

South meets North at *mishti* mela Mouthful of *mishti* - Three-day fest to showcase the excellence of Bengali sweets

ANASUYA BASU



Actress Roopa Ganguly savours the fare at the *Anandabazar Patrika* Ananda Modhura. Picture by Pabitra Das

For so many south Calcutta residents, trips to the northern part of the city are rare. But when they do make it to the other side, they so often carry back a pack of *sandesh* from Girish and Nakur or Bhim Chandra Nag.

For three days, the north Calcutta *mishti* and the south Calcutta sweet tooth find a meeting point midway' at the Olpadwala Hall, on Chowringhee, playing host to the first *Anadabazar Patrika* Ananda Modhura, presented by Sugar Free Natura.

'I shifted to south Calcutta several years ago, and I sorely miss the sweets that we got from the famous shops in the north,' said Bithi Ray from Lansdowne Road, between mouthfuls of *dilkhush* from the Bhim Nag counter on Day I of the *mishti* mela.

Her two teenaged daughters found the festival fare opposite Rotary Sadan very 'novel', but preferred to dig into the *chholey bhature* served at Haldiram's round the corner.

If bridging the great north-south *mishti* divide is one aim of the festival, the other is raising awareness about the good ol' Bangali *mishti*, particularly from the districts, fast losing out to the *namkeen-mithai* combo of the Haldiram's and Gupta Brothers.

The gourmet culture may be thriving thanks to a host of specialised Bengali cuisine restaurants, but there is hardly any sign of the *monohora* or the *nikhuti*.

And they will never stage a comeback unless there is more aggressive marketing from the Bangali *mishti* brigade, warns Shankar, author of the best-selling *Bangali Khawadawa*.

'How many of the young generation know of the 161-year old Girish and Nakur shop tucked away in the north' asks Shankar. 'They would rather have a pastry for Rs 45 than a *sandesh* for Rs 10!'

What the three-day Bengali sweet festival would do is serve the connoisseur ' and the newcomer 'some forgotten delicacies.

Where else would you get to savour Shaktigarh-er *lyangcha*, Berhampore-r *manohora* and Krishnagar-er *sarpuriya* all under one roof You could also go for the melt-in-the-mouth *dilkhush* of Bhim Nag or bite into the crunchy *mecha sandesh* from Bankura or lick the sugar syrup trickling down your palm as you dig into a *jalbhara talshansh* from Chandernagore.

And the famed Bengali sweet tooth lived up to its billing. Even before the inauguration of the *mishti* mela, people thronged the venue, and *dhakis* drummed up a festive beat.

'This is a very good and novel theme. I wish we had such festivals more often,' smiled Roopa Ganguly, before digging into a *sarpuriya* on Thursday evening.

While Shaktigarh-er *lyangcha* and Bardhaman-er *mihidana* proved the top draws, there were others queuing up for a combination of *chhatu*, *chhana*, *khoya*, sugar and ghee, called *mecha sandesh* of Beliatare, in Bankura.

Among other popular counters were Jadav Chandra Das (*shada mishti doi* and *Babusandesh*) and Balaram Mullick (*rabri* and *malpoa*).

And for those craving for a change of tongue after an overdose of sweets, there was the mutton or fish *shingara* from Ananda Caterers. 'Our *kochuris* became famous from the tea parties we catered,' said Anil Chandra Guin of Ananda Caterers.