

STORY OF CHOCOLATE

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Chocolate, today is the most popular and favourite flavour enjoyed by people all over the world. It comes in varied forms, texture and tastes reminiscent of the skill and fineness of the world's greatest chefs. Behind every place of chocolate we eat, there has been spent much time and paid painstaking care. More than a series of scientific and mechanical processes, there is involved in its making an art which was evolved centuries ago and preserved and perfected from time to time. Adding upto a billion dollar industry today, chocolate owes its fame and popularity to the wonderful taste of cocoa beans.

The story of chocolate as far back as we know begins with the discovery of the new world. Columbus on his triumphant return from America presented to the Spanish throne a treasure-trove of many strange and wonderful things. Among them were a few dark brown beans that looked like almonds and appeared to the king as most unpromising. They were cocoa beans which now reach millions of people in such forms as eating chocolates, drinking chocolates, bakery products etc.

The king unable to realise the importance and value of cocoa beans, this new world offering remained unexploited till Don Cortez, the great Spanish explorer grasped its commercial possibilities during his conquest of Mexico. Cortez found the Aztec Indians using cocoa beans in the preparation of the royal drink of the realm "Chocolatl". This was being prepared by roasting and grinding the cocoa nibs followed by mashing with water, maize and spice flavours. Apart from the royal importance Chocolatl was also considered as having aphrodisiac and nuptial properties and therefore, used to be served during wedding ceremony, in the court of Montezuma, the Mexican Emperor. Montezuma served chocolatl in great golden goblets to Cortez and other Spanish guests in 1519 treating it like the food for the Gods.

In spite of its regal importance, the Mexican chocolatl was very bitter and the Spaniards could not relish it. Cortez and his countrymen therefore, conceived the idea of sweetening the preparation with cane sugar to make it acceptable to the Europeans. Thus, Cortez took chocolatl to Spain and the drink which underwent several changes, some adding little cinnamon and others giving flavour of vanilla, soon found favour with the Spanish people.

With the new drink gaining popularity, Spain wisely introduced cultivation of cocoa in its overseas possessions. This gave birth to a very profitable business for the Spaniards who maintained it as a secret from the rest of Europe for nearly a hundred years.

The chocolate secret was however leaked out by the Spanish monks in the 17th century and chocolate soon spread throughout Europe and Great Britain as a delicious health giving food. It even reigned as the drink at the fashionable Court of France. By about the middle of the 17th Century many famous chocolate houses appeared in Great Britain. At that time chocolate costs in England was between 10 to 15 Shillings per pound, a price which in those days was beyond the reach of all but the very rich.

Chocolate was used to be manufactured adopting hand methods till the end of 17th Century. However, in the early 18th Century cocoa grinding was taken up by small steam engines which helped in slashing down the chocolate prices to within financial reach of others besides the wealthy.

Chocolate was being prepared by using the whole cocoa beans or the nibs and sugar until the early part of the 19th Century. In 1828 Van Houten of Holland invented a press which helped to squeeze out a part of the cocoa butter thereby enabling to improve the quality of the beverage. This also led

to the manufacture of cocoa powder which at that time was called 'cocoa essence'.

The chocolate industry made remarkable progress during the 19th Century. As a result of manufacture of cocoa powder by passing, cocoa butter became available. The unique solidifying property of this fat enabled preparation of moulded chocolate tablets. This and the invention of fondant cream helped

developing fondant chocolate, a smooth and velvety variety that has almost replaced the old course grained chocolates which formerly dominated the world market. The eating chocolate of today had its origin in 1876 when Daniel Peter of Vavey in Switzerland invented a way of making milk chocolate by mixing milk solids with cocoa mass and sugar. The milk chocolate now produced in a variety of forms is the back bone of the present cocoa industry.

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Published by

THE DIRECTORATE OF CASHEWNUT DEVELOPMENT,
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & COOPERATION
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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