture: It's Impact on Health, Economy and Tradition in the Manipuri Society

Dr. KSH Bimolata Devi

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Home Science, Dhanamanjuri University; Imphal, Manipur, India

Email: bimolata\_2006[at]yahoo.com

**Abstract:** Food is one of the basic needs of life. It is also part of one's own identity. The central part of our community, social, cultural and religious life. It has been an expression of love, friendship and happiness at religious, social and family get togethers. Manipur is a small state in the north eastern part of India. The food culture of Manipur state is considered to be a major cultural heritage and practice of the indigenous people of the state. The unique traits of the locale have been of great influence to the tourism growth and economy of the state. Many countries, states, all over the world are affected by westernization, including our state of Manipur, a land of very deep cultural roots. Westernization is the process in which regional or local cultures become heavily influenced by western culture and society. It has the power to bring about many positive changes as well as negative changes in a society. Traditional food markets and local vendors selling foods on the street cannot compete with the branded and easily available, tasty fast foods. The entries of many multinational fast-food outlets have revolutionized the industry of our small and not so rich state like Manipur in its own way. Many unemployed youths are taking advantage of the westernized institution to set up fast food businesses on the streets. Today, the cuisine of Manipur is being altered by the increased consumption of these western fast foods. Consumption of such foods contributes towards weight gain, certain deficiency diseases, heart and liver diseases, costly treatments, healthcare, etc. Most of the foods are junk foods, with very poor nutritional values. There has also been a loss of traditional values. Not only has the content of the diet been an issue, but also the way in which the food is consumed. While some changes are embraced by the population, others can be seen as a threat. In order as not to lose our own identity, therefore we need to find out the bad sides and improve upon them.

**Keywords:** Food culture, Health, Economy, Tradition, Society

## 1. Introduction

Westernization of food culture refers to the global spread and influence of Western eating habits, food products, and culinary practices on other regions and cultures, the adoption of Western dietary practices and food products. This phenomenon has been driven by factors such as globalization, media, trade, and migration, and marked by several trends, such as the increasing consumption of fast food, processed foods, and sugar - sweetened beverages.

Food is one of the basic needs of life. It is also part of one's own identity. The central part of our community, social, cultural and religious life. It has been an expression of love, friendship and happiness at religious, social and family get togethers. The shift towards Western diets can impact the culture, local economies and social structures. For instance, the growth of fast food chains can alter local food systems and employment patterns.

Manipur is a small state in the north eastern part of India. The food culture of Manipur state is considered to be a major cultural heritage and practice of the indigenous people of the state. Western food culture is heavily promoted through movies, television, social media, and advertising. The unique traits of the locale have been of great influence to the tourism growth and economy of the state. This exposure shapes perceptions and aspirations related to food, especially among younger generations.

### Dietary Changes:

The introduction of Western fast food and processed foods has led to changes in traditional eating habits. In Manipur,

this may result in a shift from locally sourced, traditional foods to more Western - style diets high in fats, sugars, and processed ingredients.

Western fast food chains like McDonald's, KFC, and Burger King have established a significant presence in countries around the world. These establishments offer standardized menus that often prioritize convenience and speed over traditional dining practices. Western diets, characterized by higher consumption of meat, dairy products, refined sugars, and fats, have influenced eating habits in non - Western countries. This shift often leads to decreased consumption of local grains, vegetables, and legumes. The decline in traditional food practices can result in a loss of knowledge related to the nutritional benefits of traditional foods and their preparation.

### Health & Nutritional Implications:

Today, the cuisine of Manipur is being altered by the increased consumption of these western fast foods. Consumption of such foods contributes towards weight gain, certain deficiency diseases, heart and liver diseases, costly treatments, healthcare, etc

- **Increased Obesity Rates:** The adoption of Western dietary patterns has been linked to an increase in health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in various parts of the world, due to increased consumption of these high - calorie, low - nutrient foods. Traditional diets, which are often more balanced and nutritious, are being replaced by diets high in processed foods and unhealthy fats.

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- **Chronic Diseases:** Western dietary patterns are associated with a higher risk of chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension. Diets high in saturated fats, sugars, and refined grains contribute to these health issues.
- **Nutritional Imbalance:** Most of the western foods are junk foods, with very poor nutritional values. Western diets often lack essential nutrients found in traditional diets, such as fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Traditional diets, which are often rich in fresh vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, may be overshadowed by the influx of processed foods, leading to potential nutrient deficiencies and various health problems.

### Cultural and Traditional Impact:

Many countries, states, all over the world are affected by westernization, including our state of Manipur, a land of very deep cultural roots. Westernization is the process in which regional or local cultures become heavily influenced by western culture and society. It has the power to bring about many positive changes as well as negative changes in a society.

**Erosion of Traditional Practices:** The prevalence of Western foods may lead to a decline in the consumption of traditional Manipuri dishes and food practices, which are integral to cultural identity. Western foods can overshadow traditional food practices and reduce the consumption of locally sourced and culturally significant foods, potentially affecting overall dietary quality.

