

## THE MOVEABLE FEAST

## Tukche Thakali kitchen tantalises

Dubby Bhagat  
Kathmandu

When describing the Tukche Thakali Kitchen one needs more than one source to do it full justice, the place is just extraordinary. So here goes with Sraddha Basnyat who said, "When it comes to dal-bhat, let it be said that no-one does it better than the Thakalis. As traders between India and Tibet, the Thakalis adapted dishes and together with local favourites, created a culinary tradition all their own. It's a huge compliment to Rekha Bhattachan that since 1997, locals have been flocking to Tukche Thakali Kitchen on Durbar Marg to eat. Unlike midhill Nepalis, Thakalis pay close attention to the visual appeal and presentation of food. 'You'll never find a potato dish next to cauliflower,' explains Rekha. 'It will be something green, like spinach.'"

Rekha Bhattachan also has paid magnificent tribute to the Inns that the Thakalis ran. The Thakali restaurant has rustic furniture that is comfortable and glinting brass pots decorate an ambience that has you believing that you are on the trade route stopping for a fantastic feast.

I love the *Phaar Ko Roti* or Buck Wheat Bread which Jyoti Pathak in her award winning book *Taste of Nepal* says, "It is a delicious light grey-coloured bread prepared from buck wheat flour. The bread is made from a smooth batter that is spiced with green chillies, ginger and Szechwan pepper and cooked on a griddle."

Order the Set Mini Meal at Tukche. With the rice you get a number of unusually interpreted dishes like the Black Daal. Everywhere else it is thick and has additions that



Photos: Rajendra Manandhar / THT

**Sraddha Basnyat has one Dubby Bhagat saying, "Nepal has as many pickles as France has cheeses"**

detract from the taste of the daal. But here the taste is heightened by a dab of butter and a little salt and the Himalayan herb Jimbu. This traditionally heavy dal has spices that make it easy to digest. The ratio of turmeric to clarified butter make for a green colour typical of Thakali dal.

Every household in Nepal has its own version of the

fried potato or *Plaa* as the Thakalis call it. Also known as the *Aloo Tareko*, what the dish is like is best summed up by Loke Rajye Laxmi Devi in her book *Nepalese Kitchen* who sees to it that the garlic, ginger, green chillies and black peppercorns coat the potatoes. Delicious is not enough to describe it. At Tukche the secret ingredient is *Timur* a famous Nepali spice.

Another specialty is spinach, the most beloved of vegetables in Nepal according to Jyoti Pathak, "It's served with almost every Nepali meal. I cook the greens simply as overcooking robs them of their natural taste". It is cooked so that the soft but slightly crunchy essence of spinach remains.

The Mutton Curry tastes exactly like a curry should which led me to ask Bishal Lama who was serving us if there were curry leaves used. He said no but the condiments included coriander and cumin powder and essential to the taste was a little fat from the meat itself.



Sraddha Basnyat has one Dubby Bhagat saying, "Nepal has as many pickles as France has cheeses." As if to prove the point Ms Pathak has 46 pages of pickle and *achars* in her excellent book.

My favourite tomato *achar* has green chillies added to the fenugreek, cumin, coriander, ginger, garlic and mustard oil. But when you leave Tukche you need to take home some *Lapue achar* or radish pickle. With a coating of sesame seeds, chilli powder, lemon juice and fenugreek they make for anytime snacks. Actually Tukche Thakali Kitchen and its food is an anytime kind of place. For all the time food.

Call 4225890.