



Montefiori winery), Leda Gamboa (The Adobe Food Truck at the Adobe Guadalupe) and Diego Hernandez (Corazon De Tierra) continue to transform, elevate and energize the local food scene with their creativity and enoturismo evangelism

For those unwilling or unsure about driving down to the Valle, a few reputable companies offer guided tours for small groups and individuals, including Fernando Gaxiola’s Baja Wine + Food. Although 4-wheel drive isn’t required, most roads leading up to the wineries are pocked dirt roads and dusty feet are guaranteed – a good enough reason to kick ‘em up and enjoy another sip of delicious Guadalupe Valley wine.



# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE



## *Nascent Wine Industry in India* Subhash Arora, President Indian Wine Academy



Wine culture is nascent but slowly catching on in India, historically known for its hard liquor drinkers. Modern day wine production was pioneered by the now defunct Champagne Indage with French collaboration in the 1980's to produce and export sparkling wine Omar Khayyam but varietals were introduced by Grover and Sula in the mid-late 1990's. The bureaucracy and government policies have been a hurdle in the progress with the government treating wine at par with liquor with social stigma attached to it.

It is pleasing and unsurprising now to visit a restaurant in Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore and find people ordering a glass or a bottle of wine with food. Go to a department store or a wine shop and you find even women shopping for wines. About 85% of these wines are made in India, ranging from Rs. 150- 4500 (\$2-65) each; most of them were not produced barely 20 years ago. Wine culture is slowly catching on in India though it is still less than 1% of the total consumption of over 600 million cases of hard liquor and beer.

Our old scriptures remind us of the royals courts imbibing a fermented drink that was perhaps unlike the wine we drink today. But it was more in fashion during the Mughal rule from the early 16th century to the mid-19th century. There are records of merchants coming from Shiraz in Persia, selling red wine to the top rung of the society. They seem to have even persuaded some locals to grow grapes and make wine locally.

We had grape and wine production in small parts in India with the British encouraging the production for their consumption in the 19th century. The famous International Exhibition in Calcutta of 1883-84 even boasted of a few Indian wines winning medals. History is full of folklore but insufficient documents. There are records of wine being produced in Kashmir and parts of Sahyadri Hills in Maharashtra. Post phylloxera in 1890-1900 when all the vineyards were destroyed, the British did not encourage the restart of the industry due to social pressures and protests against wine and alcohol.

#### Wine in Post-Independent India

As India became independent in 1947 wine was being consumed mainly in Goa due to Portuguese influence and in fact 1960's saw the production of cheap 'Goan Port' wine costing under \$2; it was fortified wine made by fermenting local eating grape varieties and mixing with molasses, flavours and adding natural alcohol to bring it to 20% abv.

#### Modern Day Wine Production

The modern day wine production was pioneered by Champagne Indage which produced Marquis de Pompadour and exported Omar Khayyam Brut using Méthode Traditionelle with French collaboration in the 1980's and later 'Riviera' and 'Chantilly' still wines that enjoyed popularity because of its monopoly. The credit for introducing varietals however, goes to Grover and Sula in the mid-late 1990's and considered a benchmark for modern day winemaking.





The wine culture took off in 2001 as the State of Maharashtra announced a model excise policy, waiving excise duty for sales within the State and offering other incentives, and the Indian government allowing free import of wines in 2002 with high import duties of around 260%. There are about 90 wineries today, over 80% being in Maharashtra and the balance mostly in Karnataka. Of late, fruit wine industry has starting developing in parts where different fruits grow aplenty and wastage is humungous.

During the period of 1980's to the early 2000's the cheaper fortified wine market continued to



grow, especially in the South and Southwest of India. Today, there is a total consumption of about 3.5 million cases with over 1 million cases of the 'cheap fortified' wines and about 450,000 cases of imported wines annually. There has been an average growth of around 10-12% during the last 20 years with a sharp drop during the global meltdown during 2008-2010 and in 2020-21 due to Covid-19, especially since wine tourism was reduced practically to nil and no online sales allowed.

Women, especially middle class, and the youth have been driving the growth of wine culture. Increased tourism to foreign countries has also contributed to people adopting wine culture. Another factor is the health benefits of red wine propagated by the medical fraternity. About 60% of the wine consumed is red with 35% being white; the balance is Rose and sparkling wine which is slowly increasing in consumption.

Known as the Napa Valley of India, Nashik is the center of production since it has been growing table grapes for over 50 years; India is ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup> biggest producer of grapes in the world, though the vast majority is table





grapes. Arguably, Karnataka terroir offers better quality of grapes. Minuscule portions are produced in other states- Kashmir is out of reach



today due to political and religious reasons but the foothills of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh

have a very good potential. Being nearer the equator India can have two crops of grapes for wine but due to the monsoons, winemakers prune their vines to keep only one crop for wine grapes, making January-April as the harvest season.

Indian wines are gradually getting to be discovered out if India but only about 5% is exported because the prices are not internationally competitive. Due to continued premiumisation, higher priced and higher quality wines are being added to the producer portfolios with upper end of the spectrum (J'NOON- a collaboration with Jean- Charles Boisset of Fratelli Wines in Maharashtra) selling for up to Rs. 4500 (\$65) a bottle.





Karnataka-based KRSMA exports to New York where the Estate Cabernet Sauvignon sells for \$45 in Retail.

However, wines have been accepted well for their flavour profile by the expats. There has been undeniably a marked improvement in quality in the last 10 years. This has also resulted in an increase in wine tourism with the leading producer Sula Vineyards making a million cases a year, receiving over 350,000 wine tourists a year. Others producers are gradually emulating its success, the financial constraints notwithstanding. Constitutional bottleneck

Unfortunately, the growth of the industry is not as fast as expected. There were perhaps less than 50,000 people drinking wine in 2001-today there are estimated to be around 4- 5 million. Bureaucracy and government policies are a major roadblock. Excise duty is huge and varies in different states. The government treats wine at par with liquor which has a social stigma attached to it. Genesis of this is in our Constitution.

India has a Federal Structure like the US. But Article 47 of our Constitution directs that the States shall endeavor to bring about prohibition of alcohol and drugs injurious to health and gives them the power to formulate their own taxation and marketing policy. Politicians use this as a cash cow and regularly raise taxes in an attempt to increase revenues. Out of 29 States and 7 Union Territories- Bihar, Gujarat, Mizoram and Nagaland States as well as in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep have enforced prohibition.

Indian producers try to be in tune with the wine trends and technology in the world. Sula introduced screw-caps around 15 years ago and a majority of producers followed suit. It introduced red sparkling wines and recently 'wine in the can'. It is a leader in sustainability, energy saving and using latest technology. Grover is innovating by using optical sorters, egg-shaped fermenters and amphorae. It has even bought a winery in Burgundy. Fratelli has introduced Italian grapes and their winemaking style. KRSMA is a boutique winery that has made top quality wines despite acute water shortage and is exporting to the US. They are all selling their wines to Michelin Starred restaurants in Europe and the USA and are very popular in the Indian restaurants in Japan.

There is no doubt that India has a bright future for wines, not only to check alcoholism due to liquor but also as a job provider to farmers. The speed with which the industry expands will depend upon the government delinking wine from spirits and how winemakers improve the quality without increasing prices.

