

Pandal traces Bengal's love for sweets

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Calcutta: A central Calcutta Durga Puja will trace the evolution of Bengal's traditional sweets through its theme, Mishtanna Puran.

The Wellington Nagarik Kalyan Samity puja will depict the journey of *mishti* in two phases — before and after Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

The pandal will trace the journey of Bengal's sweets from the 15th century, when milk used for sweets was largely in its solidified, condensed form, or *khoa*, to the modern era of rasogolla and sandesh.

"A section of historians believes that the word Gaud of Goud Banga, representing the entirety of Bengal, derived its name from *gur* or jaggery, which was available in abundance in Bengal in different varieties and was widely used to prepare different kinds of sweets," said Sayak Raj, chief patron of the puja.

"We will try to capture the journey of *mishti* from the days when it was made with *gur* and coconut, through the introduction of condensed milk, and finally to the use of cottage cheese," he added.

Raj said the evolution of *mishti* would be depicted in two phases — pre- and



A poster of the Wellington Nagarik Kalyan Samity puja

post-Chaitanya, the founder of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which celebrates Krishna through songs and dance.

Some food historians say the sweets offered to Chaitanya and recorded in texts such as the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* were strictly non-*chhana* sweets. They relied on *khoa*, coconut and jaggery. "The differentiation of the two *mishti* phases is possibly based on the observation that no sweet made of cottage cheese was offered to gods in the era before Lord Chaitanya," said Samim Ahmed of the philosophy department at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur.

Ahmed, who has written several books, including

Paak Darshan, said that a broad range of sweets existed in Bengal even before the advent of Chaitanya.

"Sweets such as Labanga Latika, Darbesh, Monda and Kadma existed during the Sultanate period. The Portuguese settled in Hooghly and Bandel around the late 16th century, introducing the acid-curdling technique that led to the making of *chhana*. That changed Bengal's sweet history," said Ahmed.

The Wellington pandal will feature utensils used to prepare *mishti*, including wooden ladles, *chhanch* (wooden moulds), packing boxes and wrappers. The remaining sections will feature Bengal-style paintings depicting the evolution of sweets through the ages.

The *chandwa* behind the Durga idol will feature Chandrapuli and a few other traditional Bengali sweets, while the entrance will be designed as Taal Saash, one of Bengal's iconic sweets made of cottage cheese and sugar or seasonal jaggery.

"Besides Narkel Nadu, Narkel Chaap, Labanga Latika, Sada Bonde and Chandrapuli, the modern-day Rasogolla, Sandesh and Mishti Doi will feature in the paintings that will decorate the pandal," Raj said.