Western food culture has also brought about changes in dining etiquette and practices. The concept of eating on - the - go, for instance, has become more prevalent. Additionally, the aesthetic and presentation of food, as seen in Western culinary traditions, have influenced global food trends. There has also been a loss of traditional values. Not only has the content of the diet been an issue, but also the way in which the food is consumed

- **Culinary Fusion:** While the Westernization of food culture has led to the spread of Western foods, it has also given rise to fusion cuisine. This blending of Western and local culinary practices has resulted in innovative dishes that reflect a combination of different cultural influences.
- **Festivals and Celebrations:** Traditional festivals and cultural events that center around specific foods may see a shift in menu offerings. Western foods might be introduced or replace traditional dishes, affecting the authenticity and cultural significance of these events.
- **Family and Social Gatherings:** Traditional communal meals and social gatherings, which play a key role in maintaining cultural ties, may be influenced by the convenience and appeal of Western food options.
- **Alteration of Culinary Traditions:** The introduction and popularity of Western foods, such as fast food and processed snacks, can lead to a decline in traditional cooking practices and recipes. Traditional Manipuri dishes, which are often prepared with local ingredients and specific methods, may become less common.
- **Shift in Eating Habits:** Western fast food can alter meal patterns and eating habits, potentially replacing

traditional meals that are typically consumed in a communal setting with more individual and convenience - oriented eating practices.

- **Cultural Adaptation:** The community might adapt by integrating Western foods into traditional meals, which can affect the nutritional profile of the diet.
- **Cultural Identity:** The growing preference for Western foods may contribute to a loss of cultural identity as traditional food practices and culinary heritage become less prominent.

### Changes in Local Food Markets:

Traditional food markets and local vendors selling foods on the street cannot compete with the branded and easily available, tasty fast foods. The entries of many multinational fast food outlets have revolutionized the industry of our small and not so rich state like Manipur in its own way. Many unemployed youths are taking advantage of the westernized institution to set up fast food businesses on the streets

- **Shift in Consumption Patterns:** The introduction and popularity of Western fast food and processed foods can reduce demand for traditional local foods. This shift can impact local farmers and food producers who rely on the consumption of traditional crops and ingredients.
- **Market Competition:** Western food chains entering the market can create competition for local eateries and traditional food vendors, potentially leading to the decline of local businesses and changes in food pricing.
- **Local Food Industries:** The rise of Western food chains can impact local food vendors and markets that sell traditional Manipuri foods. This shift can lead to economic challenges for small - scale producers and vendors who rely on traditional food practices.

### Economic Opportunities and Challenges:

- **New Business Ventures:** The popularity of Western food can create economic opportunities for new businesses, including fast food franchises and imported food products. This can lead to job creation in sectors related to food service and retail.
- **Economic Disparities:** The shift towards Western diets may exacerbate economic disparities, as higher - income groups might afford more Western food options, while lower - income populations may struggle to access traditional or healthier foods.
- **Economic Influence:** The food industry has become a significant economic driver, with Western brands often dominating the market. This has implications for local food producers and small businesses, which may struggle to compete with multinational corporations.
- **Cultural Erosion:** The increasing prevalence of Western food culture can lead to the erosion of traditional culinary practices and cultural identity. This can have long - term economic implications as traditional food - related industries and cultural practices may decline. The adoption of Western food culture can influence social norms and eating habits, impacting social gatherings and family dynamics related to food consumption.

### Impact on Traditional Agriculture:

- **Reduced Demand for Local Produce:** As Western food products gain popularity, there may be a reduced demand for locally grown crops that are integral to traditional diets. This can affect the income and livelihood of local farmers.
- **Agricultural Shifts:** Farmers may shift their production to crops that align with the demand for Western ingredients, potentially leading to changes in local agricultural practices and land use.

### Research and Policy Implications:

- **Research Needs:** Studies are needed to assess the extent of dietary changes and their health impacts specifically in Manipuri society. This includes epidemiological studies and surveys of dietary patterns and health outcomes.
- **Policy Measures:** Public health interventions may be required to promote balanced diets and encourage the preservation of traditional food practices. Educational campaigns can help raise awareness about the risks of Western dietary patterns and the benefits of traditional diets.

## 2. Conclusion

The Westernization of food culture is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with both positive and negative implications for societies around the world. It reflects broader trends in globalization and cultural exchange, highlighting the dynamic nature of food as a cultural and economic entity.

Understanding the impact of Westernization on Manipuri food traditions involves exploring how these global influences are integrated into or replace traditional practices and how they affect the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the community.

Westernization of food culture have significant impacts on traditions in Manipuri society, affecting cultural practices, social structures, and local traditions. In some regions, there is a conscious effort to resist Westernization and preserve traditional food practices. This includes promoting local ingredients, traditional cooking methods, and cultural heritage.

This topic highlights the complex interactions between global dietary trends and local food cultures, emphasizing the need for targeted research and tailored public health strategies. While some changes are embraced by the population, others can be seen as a threat. In order as not to lose our own identity, therefore we need to find out the bad sides and improve upon them

## 3. Recommendations

- 1) There is need to conduct local research on dietary patterns and health outcomes in Manipur or similar regions to provide specific insights.
- 2) To Compare with studies on the Westernization of food culture in other regions to understand broader trends and their applicability to Manipur.

- 3) To explore the Economic Impacts of Fast Food Chains on Local Food System – and how the entry of fast food chains affects local economies.
- 4) To Go for case studies focused on the impact of globalization and Westernization on local food systems and economies in similar regions to gain insights relevant to Manipur.

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