

# SEPIA

AUGUST 2022

**INSIDE**  
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SPECIAL:  
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IT'S A  
NEW  
SCHOOL  
YEAR

## WOMAN ON A MISSION

RESHMA SAUJANI'S  
MARCH FOR EQUALITY

# VEGAN *Vibes*

*Babita Shrestha is a plant-based chef, photographer, graphic designer, and the author of Plant-Based Himalaya*

## **BINDU GOPAL RAO**

**I**n recent times, one ruling food trend is plant-based eating. Even as sustainability on your food plate has come to the forefront, clean and simple eating with a focus on all things local ensures you are doing your bit to save the environment.

### **FOOD FILES**

Babita Shrestha believes it is her responsibility to educate and promote agriculture which she believes is the solution to saving the planet.

“I truly believe that problems such as pollution, world hunger, gender inequality, and dependency on governments/corporations can all be addressed through local organic farming

and self-sustainability,” she said. “There is no plant-based food if there is no one growing the beautiful and nutritious plants and saving seeds for the future. I think GMOs, processed chemical foods, agri-business, and corporate control of the farmers/food supply are one of the greatest threats to my generation. Farmers are the true artists of our community. Local and sustainable food is healthier and more ethical. Even if you are not 100% plant-based, taking control of your food supply from greedy corporations is truly a revolutionary act in our current society. I have seen this firsthand in Nepal and have witnessed the problems that ignoring this has created in America.”



**HEALTH HUES**

It is a no brainer that cooking at home is always healthier than eating at a restaurant.

“My ancestors knew that homegrown, fresh, and raw ingredients can heal the body, mind, and soul,” she said. “The trend of heavily processed fake meats from the same companies that have been ruining farmlands for decades is not the right direction for a healthy lifestyle, community, or world. I hope my book can help individuals take even a small step on the course to health and happiness.”

Shrestha’s cooking journey started in her grandfather’s kitchen when she was a young kid helping him but her real cooking started at the age of 12 when she was living with her parents in Kathmandu.

“My mother had just given birth to my brother, so I had to take care of my family,” she said. “As the oldest child of the family, it was my responsibility to cook full-time and it quickly grew into a true passion.”

**CROSS OVER**

While cooking was in her heritage and the family had many chefs, Shrestha always wanted to become a chef, but could not see herself working in a chaotic restaurant environment.

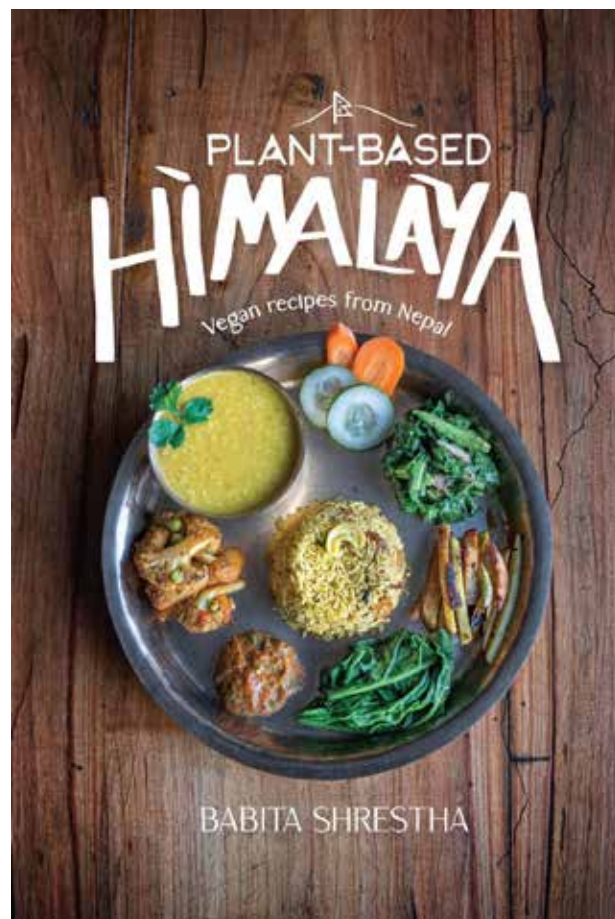
“Instead, I chose to go to the U.S., where I ended up studying graphic design,” she said. “By the time I graduated I was 30 and realized that food is my first passion. I wanted to do something in the culinary field. I moved to Lexington, Kentucky after graduation (in 2016) to take a break and live with my sister. During that time, I visited a Barnes and Noble with my then boyfriend (now husband) where I was first introduced to the world of cookbooks. It seriously opened a whole new dimension for me and realized this is where I belong.”

As she had cooked for nearly 20 years, photographed for 10 years, and designed for five years, she decided to write her first cookbook.

“In 2017, I started my company, Vegan Nepal, because there weren’t any good vegetarian or vegan places to eat in Lexington,” Shrestha said. “So I felt like I was meant to do this. In 2019, I got married. After doing two years of pop-up, catering, and food festivals, I had the option to open a restaurant or focus on finishing my first cookbook.”

