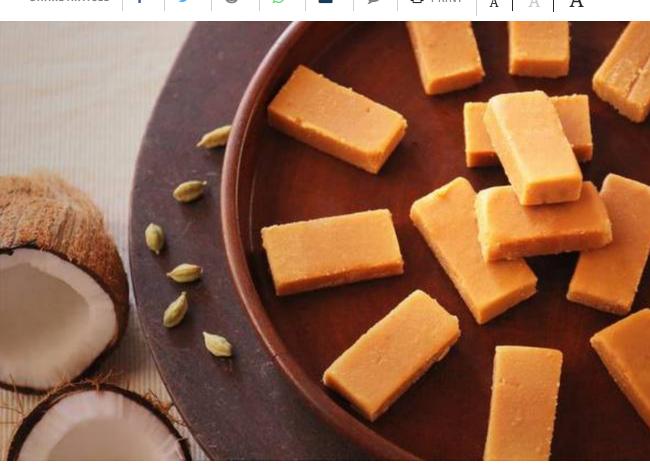
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DEEPAVALI 2021 FOOD

This Deepavali, traditional mithai takes on a vegan avatar

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ways to make traditional Indian sweets vegan, replacing milk with coconuts, jaggery and even tofu Oil-free, sugarless, no-dairy gulab jamuns? Shalu Nijhawan, a whole plant-based

Ahead of Deepavali 2021, chefs and home cooks are trying creative

nutritionist, says it is possible. After two years of trial and error, she has succeeded in creating a vegan version, which she will teach during an online pre-Deepavali cookery class aptly titled 'Impossible Sweets'. The session is being hosted by Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals

and Nature (SHARAN), an Auroville-based organisation dedicated to spreading awareness about holistic health. Also Read | How India is leaning into better vegan options, across the board

Shalu will also be sharing recipes for vegan versions of traditional sweets like ras

right; I feel it's a dhamaka (blast) in the world of traditional vegan sweets," she says, adding that she adopted a vegan lifestyle after it helped reverse her husband's auto-immune disorder. A growing market for vegans has encouraged sweet makers and food innovators to experiment with *mithai* for the upcoming festive season. V Aravindan's Coimbatore-based Vijay Sweets specialises in vegan treats. His trademark offering, Mysore Pak, is made with coconut milk instead of ghee with

malai, khoya gujiya and Bombay Karachi halwa. "I am so excited about getting it

barely a difference in taste. It now comes in five varieties: beetroot, carrot, palm jaggery, coconut milk and mixed nuts. This year, he is curating customised Diwali hampers priced between ₹500 and ₹2,000, which are filled with everything from cashew pedas to the Ironman laddoo incorporating dates, cashew, melon, cucumber and pumpkin seeds. Also Read | Vijay Sweets' vegan mysore pak, delivered to your doorstep



Being one of the pioneers in this field, they were faced with many challenges. One of the biggest was training their existing staff to work with alternative

ingredients. As trendsetters, they had no products to compare theirs with and no

one to take inspiration from. "We had to understand the behaviour of these

alternative products and test out their shelf life," says Aravindan. He adds that the family concentrates on "cracking tough traditional sweets" into vegan ones. Trials are on for baked rasmalai and gulab jamun. "Our motto is to make vegan sweets accessible to all," states Aravindan. Though ingredients are

expensive, he keeps the price 20% lower than dairy-based sweets. **Festive recipes**

Mumbai-based chef Vandana Tiwari, who turned vegan seven years ago to reverse

$her \ hyperthyroid is m, \ made \ chocolate \ \textit{modak} s \ for \ Ganesh \ Chaturthi \ this \ year.$

vegan-only sweets.

"We can convert any dessert into its vegan form," she says. Vandana completely did away with ghee and used dates to sweeten the chocolate modak, made with a mix of almond and cocoa powder. She also makes modaks with red rice flour, stuffed with a mix of grated coconut, cardamom and dry dates powder. She's planning Deepavali hampers under her label Vegan Essence, that will include mithais, cakes and snacks like gujiyas, chaklis, chivda and more. Vandana substitutes all processed ingredients in her recipes. Also Read | Chef Mandaar Sukhtankar on the beauty of modaks

Gautam Agicha's kitchens at AAA Gourmet Foods, Mumbai, are also buzzing with trials of laddoos made with a mix of jaggery, to which are added unprocessed flours like bajra (pearl millet), sattu (roasted horsegram flour) or quinoa. "These

will be part of boxes of vegan sweets for Diwali," says Gautam, who set up the business of health foods in August last year and is surprised by the growing niche market. His sweet shop sees movement in a ratio of 90:10 in the sweet versus the vegan sweets market. Reyna Rupani, head of SHARAN's Mumbai team, points out that there's vegan and there's healthy vegan. "Sugar and Jaggery are vegan, but we are for healthy veganism and so we use dates for sweetening," she says. Reyna, who recently

tasted gulab jamuns made from sweet potatoes, believes that gifting a box of healthy sweets is more accepted now than ever before. When she turned vegan seven years ago, there were "hardly any options" but now there is plenty to choose from.



Rose Pinto converted to veganism and now conducts Millet workshops and runs an organic store in Mumbai. Rose places orders for vegan cakes and sweets with her 'students' to encourage them to cook and cater. She makes laddoos using pulses, mainly green gram. Meanwhile, Gautam is trying hard to get the Mohanthal and Lola, a Sindhi

dessert, right for this season, using kapli (emmer wheat) flour. "The trials are on

and we should get the sweet ready in time for Diwali."

Vegan malpua recipe Ingredients: 1 cup whole wheat flour; 1 tsp crushed fennel seeds (saunf); 3-4 crushed cardamoms (*elaichi*) OR ½ tsp cardamom powder; 3 tbsp full fat coconut

milk; 3 tbsp coconut butter; 3 tbsp almond paste; ½ cup water; ⅓ tsp baking soda

For the topping: ½ cup coconut milk; ½ cup date paste; ¼ tsp cardamom powder; 2 tbsp mix of almonds and pistachios, for the garnish



On low heat, gently pour two-three tablespoons of the batter onto a heated *tawa*. Spread the batter lightly with the back of the spoon. You could make multiple malpuas side by side, depending on the size of the tawa. Roast malpuas on lowmedium heat, turning them over a couple of times, until crisp & golden on both sides.

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For the topping, mix the coconut milk, date paste and cardamom powder. Pour

over the *malpua*, garnish with sliced nuts and serve.

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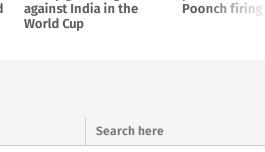
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