

NEPALI COOKING : A SHORT ESSAY INCLUDING RECIPES

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Kathmandu

The cuisine of Nepal is not famous for its variety or its special dishes. It would probably be true to say that it is not famous at all, in the way that regional Indian cooking and South East Asian food is throughout the world. But to those who have eaten it, it will always recall Nepal, and, if one can penetrate beyond the undistinguished Chinese or Tibetan of the restaurants of Kathmandu, it is possible to be rewarded by food that is sustaining, well-balanced in its components and distinctively flavoured. It's not true that Nepali food is 'hot'. Most is without strong taste, like boiled rice; and the dishes of *tarkari* (vegetables), *achar* (pickle), and *dal* (lentil sauce) that go with rice to make a good Kathmandu meal may be quite bland—or bitter, sharp, aromatic or salty in acceptable variety.

Dal-bhat is probably what most people think of as the commonest dish in the Nepali cuisine, although it is not, in fact, the most commonly eaten meal in parts of the country where rice is not grown. It consists of boiled rice with a sauce of lentils, and is usually accompanied by various vegetable mixtures and pickles. There are many kinds of rice in Kathmandu. The best and most expensive is long-grained, called *basmati* or *masina*, which has a distinctive, pleasant smell when it is being cooked. Another is the white, plump *marsi*, which is also regarded as a "good" rice. There are grades of *marsi*. *Towali* is somewhat brown in colour and cheaper to buy. People say that it stays in the stomach longer and has more vitamins than the others. *Tapchini* is a grade of rice suitable for making *jard* or beer, but difficult to cook well for eating. Rice is cooked in the old-fashioned round-bottomed brass pots called *kasauri*, or in modern stainless steel or aluminium pans.

Boiled Rice

Wash 2 cups of rice. Do not pour the water directly on to the rice. Pour the water first on the hand held over the rice so as not to break the grains. Wash the rice about four times and drain off the water.

Add $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of water (sufficient to cover the rice) and a heaped teaspoon of ghee. Do not use poor ghee. If necessary, use butter instead.

Bring to the boil. Stir the rice only four times. Cook only 15 minutes. Each grain of rice must be separate and undamaged.

The main source of protein in *dal-bhat* is the *dal* or lentil sauce which is served with the rice. There are several kinds of dal. Black dal is grown in Kathmandu at the edge of the paddy. Yellow dal comes from the Tarai. Dried peas and beans are

also called dal, and various types are often mixed. Dal can also be cooked in a *kasauri*. (Note: do not leave cooked food standing for a long time in a brass container, because a metallic taint will occur in the food.)



Kasauri

Mas ko dal (black dal) or Mugi Dal (yellow dal)

Ingredients:

$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup dal

$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon of ghee.

Ground ginger to taste.

4 cups water.

1 pinch jimbu. (A special Nepali spice; see following note).

Process:

1. Boil water and $\frac{1}{4}$ tablespoon of ghee.
2. Put the dal and salt in the water and cook for an hour for black dal and half an hour for yellow dal.
3. Add ground ginger.
4. Take off fire.
5. Heat the rest of the ghee in a stirring spoon and fry the *jimbu* and put it in the dal.
6. Serve hot

The *jimbu* mentioned in the above recipe, and the *timur* in the recipe which follows seem to be uniquely Nepali spices. *Jimbu* looks like dried, broken tarragon leaves while *timur* is small, dark berries containing black seeds. The shell of the *timur* berries is highly aromatic. *Jimbu* and *timur* and other spices can be bought from shops in Indrachowk in Kathmandu.

With *dal-bhat*, vegetables are also eaten, and it is these that provide minerals and vitamins. Over the year a great variety of vegetables are available in Kathmandu, for example potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage, *mula* or giant radishes, aubergines, *okra* or lady-fingers, broccoli, asparagus, tomatoes, onions, marrows, cucumbers

and various local specialities—although once a season is over the vegetable will not appear again until its appointed time next year. Two or three vegetables, often mixed together, are eaten at every meal.

