



with influences from north, south, east and west that have also evolved within Nepal into homegrown dishes.

Like Timmur, *The Nepal Cook Book* is an important effort to document the diversity of Nepal's cuisine, which is being eroded steadily by Dal Bhat hegemony. Each chapter is visually rich, showing not just professional food photography but also the fabric, utensils and even jewelry of the ethnic groups featured.

Ethnic cuisine tends to be difficult to replicate because ingredients are not available or its preparation needs practice. But Dolly Rana has simplified the process so that the preparation of Tamang Batuk, Sherpa Thukpa, Tharu Dhikari, for example, seem to be a piece of cake, as it were.


When Nepalis stop at 'Thakali' restaurants along the highway in Mugling, they are usually looking for a Dal Bhat eatery that is just

cleaner and the food tastier than other places. But it is from the Thakali chapter in *The Nepal Cook Book* that we find out how inaccurate this stereotype is. Original Thakali recipes from Mustang have buckwheat Dhindo, Kanchemba Fried Buckwheat Fingers, Yak Sukuti, and Timur Chohe. And Dolly Rana gives us step-by-step instructions to prepare them so that the amateur chef will not be intimidated.

Few know that the most popular dish among the Magar community is the Sutkeri Kukhura Ko Jhol. Unlike what its name suggests, this is not a dish made of the mother hen, but a nutritious broth especially prepared for nursing mothers. The Gurung have gone a step further and marinated their chicken into a pickle so that it does not spoil on long journeys in the days before refrigeration. And the closest Nepal's cuisine comes to preparing crustaceans is the Tharu Ghoongi snail dish.

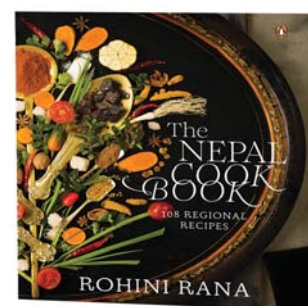
The most elaborate chapter is on more mainstream Thakuri-Brahmin-Chhetri food, but even here we find speciality dishes that some of us may not be familiar with: Koiralo Ko Achar (nothing to do with the clan of Nepal's former prime ministers) is a pickle made of ebony buds, or Bhang Ko Achar made from hemp seeds, roasted so they are not narcotic.

Besides the chapters on ethnic cuisines, *The Nepal Cook Book* also has helpful sections on indigenous spices (jimbu and timur), and Nepali fermented foods (kinema, gundruk, tama, yangben). And there is even an explanation about the significance of the number 108 in Vedic cosmology which is why Dolly has chosen that many recipes for her book.

She explains in her foreword: 'I hope that with this auspicious number, my book will succeed in offering a higher level of insight into Nepalese cuisine and culture.'  **Kunda Dixit**



ALL PHOTOS: THE NEPAL COOK BOOK



The Nepal Cook Book
108 Regional Recipes
by Rohini Rana
Penguin Viking, 2024
Hardcover 298 pages Rs3,200

of women

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not have a separate tent for a woman. Another expedition to Afghanistan turned her down because a female climber would create 'excretory' complications at high altitude.

The American Alpine Club (AAC) denied her all-women expedition to Denali. ("Chicks? Climb Denali? No way dames could ever make it up that bitch.") But Blum went anyway, and also joined women climbers in British Columbia, the Pamirs and Kashmir.

The first ever female ascent of Denali was ignored by America's climbing community. It was not enough for women climbers to be as skilled as men, they had to be stronger and more experienced to be accepted. Travelling in India on an expedition to Trisul, Blum was shocked by the poverty and decided to change the trajectory of her research away from theoretical science to 'help solve the planet's problems'.

After joining the American Bicentennial Everest Expedition in 1976, Blum returned in the autumn of 1978 with a group of 12 female climbers to take the route up the same face as Maurice Herzog had 28 years earlier on Annapurna I.

But first, again, she had to fight an AAC decision not to endorse an all-women team, and one led by her. Finally, the American women reached the north base of Annapurna I. The peak is 800m lower than Everest, but sections are more technical and avalanche prone. Four in every 10 do not make it back alive from Annapurna.

The expedition was as much an adventure as a statement highlighted in its cheeky t-shirts: 'A Woman's Place Is On Top'.

