

Candied Sugar

A Sweet Invention from Ancient India That Still Shines Today



India's contributions to the world span many fields—mathematics, medicine, astronomy, architecture—but one of its sweetest and most enduring innovations is often overlooked: candied sugar, known to many as mishri or kalakand.

When and How?

Believed to have been developed during the Gupta dynasty (circa 4th to 6th century CE), candied sugar was a product of India's golden age of science and culture.

During this time, Indian food scientists were exploring how to preserve and transform sugarcane juice. Through repeated boiling and cooling, they discovered how to create large, clear crystals of sugar—a form that was more stable, easier to store, and more versatile than liquid sweeteners.

This was such a remarkable breakthrough in food technology that Buddhist monks carried it from India to China, where it later spread through trade and travel to the rest of the world.

Significant Properties

- Preservation and storage: Unlike jaggery or syrups, candied sugar could be stored for long periods without spoiling.
- Culinary versatility: It enhanced sweets, drinks and even savoury dishes, balancing sharp spices and acidic ingredients.
- Medicinal applications: In Ayurveda, mishri is used to cool the body, soothe the throat, and deliver herbal medicines in a palatable form.
- Cultural significance: It became a staple in temple offerings, post-meal mouth fresheners, and festive foods.



How is it made?

The process of making candied sugar involves boiling sugar syrup to the hard-crack stage, allowing it to cool and crystallise. These crystals can then be used in various forms—whole, powdered, or as coatings.

More than a culinary item, candied sugar is an example of how early Indian innovators transformed a natural resource into something with lasting cultural, scientific, and practical value. Its continued use in Indian homes, temples, and traditional medicine shows how relevant ancient innovations remain today.