Mixed Vegetables (mismas)

Heat $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mustard oil (*tori ko tel*) until bubbles form or blue smoke starts rising. This oil has a strong smell and unless it is properly heated the smell will linger in the food.

Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ghee and stir.

Add pinch of asafoetida (*hing*), pinch of bay leaf, pinch of *timur*

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fenugreek seeds (*methi*)

4 red chilli peppers (*khorsani*)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup garlic (*lasun*)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup ginger (*aduwa*)

1 large onion (*pyaj*), chopped

8 peeled and chopped potatoes (*alu*)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon turmeric (*besar*)

$2\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt (*nun*) (more or less to taste)

1 small head of cauliflower (*kauli*) cut in pieces.

Cover and simmer until tender (about 15 to 20 minutes).

Then add 1 cup green onions cut in sections

1 cup of green peas (*matar kerau*)

Stir for some time.

Alu ko achar (Potato Chutney or Pickle)

Boil 15 biggish potatoes with the skins on. Peel the skins off and slice the potatoes in halves.

Prepare 1 cup of ground sesame seeds (*til*) which must be roasted first then ground

2 tablespoons of chilli powder (*khorsani*)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup timur

5 teaspoons of salt

1 cup water.

Put all these ingredients into the bowl with the potatoes.

Heat $\frac{1}{3}$ cup mustard oil (*tori ko tel*) in a frying pan until bubbles form.

Prepare 1 teaspoon ground ginger

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fenugreek seeds (*methi*)

a pinch of jimbu

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of green coriander leaves

4 red peppers.

Put all these ingredients into the mustard oil and let stand for some time.
Mix the ingredients in the oil with the potato mixture. After mixing well, serve.

Cooked Tomato Chutney.

Heat 2 cups of mustard oil.

Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of garlic
1 handful of ginger (fresh)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of onions (chopped)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of methi
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon jimbu
8 chillis (powdered)
4 tablespoons salt
1 teaspoon timur
1 teaspoon cumin seed
3 teaspoons chlli
1 handful green coriander
10 tomatoes.

Cook for at least 15 minutes and serve.

Add 5 green chilli peppers, sliced
5 tomatoes sliced and quartered
a few fresh leaves of coriander (*dhania*) with discarded stems
1 heaped teaspoon of chilli powder
2 heaped teaspoons of coriander powder (*dhania*)
1 tablespoon of cumin seed (*jira*)
1 heaped teaspoon garlic powder (*lasun*)

Finally add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, and simmer until the vegetables are tender. Be careful that the vegetables do not burn.

Pickle (*achar*) is essential to give piquancy to rice, dal and tarkari. There are many different sorts of pickle. The piquancy comes from the spices, not from vinegar, which is not used, at least in the following recipes.

Potato and Cauliflower Pickle

Ingredients:

5 cups cauliflower broken into flowerlets
20 small potatoes
3 tablespoons sesame seed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup *nibuwa* (lime) or lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon turmeric
2 teaspoons of salt
2 tablespoons of mustard oil

3 garlic buds
6 dry chillis
Some fenugreek seeds (*methi*)

Process:

Boil the potatoes and cauliflower for 15 minutes. Peel the potatoes and cut them into small pieces. Fry and grind sesame seed, chillies and garlic, Mix potatoes, cauliflowers, sesame, chillies, salt, turmeric and juice. (Heat the mustard oil until the smoke comes, add the methi and fry till brown, then put it into the pickle.



Paneu

Pickled Tomato and Peas

Ingredients:

1 pau ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb) tomatoes
1 pau green peas
2 onions
1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger
2 tablespoons salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mustard oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon turmeric
a little mint
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon methi
1 teaspoon spices (ginger, clove, jira, timur etc.)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup green coriander leaves (*dhania*)

Process:

Wash tomatoes, onions, peas, *dhania*, garlic, ginger, chillies well, then chop them into small pieces.

Heat mustard oil till the bluish smoke comes. Put in *methi*, onion, garlic, ginger, spices, peas, tomatoes, chillies.

Add salt and turmeric and let it cook for 15 minutes. After that put in the chopped *dhania* and mix well.