In her 1980 book *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, Blum admits that had she known of the post-monsoon avalanches on Annapurna she would have gone to another mountain. As leader, she also had to constantly balance the need to be decisive, while being democratic. The expedition faced a strike by Sherpas, who perhaps did not like taking orders from a woman leader.

Eventually, after more storms, avalanches and personality clashes, four members made it to the summit: two women and two Nepali male guides. Two other women climbers tried to make a second summit bid, but were killed near Camp IV.


The deaths marred the expedition's triumph, and there were naysayers dismissing the women's achievement because Nepali male guides helped them reach the top.

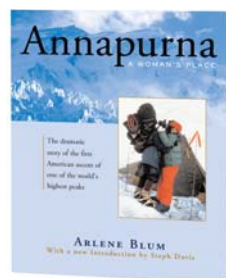
After *Annapurna*, Blum returned to do the Great Himalayan Traverse from Bhutan to Ladakh in 1982. She has since lived in Nepal for a year and visits often to hike.

"Nepal has changed a lot, it is more prosperous with farmers talking on mobiles," she said last month after doing the Millennium Trek south of Pokhara.

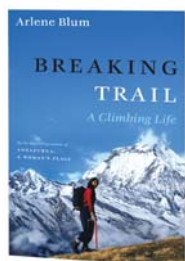
Blum has gone back to research that will make a difference to people and the planet, and heads the Green Science Policy Institute.

Her findings made California ban harmful fire retardant chemicals from children's clothing. Her activism also led to 30 countries banning toxic compounds in the electronics industry.

Says Blum, "There are indeed other Annapurnas in the lives of women. There are now more female-led expeditions, half the students at MIT are women now. And you have women running your newspaper." 



Annapurna: A Woman's Place
by Arlene Blum
Counterpoint, 2015
Sierra Club Books, 1980
238 pages \$19.95



Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life
by Arlene Blum
Lisa Drew Books, 2019
Mariner Books, 2007
313 pages Rs3,000

The Shépa lexicon

Many browsing the shelf of a bookstore or library may see Shépa written in bold all caps on the cover of this book, and misread it as 'Sherpa' and think it is yet another book on the ethnic group from the Khumbu.

That happened to this reviewer when a copy arrived by mail. But Shépa in Tibetan actually means 'explanation' and is a unique form of oral poetry sung in the question-answer style and the intangible heritage of Tibetan-speaking people in danger of dying out.

The book contains Shépa

poetry that has been passed down from one generation of the Choné people of Amdo to the next. The original Tibetan verse is translated into English and Mandarin, and includes animistic beliefs before Buddhism got to the plateau. There are Bon Po legends, explanations of various Mahayana traditions, as well as the shared memory of the ebb and flow of history.

The Shépa has a wide range of subjects and has been recited and shared for hundreds of years, and the book is a result of contributions from researchers, monks, and devotees. It is thus a valuable undertaking to document this oral tradition before it disappears forever. The book is part of the World Literature Series and the ebook version is available for free


from OpenBook Publishers.

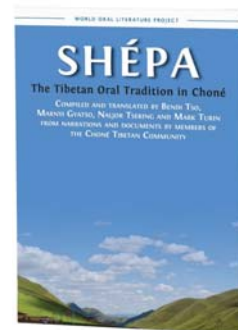
"This trilingual publication is a landmark in Tibetan studies, making research findings accessible to the community for whom Shépa is a living practice," says Tsering Shakya of the University of British Columbia.

Why the Choné people came to embrace the Shépa oral tradition is buried in history, but it does resemble the recited verse of the Himalayan rimlands. Shépa performances can be religious or secular, sing about the Tibetan cosmology, history and recite chants at weddings. The verses are rendered by elderly men and are performed somewhat like the back-and-forth dohori in Nepal.

Shépa orature is varied and constantly revised, its mutability giving it relevance as Tibet is swept by change. The book may be a bit too detailed for the lay reader, but will be valuable

for students and researchers of Himalayan linguistics, ethnicity, and even for those studying Nepal's indigenous groups.

More importantly, the book is an invaluable documentation of an oral tradition that is hanging by its thread, made accessible because of the translation of the stanzas into English and Mandarin. 



Shépa
The Tibetan Oral Tradition in Choné
by Bendi Tso, Marnyi Gyatso, Naljor Tsering, Mark Turin, and Members of the Choné Tibetan Community
Open Book Publishers, 2023
804 pages ebook available for free download