

Meet Bengal's 'Columbus of Rosogolla' who is said to have made the spongy sweet

For years, the Das family was recognised as the first family of the state's sweetmeat industry mainly due to its claim on the parentage on rosogolla.

Updated: Nov 14, 2017

The legend goes that it took years for Nobin Chandra Das to hone his recipe for a new dessert and the result was a pristinely white, perfectly spherical, and delectably juicy rosogolla that is now a part of every festivity and celebrations in West Bengal.

His name as the inventor of the iconic syrupy sweet was officially recognised on Tuesday after Chennai-based Geographical Indications (GI) Registry [announced that it originated in West Bengal](#), and not Odisha.

Das, known as the 'Columbus of rosogolla', was a resident of Bagbazar in north Kolkata.

Born in 1845, he grew up at a time popularly known as the Bengal Renaissance, a period when a creative energy in literature, painting, music and the arts marked the state.

His father was a sugar merchant, who died a few months before he was born. The family fell on difficult times and his childhood was spent in poverty.

His first attempt to set up an outlet at Jorasanko bombed but he struck gold with rosogolla at his shop on arterial Chitpur Road (now known as Rabindra Sarani).

"Nobin Chandra Das invented the sweet in 1868. He was trying to come up with a new sweet for a number of years before he came up with it. He never thought of trying for a patent on the sweet but taught confectioners how to prepare it," Nobin Chandra Das' great-great-grandson Dhiman Das said.

"The key ingredients are chhana (cottage cheese) made from cow milk, the sugar syrup and a crucial determinant is how long the rosogolla is boiled," the director of one of the most famous makers of the iconic sweet, KC Das Pvt Ltd, said.

Das's son Krishna Chandra (1869-1934) expanded the business his father set up and is credited with the invention of another popular sweet 'rosomalai'.

For years, the Das family was recognised as the first family of the state's sweetmeat industry mainly due to its claim on the parentage on rosogolla. The residence of the Das family on 532 Rabindra Sarani is – no prize for guessing – known as Rosogolla Bhavan.

Down the decades, Bengalis have taken immense pride in the spongy sweet. Virtually every dignitary visiting West Bengal – from Fidel Castro to Diego Maradona – was offered this signature sweet during state dinners.

So Bengalis were quite surprised, if not hurt, in 2015 when the neighbouring state of Odisha suddenly claimed that the sweet was essentially an invention of that state. As the bitter battle between West Bengal and Odisha started over its origin, the Bengal government quoted 19-century history to argue that the rosogolla was invented by Das in 1868.

Odisha's minister of science and technology Pradip Kumar Panigrahi announced the setting up of committees to trace the origin of the sweetmeat and furnish evidence that it was first prepared around 600 years ago in the temple town of Puri.

The Odisha government even launched a social-media campaign #RasagollaDibasa on July 30, 2015, to celebrate its origin. An exhibition and awareness event was also organised in Bhubaneswar by the state's confectioners.

Later in September that year, the Mamata Banerjee administration applied for GI authentication.

Bengal's food processing minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah, told Hindustan Times last week that they were toying with the idea of getting ready for a legal battle even if the government's application was turned down.

And on Tuesday, the rosogolla firmly established itself in the rich culinary tradition that the state is known for.