Meat is not eaten every day by Nepalis, because it is expensive. Also there are various religious taboos on the eating of meats. Of course beef is not eaten at all as it is a crime to slaughter beef. It is also a crime to kill any female animal, although,

as people say, it is difficult to tell from the carcase of a goat, say, whether the animal was male or female. Once a month, on the day when there is no moon, the slaughter of any animal is forbidden. This is called *aunsi*. Once a fortnight there is *ekadasi* when no meat may be sold or eaten (and no rice should be eaten either.) *Aunsi* and *ekadasi* are connected with the worship of Shiva. The sacred nature of the cow is because the cow is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The available flesh is mutton (which means goat, not sheep usually), buffalo, pork and chicken. But not everybody can eat all of these. Brahmans are sometimes complete vegetarians (and some cannot eat onions or eggs either) but many brahmans can eat mutton, although not chicken, buffalo or pork. Higher caste Chetris and also Gurungs don't eat buffalo. Other groups (e.g. Magars, Tamangs) do eat buffalo. Newars don't eat pork. In general, mutton will suit most people except vegetarians.



Dadu

Lamb (*bhera*) or Mutton (*khasi*) Curry

Ingredients:

- 4 small onions
- 3 tablespoons butter or ghee
- 4 pound leg or shoulder of lamb or mutton
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tablespoon coriander
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon turmeric
- 2 teaspoons salt
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water

Process:

Dice the meat. Brown the onions, thinly sliced, to a pale brown in the butter or ghee. Add spices, except the salt. Brown the meat, turning it all the time, and add water. Add salt and cook, covered, till tender. Add more water if needed. This light and delicate curry has lots of gravy. It should cover all the pieces of meat.

Bhutuwa (Fried Mutton)

Cut 2 pounds of mutton into very small fine pieces.

Rub with turmeric and salt.

Heat 1 cup mustard oil and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ghee. Let the oil and ghee heat until bubbles form.

Prepare $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of coriander

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon *jimbu*

- 6 red chillies (*khorsani*)
- 6 pieces of ginger (*aduwa*)
- 1/4 cup of garlic (*lasun*) ground
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 2 1/2 teaspoons salt (or according to taste).

Cook the spices in the oil with the meat. After the meat has been cooking for about 40 minutes:

- Add 2 heaped tablespoons of chilli powder
- 3 tablespoons cumin powder
- 1/4 teaspoon timur
- 2 teaspoons fresh ground or chopped ginger (*adnwa*)
- 2 teaspoons garlic.

Cook for a further 20 minutes.

Mutton (*khasi*) Curry

Ingredients for 10 persons.

- 3 pounds of mutton
- 3 or 4 onions
- 1/4 cup ghee
- 1/4 cup oil
- 3 cloves
- 3 buds garlic
- 3/4 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon chopped ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg powder (*jai phal*)
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 cup curd
- 3 cups water
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon powder (*dalchini* powder)

Process:

1. Cut mutton into pieces and wash.
2. Chop the onions into small pieces.
3. Heat the oil and ghee in pan.
4. When oil and ghee are heated, fry a few cloves and add the onions. Fry the onions till pale brown.
5. Add the curry powder to the fried onions and cook 5 minutes.
6. Add the meat and salt and cook for 20 minutes in a pressure cooker at ten pounds pressure.
7. Add curd and water for gravy, cover and leave to cook until it has thickened.

8. Before taking it off the fire, add cinnamon powder.
9. Serve hot.

With these dishes, and especially if there are guests, it would be appropriate to make more vegetable dishes.



