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Dark Choco Fever Catches On

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By **Manbeena Chawla** | June 1, 2022



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The dark chocolate market is rising and is still to realise its full potential in India. With the presence of several small and large players in the Indian chocolate market, the industry is highly fragmented and the vendors are distinguishing their offerings through their unique selling point (USP). A trend in dark chocolate is growing, as people pay more attention to health and sugar reduction now.

Today, the demand for organic, sugar free and gluten free chocolates in India is rising, for which industry players like Nestle India Limited, Amul, Whole Truth Foods, Hershey India Private Limited, Mondelez are working towards unique varieties of dark chocolate.

Switching to dark chocolate

There have been many reasons that are propelling the demand for dark chocolates. Nowadays, people pay more attention towards health and prefer low sugar content in chocolates. According to a research from Mintel, “The total value of the chocolate market in India will reach an estimated Rs 28,390 crore in 2022 from Rs 17,200 crore in 2019 and is pegged to grow at a CAGR of close to 10 per cent between 2019-2023.”

“*In a world that is becoming more health-conscious, chocolate doesn’t have to be labelled as indulgent and can extend well beyond by incorporating health benefits like reduced trans-fat, reduced sugar and relaxation benefits. Sugar reduction has become ‘the need of the hour’ and, albeit at a lower base, chocolate confectionery launches with the no-added sugar claim are gaining traction. Furthermore, as more and more consumers prioritise functional food and drink, chocolate with added benefits will allow brands to stand out from the competition. Along these lines, there is an opportunity to introduce more energy-specific claims to garner interest. Brands can look at incorporating ingredients such as guarana, coffee and protein, which are gaining popularity for their energy-providing properties*,” explains **Natasha Kumar, Food & Drink Analyst, India, at Mintel.**

Unique dark varieties

Industry players and manufacturers are now incorporating organic ingredients and natural sweeteners to make this dark chocolate category an attractive alternative to heavy sugar milk-based chocolates.

India's first 100 per cent Clean Label brand, The Whole Truth Foods (TWT), recently presented India's first chocolate range, sweetened only with dates and without any added sugar or artificial sweeteners. With this new category launch, TWT brought a range of premium, decadent, yet 100 per cent clean chocolate made from just two ingredients - the finest locally-sourced, single-origin cocoa from Idukki (district in Kerala), and imported high-quality, non-GMO dates.

Shashank Mehta, Founder and CEO, The Whole Truth Foods said, "*It was about 18 months ago when we decided to create a chocolate that was sweetened only with dates. No added sugar or sweeteners. However, dates are quite fibrous so achieving that perfectly smooth texture of rich chocolate called for 4X longer conch-time. That meant that every batch of this chocolate had to be continuously ground for up to 22 hours. For us, owning every part of the bean-to-bar journey was critical and so we set up our own chocolate factory in Mumbai."*

He added, "*Consumers are not only becoming more aware of the benefits of real chocolate, but are developing a palate that moves away from the sugar-laden dessert we call chocolate. Yet they get completely priced out of the dark chocolate market. We're breaking this trend by offering a 100 per cent clean, truly decadent and naturally sweetened chocolate at a much better price*."

Despite growing at 30 per cent year-on-year, dark chocolate constitutes a miniscule (Rs 600 crore) part of the larger Rs 14000 crore chocolate market. This is primarily because of the substantial price gap between milk chocolate and dark chocolate, which has in turn meant that dark chocolate, despite its many health benefits, has been reserved for the elites.

Further, Nestlé announced that it has created a unique chocolate made entirely from the cocoa fruit, using the beans and pulp as the only ingredients and therefore not adding any refined sugar. Nestlé has developed a natural approach, which allows it to extract the pulp and use it in chocolate with no compromise on taste, texture and quality. Nestlé has launched Incoa, a 70 per cent dark chocolate bar under its Les Recettes de L'Atelier brand.

Patrice Bula, Head of Strategic Business Units, Marketing and Sales at Nestlé, said, "*We're proud to bring chocolate lovers a new chocolate made entirely from the cocoa fruit without adding refined sugar. This is a real innovation which uses the natural sweetness of the cocoa pulp to provide a pure, novel chocolate experience.*"

Louise Barrett, Head of the Nestlé Confectionery Product Technology Center in York, said, "*This breakthrough innovation allows us to deliver a great-tasting dark chocolate, while also integrating agricultural side-streams into our value chain, a key priority for our sustainability agenda.*"

Moreover, Mondelez India has introduced an addition to its bouquet of premium chocolates with Cadbury Dark Milk.

Anil Viswanathan, Director, Marketing (Chocolates), Mondelez India, said, "*Mondelez India sees a major opportunity in developing a new taste experience in the chocolate category and Cadbury Dark Milk gives us the first mover advantage of becoming the category innovator. Our brands play a special role in people's lives. Increasingly consumers want products that reflect their lifestyle and we have always been at the forefront of creating distinctive products and platforms to address this need. Cadbury Dark Milk is a unique product that offers a heightened delight of a grown-up chocolate.*"

In another unique trend, recently the scientists from Switzerland developed an alternative, non-microbial approach called moist incubation, in which dried, unfermented cocoa nibs are rehydrated in an acidic solution, heated for 72 hours and then re-dried. The method, which is faster and more easily controlled than fermentation, produced similar aromas in beans as fermentation, with some differences.

The researchers made chocolate bars using moist incubated or fermented dried cocoa beans, as well as unfermented beans as a control. Sensory panellists said the moist incubated sample had higher intensities of fruity, flowery, malty and caramel-like aromas, whereas the fermented one had higher roasty aroma notes, and the bar made from unfermented beans had a primarily green aroma. The researchers concluded that moist incubation produces a chocolate with a pleasant aroma and taste and could, therefore, serve as an alternative postharvest treatment.

Health-conscious consumers

With increasingly health-conscious consumers coming, the world’s biggest chocolate makers are looking for ways to add more options into the market.

Sales of mainstream milk chocolate bars have stagnated as consumers are becoming more health-conscious and are worried about lifestyle. The shift in attitudes is forcing global firms from Mondelez International to Nestle to rebrand their mass-market chocolates to create a healthier image, or sell a more expensive premium experience.

To answer consumer demands for healthier and higher-quality bars, companies are going for smoother dark chocolates, protein bars, chocolate bars and sugar free chocolates.

One such development is a Mumbai based organic chocolates brand Pascati that has developed at least 14 different types of products. The cocoa beans are sourced from collectives in Kerala, impacting the livelihoods of over 2000 farmers.

India is one of the fastest-growing markets for the impulsive and indulgent industry of chocolate confectionery with plenty of room for growth.

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