

BARFI AND BUTTERSCOTCH

Decadent Indian sweetmeats head into new flavour territory—everything from ricotta to apple to vanilla is game, as Indian mithai gets a luxe makeover. PRACHI JOSHI stakes out some boutique dessert services

A decadent mouthful of slow-cooked milk and cream, blended with chai spices and ginger, or a bite-size butterscotch barfi studded with handmade clotted cream fudge—it's your all-too-familiar Indian mithai like you've never seen before. The barfi is back in a new avatar and it's rubbing shoulders with gourmet chocolates, cupcakes, and tarts.

Remember the lurid pink and green barfi you'd devour without a second thought as a kid? As palates evolved, chocolates and other Western confections replaced mithai as our go-to dessert. "Our barfi was in desperate need of a makeover," says Sam Garcha Sidharh, who ran a wedding cake business in London, where a client asked her to create a new barfi. "I could see that first-generation Indians [in the UK] wanted something other than chocolates but they didn't want the traditional mithai either," adds Sidharh. And so, in 2013, Barfia (*Barfia.com*),

Mithai is being repackaged, like these flattened fig and almond barfi bars made using traditional laddu ingredients

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Barfia's dessert portfolio includes barfis flavoured with citrus or Oreo cookie crumbs

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— **SAM GARCHA SIDHARTH**, owner, **Barfia**

an artisan confectionery company, was born, marrying the traditional barfi with English flavours like fudge butterscotch, banoffee pie and Eton mess. With 12 stores across the UK, Barfia, known for its couture confections, has catered to several lavish Indian weddings. (Recently, a creative client splashed out £25,000 on barfi displays, including one fashioned like a dress.)

Growing up in New Jersey, Shefalee Patel saw a similar trend of young Indians moving away from traditional mithai, which prompted her to start Sweet Silk (*Savorsweetsilk.com*). "I realised that Indian sweets, which are prepared so meticulously with rich ingredients, were not given the credit they deserved compared to luxurious confections from around the world," says Patel. At Sweet Silk, traditional Indian and Middle Eastern ingredients (inspired by her stint in Dubai) get a contemporary upgrade—the barfi, for instance, is presented like a petit four. Her repertoire includes walnut apple spice (a take on apple pie), a decadent pistachio white rose barfi layered with Valrhona white chocolate, seasonal flavours like mango coconut cream, and a luscious mango and ricotta barfi topped with coconut vanilla cream.

But is India ready for the reimagined, luxury mithai? Sid Mathur, owner of the Delhi-based Khoya Mithai

(*Khoyamithai.com*), thinks so. "We realised there's a gap in the market for fine Indian mithais," he says. Mathur started his online bespoke mithai service in March this year, but instead of going the fusion route he dug up traditional halwai recipes to create luxury mithai. Khoya offers a range of barfis, pedas, modaks and laddus, all made with high-quality ingredients, beautifully presented and packed in chic Baroque-style boxes. Mathur has eschewed artificial colours in favour of natural food colourings; their popular pink laddu sees motichoor infused with beetroot for the red tinge.

Another delicious cross-pollination that we can totally get on board with is the mithai truffle, which features a milk-based mithai encased in premium chocolate. In New York, Bittersweet NYC (*Bittersweetnyc.com*) offers Carrot Sensation, a truffle take on the ubiquitous gajar halwa, while in India we love Foodhall's (*Foodhallonline.com*) festive line of truffles, which includes Badam Barfi & Chocolate Truffle and Pista & Motichoor Truffle. In Delhi, Chockriti's (*Chockriti.com*) popular Diwali gift box contains handmade mithai truffles in three flavours—Dark Truffle Gulab Jamun, Milk Truffle Baklava, and White Truffle Kesar Pista. It's about time our mithai steps back up on the pedestal—right where it belongs. ■

SWEET LIFE

Get a taste of the modern Indian mithais at these restaurants



◀ THE BOMBAY CANTEEN's

Gulab Nut is a delectable cross between the Indian gulab jamun and the French baba au rhum, with a creamy pistachio filling and a big dash of Old Monk.

▶ Gulab jamun carpaccio meets pistachio phirni brulée in the Gulab Jamun aur Phirni dessert at Ziya, **THE OBEROI**, Mumbai.



◀ TOAST & TONIC's

Almond, a badam milk parfait served with yoghurt sorbet and cumin and black salt cake, is a tribute to Bengaluru's iconic sweet shop Anand Sweets.



▶ A combination of two popular sweet treats, the Mishti Doi Cannoli at Delhi's **INDIAN ACCENT** combines the delicious world of Italian and Indian desserts and is served with amaranth laddu for texture.