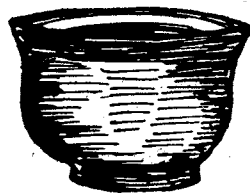
Thal
Cabbage and Potatoes

Ingredients for 20 persons:

- 5 pounds potatoes
- 3 pounds cabbage
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ghee
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup oil
- 3 tablespoons salt
- 2 tablespoons turmeric
- 1 teaspoon *methi* (fenugreek)
- 5 medium-sized onions
- 1 tablespoon mixed spices (ginger, cloves, *timur*, etc.)
- 1 cup water

Process:

1. Wash cabbage and potatoes and cut in small pieces.
2. Put the pan on the fire and heat the fat.
3. When the smoke comes add the *methi* and fry till black.
4. Fry the onions till brown, add the potates and fry for five miunutes.
5. Add the cabbage and salt and tumeric (*besar*).
6. After ten minutes add the mixed spices.
7. Add 1 cup boiled water and cook for 30 minutes.
8. Serve hot.



Kacaura
Green Leafy Tarkari (*Sag Tarkari*)

Ingredients for 8 persons.

- 4 pau ($1\frac{3}{4}$ lb) green leafy vegetables

- 4 tablespoons mustard oil
- 1 tablespoon aniseed (*jwanu*)
- 5 big dry chillis
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 2 teaspoons salt

Process:

1. Wash and cut the green vegetables.
2. Heat mustard oil till blue smoke comes.
3. Put aniseed, dry chillis and turmeric into the hot oil and fry till brown.
4. Put the greens in the oil and add salt and cook for a minute. Then turn the greens once, completely, and cover. Cook over a slow fire for 15 minutes. Take off the lid every now and then and stir to prevent scorching.
5. Serve hot.

A sweet dish at the end of a meal is not usual for every day, but if the occasion is special, such as when there are guests, a sweet may be eaten.

Yoghurt Pudding (*Sikarnai*)

Prepare Curd or yoghurt (*dahi*) by placing the yoghurt in a piece of fine material to drain for several hours or overnight, depending on the consistency preferred.

Put 4 cups of the prepared yoghurt in a bowl.

Put 1 pinch of saffron (Kashmiri saffron is best) and 1/2 teaspoon rose water (*gulaf pani*) in a marble mortar and allow it to stand for a while. Put these ingredients into the curd.

Prepare 2 cups of sugar (*chini*)

1/2 teaspoon cloves (*lwang*)

1 teaspoon cinnamon (*dalchini*)

1 teaspoon cardamon (*alainchi*)

1/2 teaspoon black pepper (*marich*) by powdering all the spices in the mortar and mixing with the sugar.

Put all the above ingredients into the curd and stir well.

The above recipes are Kathmandu recipes and the meal they are part of is centred on the rice, which is eaten in great quantities. But in other parts of the kingdom rice is not always available and the staple foods are potatoes or wheat or maize or millet. These are cooked in plain, and to this writer, unedifying ways, sometimes with inadequate salt, which makes them very tasteless. But there is one speciality of the hills which is also found in Kathmandu which is used to give flavour and also, presumably, vitamins and minerals, to the staple potatoes or grain. This is *gundruk*, made from dried *mula* (radishes) or cabbage or cauliflower leaves.

To make *gundruk*, take any kind of *sag* (green leafy vegetable) or strips of *mula* flesh, wash it, and put it in the sun for one or two days. Then tear it into strips (if it

is sag; if it is mula it will already be in strips) and put it into an earthen jar with a little hot water and keep it outside for three or four days. Then take it out of the jar and dry it in the sun for about seven days. Then keep it in cheesecloth putting it in the sun from time to time. Use it in making chutneys and soups. Gundruk is often eaten with *masura*, another dried preparation. Masura is made by soaking dal, and mixing it with dried potato, mula, marrow, or all three. The wet mixture is formed into little handful-sized heaps and allowed to dry. To cook both gundruk and masura, fry in a pan and add a little water.

Gundruk is useful because it is a preserved food like pickle which can be stored for at least some time. There is not a great deal of food preservation carried out in Nepal, although some vegetables, like pumpkins and chillis, will naturally keep for a few months or more, and of course grains such as wheat and rice keep from one season to the next. Rice keeps for two or three years. The older it is, the more water it needs to be cooked. New rice is also eaten, although it will be a bit sticky when it is cooked if it less than a year old.

