

Nepali **Momos**

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE MOMO MOBILE
FOOD TRUCK IN DENTON, TEXAS



Taste of Home on Wheels

By Chloe Evans

This extraordinary food truck my group and I got the pleasure of visiting is known as the “Momo Mobile”, which had many different South Asian dishes alongside the famous “Momo” (a South Asian dumpling filled with your choice of protein and vegetables). I was intrigued to find out the history of these delectable dishes, since there's so much controversy on where the momos originated from. Some say Tibet, Nepal, and even China. Nonetheless, from Himalayan kitchens to food trucks abroad; the “Momo” carries memories, identity, and community.

As Bibhusha Rai (2023) explains the momo is more than a dish; it is a practice of home and belonging. The process of shaping dumplings, sharing steaming baskets, and dipping them in spicy sauces creates memories and social connections. Momos, for Rai, mean cultural continuity and an intimate experience of shared meals.

The Momo's popularity and social outreach grew significantly in Nepal over the twentieth century. Binod Baral (2024) mentions that because it's diverse, affordable, and mobile, it makes for the perfect street food delicacy. Momos are very diverse; they can be steamed, fried, or even souped then filled with meat or vegetarian fillings, all while transforming class and regional boundaries. Baral also explains that the Momo has become not only a national favorite but also a globally recognized comfort food, especially for diaspora communities.

This global treat is continuously shown in Nepali migration patterns. Andrew Nelson (2025), mentions how Nepali immigrants in North Texas promoted the momo through gas station businesses. They're mostly made by migrants looking for new areas with the best investment opportunities. Momos have become a new, fun way to maintain cultural identity. Their portability and quick preparation suited the mobile, fast paced environment of diaspora life, while offering the community a connection to their heritage.

All in all, any food truck that serves momos, such as the Momo Mobile Truck, is reflecting centuries of cultural change over the years. From Himalayan kitchens to local streets, the momo carries the history of memory, migration, and entrepreneurship, making each dumpling both a delectable snack and a symbol of belonging.



Art by Joshua Lacy

From Beni to Denton: the Journey of Sanju & Indra

By Sommer Amerson

The Momo Mobile is a delectable food truck in Denton, Texas, owned by Sanju and Indra whose family originated in Beni, Nepal. Beni, a town of 33,498 people, is in the western part of Nepal and was officially designated a municipality in 2014. It's the place where two rivers—the Kali Gandhi and Myagdi River—meet. This area is popular for their hot springs.

Sanju and Indra relocated to the United States after 2000. Looking to satisfy the people's tastes and create a peaceful environment by making their food truck in Denton. Denton is a small college town with a vibrant music and arts scene. It also has a well-established South Asian community. In 2022, they started Momo Mobile.

The Momo Mobile is known for Nepali dumplings, which are considered a delicacy in Nepal. The dumplings are hand made in their home and consist of fresh vegetables, halal ground chicken, and spices. The customers choose their spice level, typically it is served with achar, or sauce, which is usually tomato based. The customers can then pair their momos with a chai or lassi drink. The Momo Mobile represents not only their journey from the mountains of Beni to the heart of Texas, but also their mission to create community, family gatherings, and togetherness through food. Moms are traditionally enjoyed during festivals, family gatherings, and community events. As such, they embody the warmth and unity of Nepalese hospitality. In Nepal, moms are more than just a beloved dish; they are a tradition woven into the fabric of daily life.



Meaning of Diaspora & Nepal

By Logan Schaefer

Kibria (2007) analyzes the migration patterns, social structures, and experiences of four national minorities in the South Asian diaspora in the USA: Pakistanis, Nepalis, Sri Lankans, and Bangladeshis. These groups are often lumped in with Indian immigrant communities as a broader “South Asian” diaspora, but the article argues that they have an internal diversity in experience and background which generates different tendencies and results for each group.

In its first section, the article looks into the distinct immigration patterns of each nationality. It begins with their common history in being subjugated to British imperialism, and continues on to the increase in immigration to the US in the 1980s & 1990s, which occurred due to economic conditions in other regions previously predominant in immigration, and destabilization brought about by various types of armed struggle in the region (i.e. the Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka and the Nepali Maoists). Nepali immigration drastically increased, rising over 800% between 1980 and 2000. Most of this growth was between 1990 and 2000, and consisted mostly of (76%) both familial and employment-based immigration, with employment in skilled labor being the largest section in one specific described period (1996-2000) at 39%. After 9/11, Pakistan and Bangladesh, majority Muslim countries, experienced a reduction in immigration to the US. Nepal and Sri Lanka had a slight increase.

The following section discusses economic trends within each population immigrating to the USA. It addresses the myth of the “model minority” which has sprung up around South Asian immigrants, using census data from 2000 to demonstrate that Indian immigration, significantly overshadowing other countries’ immigrants. Nepalis had the second highest poverty rate and the lowest median household income out of all groups. There is a growing class distinction in these communities too, with Bangladeshis and Nepalis being more likely to work as employees for Indian and Pakistani bosses & entrepreneurs.

Shukla (2001) discusses the meaning of diaspora in the sense that a diasporic community finds its development rooted in the contradiction between the social, cultural, and economic context each community finds itself in, and the social, cultural, and economic context of the time and place which members and branches of the broad diasporic community came from. It looks at different communities in which the “South Asian Diaspora” lives and analyses their development in its context. This article argues that the broadness, both geographically and temporally, of the modern (after the advent of British imperialism) South Asian Diaspora showcases a multitude of class distinctions, of cultural adaptations, and of interactions between the diasporic communities and their neighbors. Looking at Nepalis specifically, there are both those that come from Nepal itself and those Bhutanese who are labeled as outsiders and were forced here as refugees. There are those who came here on H1B visas and those who came fleeing the terrors of the Maoist revolution & monarchist counterrevolution. The diaspora sweeps all these people up and creates a new identity from them that evolves in its own direction.