In 2020, she decided to move back to Nepal with her husband to put the finishing touches on “Plant-Based Himalaya.”

“I had not been back home for over a decade,” she



said. “I never got an opportunity to look at a beautiful cookbook until the age of 30, but my wish is for Nepali children to be able to enjoy this book when they are very young, to open their eyes to become great future artists.”

**NEPALI NUANCE**

Being vegan is very easy in Nepal, especially when it comes to fresh fruit and vegetables. In cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara, coconut milk and soy milk are common while the rest of the country is heavily vegetarian. Most people have quit dairy and switched to ginger tea.

“Nepali food is very similar to Indian food, but we use less oil and spices,” Shrestha said. “Nepal is an agricultural country, so we have seasonal vegetables throughout the year. Cumin, ginger, turmeric, and cilantro are my basics, but timur (Sichuan pepper) and immbu (a Himalayan aromatic herb) are some of the unique spices of Nepal that add a distinct Nepali flavor to your food.”

Since Babita has lived in the U.S. for over a decade and was a student, she also understands budget-friendly plant-based cooking. Even as health is becoming a matter of concern, there is a realization that what we eat really reflects our well-being.

Babita’s shares a couple of recipes from her book.

**KHEER**

In Nepali culture, kheer is considered to be the purest dessert and is usually offered to the gods before being served to people.

**Serves:** 4

**Cook time:** 40 minutes

**INGREDIENTS**

- ½ cup basmati rice
- 4 cups coconut milk
- 2 tbsp golden raisins
- 4 tbsp brown sugar
- 4 tbsp ground coconut
- 2 tbsp sliced almonds
- 2 tbsp of sliced dates
- 1 cup water

**Spices**

- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 7 buds clove

**METHOD**

1. Wash the basmati rice and soak for 30 minutes or more in a cup of water. Soak for a few hours if there is time.
2. Chop all the coconut, nuts, and dates.
3. Add coconut milk in a pan and boil on medium heat. Add all the rice and water to the coconut milk, and then cover to cook for two minutes.
4. Once the coconut milk boils again, remove the lid, and cook on low heat for another two minutes. Stir and replace the lid to let it cook for two more minutes.
5. Add the golden raisins, dates, cloves, coconut, almonds, sugar, and cardamom powder. Stir thoroughly and cook for an additional 30 minutes on low heat.
6. Stir continuously, otherwise the rice will stick to the bottom of the pan. Garnish with more chopped almonds, cashews, dates, and coconut shavings on top. Creamy and blissful kheer is ready to serve. You can eat it warm or refrigerate it for a few hours.





## M O M O

As the most famous snack of Nepal, momo is an indispensable Newari dish that has gained much notoriety worldwide.

**Serves:** 4

**Cook time:** 2 hours

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/3 cup water
- 1 medium-sized cauliflower (3/4 lb)
- 1 medium zucchini (3/4 lb)
- 1/2 of a medium-sized onion

### Spices

- 9 tbsp sunflower oil
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 slice of ginger: 1 slice (1/3 oz)
- Turmeric: 1/2 tsp
- 1/2 tsp fenugreek seed
- 1/2 tsp cumin powder
- 4 medium fresh green chilies
- 1/2 cup cilantro
- 1 tsp salt

### METHOD

1. Wash and thinly chop the cauliflower, zucchini, onion, fresh green chilies, and cilantro. Combine with the salt and mix in a large bowl.
2. Grind the ginger and garlic with a mortar and pestle and add them to the bowl. Take turmeric on a spoon and pour over the bowl.
3. Heat a pan on medium and add 4 tablespoons of oil. Once the oil is hot, add the fenugreek seeds. As the fenugreek turns a darker brown, pour

the oil into the bowl on top of turmeric. Mix the contents thoroughly with your hand or spoon to create the momo filling. Cover the bowl and let it settle for 10 minutes.

4. In another large bowl, add the flour. Save 1/3 cup of flour for dusting. Slowly mix in the water, a few tablespoons at a time, and mix until the dough is easy to handle and smooth but not mushy. Continue to knead the dough for 10 minutes and let it settle for 10 minutes.
5. Take a small ball of dough (12g) and flatten it with the palm of your hands. Use a rolling pin to flatten each piece into a 3 1/2-inch-diameter round wrap.
6. Add one full teaspoon of filling to each wrap and fold them from the edges to make a circle dumpling. You can also make other designs if you like.
7. Boil water in the steamer. Apply some oil on the momo steamer pan evenly. Once the water is boiling, place the momo in the steamer, keeping an inch of space between so they will not stick together. Cook for 10 minutes.
8. For pan-fried dumplings, heat a pan on medium with one tablespoon of sunflower oil. Place momo in the pan keeping them an inch apart. Once the bottom is golden brown, in about a minute, add a half cup of water and cover for 8 minutes in medium heat. Crunchy on the bottom, juicy and vegan, momo is ready to devour when hot.