Another local taste is for *jard*, which is rice or millet beer. It and the distilled spirit *rakshi* are the commonest forms of alcoholic beverage. Rakshi requires some special equipment and there is a law against its manufacture at home. But *jard* is easy to make. To finish this essay, here is a recipe for *jard* made from rice. It is a simple version, requiring no special equipment. (*Jard* made by some groups, such as Newars, is especially fine but is a longer process than described here and requires a certain strainer for the first cooking of the rice.) Newari *jard* is clear and almost pale green in colour. The following recipe gives a liquid which is slightly milky but still delicious. It is made in a week.



Karua

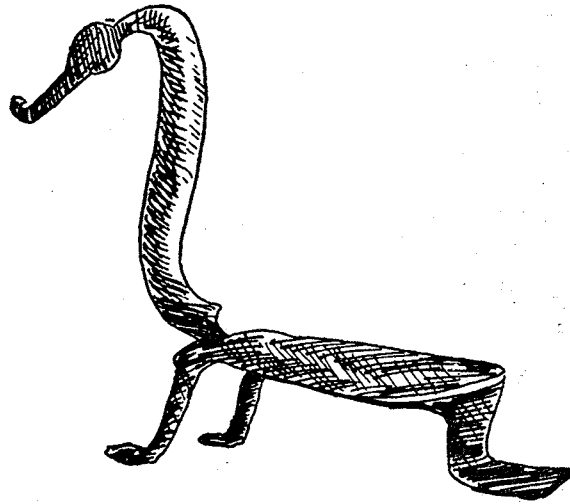
Rice Beer or *Jard*

Take 4 manas (1.65 kg. or a bit less than 4 lbs.) of rice and one piece of *marcha* (a special fermenting agent available in the bazaar).

Cook the rice and spread it out on a basket tray until it is cooled down but

still warm. Crumble the *marcha* and mix it in with the rice. Put the mixture in a warm place. Leave it for one day.

The following day the rice should smell pleasantly of fermentation. Now put it in a big jug or earthenware pot (one that is blackened on the outside, so that it doesn't leak) and add an equal quantity by volume of water.



Culesi

Glossary of Nepali terms.

1. Fruits, vegetables and spices.

apple	syau
banana	kera
beans	simi
brussels sprouts	sano bandakobi
cabbage	bandakobi
cardamon	alainchi
carrot	gajar
cauliflower	kauli
celery and lettuce	jirisag
cherry	paiyun
chilli	khorsani
chives	chyapi
cinnamon	dalchini
cloves	lwang

cucumber	kankro
cumin seed	jira
fenugreek	methi
garlic	lasun
grapes	angur
guava	amba
jujube	bayar
khol-rabi	gyanth kobi
lemon	kagati
mango	amp
matar	kerau
mustard leaf	rayko sag
musk melon	kharbuja
okra	ram-tori
onion	pyaj
orange	suntala
papaya	mewa
peaches	aru
pears	naspati
pepper (bell)	bhede khorsani
pepper (black)	marich
pepper (hot)	khorsani
persimmon	halwabed
pineapple	bhuin katahar
plum	arubakhara
pomegranate	anar
pomelo	bhogate (local grapefruit)
potato	alu
potatoes (sweet)	sakarkhand
pumpkin	pharsi
radish	mula
salt	nun
sesame seed	til
spinach	palung
sugar	chini
tomato	golbhera
turmeric	besar
turnip	salgam

walnut	okhar
water-cress	chamsur
water-melon	tarbuja
yellow mustard	sarson

2. Other foods.

baking powder	baking powder
baking soda	baking soda
beaten rice	chyura
chicken	kukhura
clarified butter	ghiu
cocoa	kokoa
coconut	nariwal
coconut oil	nariwal tel
cornflour	makaiko pitho
curd	dahi
chick pea	chana
golden syrup	golden syrup
milk	dudh
molasses	chaku
mustard oil	toriko tel
nutmeg	jaiphal
sesame oil	tilko tel
vanilla	vanilla
vegetable oil	tel
wheat flour	gahunko pitho

Cooking utensils

pestle and mortar	khal
frying pan	tapke
cutter	chulesi
pot	kasauri