Kaviraj (2014) contrasts the pre-modern (pre-colonial, pre-capitalist consolidation) period of South Asian regional development with the modern period. The former period was characterized by communities which were physically more local and smaller, and identities which transcended localities into overlapping and cohabitating regions. Such amorphous and fluid practices and ideas are very difficult for the modern, rigid state to pin down, since they developed at a basal level in a fundamentally different context. The modern national identity has no way to concretely alter and define the mosaic of cultural practices that slowly shifts from region to region. It is a box drawn over the mosaic, and not a box in which a mosaic is made. This is reflected in the contentious history of the momo. Momos cross borders between India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet. The history and development of the momo is multifaceted, internally dynamic, and expressly vernacular. No one state can monopolize the tradition, and no one state can claim exclusive credit for the momo’s modern form. Instead, as is common with culinary phenomena, the momo evades capture by the modern political boundaries. Despite their diversity, though, momos remain an essentially familiar food to the South Asian palate. They contain well-known and well-understood flavors, and their production as street food immediately puts them into an established category with its own cultural schemas that can easily adapt locally. No matter what country or region it hails from, the momo has served as a point of contention for many people, and a reminder of home for millions more.

MOMO by Deepthi Kannan

RECIPE

Ground chicken
chopped onion
Cabbage
Cilantro
Green onion

Garlic, Ginger
Garam Masala
Momo masala
MSG
Chicken masala

Instructions

- Make a soft dough by mixing flour and water, then let it rest for 20 minutes.
- Prepare the filling by mixing vegetables or chicken with salt, pepper, ginger, garlic, masala and a little oil.
- Roll the dough into small circles, place some filling in the center, and fold to seal the momos.
- Steam the momos for 10-12 minutes until they are fully cooked.
- Serve them hot with spicy chutney.



The Momo Commute

By Madison Chapman

When our group went to Momo Mobile, it was located in a gas station parking lot with an auto repair shop in the same parking lot, across the wide Dallas Drive, where there are businesses (hair salon, insurance, and some empty business space) and student housing. Momo Mobile being located in that spot is a smart move, since it has many other people nearby, from hungry college students, customers, and the local community ordering things from Momos to fried rice to even chow Mein. The price that Momo Mobile provides for their food and service is reasonable and is fair to the people who live and or work nearby, because the food ranges from \$4.99 to \$13.99, it makes it easier for everyone to enjoy the food and enjoy sitting with people around and being outside since there are picnic tables around the food truck. When our group went out to eat at Momo Mobile, the area felt open and friendly for our group, but sadly, with the crossing lights, it took some time for our other group members to arrive. When we had gotten our food, we shared our different momos and made conversations. I ordered the fried chicken momos and mango lassi, Logan ordered the fried vegetable momos, Bergomi ordered fried rice, and Sommer ordered fried chicken momos. The flavor of the different momos sparked conversation and fostered a small sense of community while we were sitting down and eating. After our successful first try of Momo Mobile, some of our group either went back for seconds (either for themselves, roommates, or family). I had bought my second portion of momos for my maternal grandmother, and I also bought some veggie pakora, which is sliced vegetables mixed with seasoned chickpea flour; I drove over to where my maternal grandmother lives in Celina, and when I arrived and gave her the food, we had a chance to catch up and I also told her the history, method, and ingredients for momos. It felt refreshing to connect with her over food and to chat about daily activities throughout our collective day. She also enjoyed the momos and vegetable pakora. What the Momo Mobile fosters is a strong sense of community among businesses and college students alike with a strong centralized location, good pricing, and amazing food.



Friends enjoying food at the Momo Mobile

Photo by: Rhyann Chapman

Nepalese Diaspora in the United States

By Bergomi Dongo

The Nepalese are an emerging diasporic community in the United States of America. In the last two and a half decades there has been a rapid immigration growth of the Nepalese immigrating to the USA. Since 2000, more than 167,000 Nepalese have immigrated to the USA (Thapa-Oli & Yang 2024, 1) The substantial increase in Nepalese immigration can be correlated with the Diversity Visa (DV) program. The number of Nepalese immigrants due to the DV program rose from 104 in 2000 to 2894 in 2022 (Thapa-Oli & Yang 2024, 6). The DV program increased Nepalese immigration in the USA due to flexibility in the eligibility criteria for applying for the DV lottery. In addition, political instability drove many Nepalese to leave the country and seek refuge in the USA. Furthermore, Nepal is the eleventh leading country in terms of the number of international students in the US. Many international students are not immigrants, but “many students adjust their nonimmigrant status to immigrants after finding employment in the USA” (Thapa-Oli & Yang 2024, 4). According to a survey by Thapa-Oli & Yang (2024), the Nepalese respondents indicated that they were hesitant to interact with other racial/ethnic groups. Most respondents had closer relationships with other Nepalese individuals (72 percent). However, most respondents socialized with other ethnic groups. The survey results indicated “a higher degree of ethnic retention but some partial assimilation in structural adaptation among Nepalese in the USA (Thapa-Oli & Yang 2024, 10).” Regarding Nepalese adaptation to the American lifestyle, Thapa-Oli & Yang (2024, 14) argue, “Nepalese have become partly assimilated to the American culture but have largely maintained their ethnic culture.” The Nepalese community according to Thapa-Oli & Yang (2024, 14) has demonstrated that cultural pluralism best captures and highlights the Nepalese community adaptation experience in the USA. The Nepalese community have found many ways to integrate their culture into the American lifestyle. For example, many Nepalese individuals in DFW work in gas stations or own mobile food trucks which they tend to sell their cultural foods/goods from their home-country (Nelson 2025).

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