

Rise of coffeepreneurs



Updated: Nov 21, 2016, 07:50 AM IST

The verdant coffee estates of Coorg and Chikmagalur, a few hours' drive from Bengaluru, have turned out to be fertile incubators. Collectively labelled the 'coffee belt of India', the two districts are the latest crucibles for a host of entrepreneurs who are out to sell the finest specialty coffee to consumers and connoisseurs across India, and overseas.

Coffee roaster Abhijit Shetty, hospitality entrepreneur, Tejini Kariappa and advertising executive Ashish D'Abreo have all plunged into the aroma of freshly roasted and brewed coffee through their bright new ventures.

The trio retails and markets gourmet coffee, some of the best varieties from Coorg and Chikmagalur, for evolved drinkers who are eager to understand the nuances of coffee and appreciate the fine taste. They very well seem to be capitalising on a well-heeled, well-travelled and cosmopolitan set of beverage lovers thronging major metros in India, discerning consumers who seek the best products at competitive rates.

“We use grade A coffee beans and use no chicory. The [market](#) is changing and there exist people who understand and cherish different blends,” says Abhijit, who started Seven Beans Coffee Company in 2012 along with his brother Advith. Seven Beans leverages Italian roasting techniques and blends it fabulously with Indian coffee beans to produce each aromatic cup.

Tejini says her company Halli Berri Coffee, which she started with her mother Nalima Kariappa, produces coffee which is affordable and luxurious at the same time.

“Coffee drinking is catching on and we’re seeing more refined palates,” says Ashish, Partner at Flying Squirrel Coffee, which he started in 2013 with his friend Tej Thammaiah. If so, then it’s certainly a refreshing trend.

Despite India being the sixth largest coffee producer globally, Indians have always preferred tea to coffee. In fact, market estimates point out that in 2015, Indians, on an annual per capita basis, consumed only 16.6 cups of coffee. Marvellously towered by the annual per capita tea consumption, which was 176.6 cups.

But these entrepreneurs are enthusiastic. They remain optimistic that coffee is becoming a drink of choice, a beverage with which to unwind and relax, or catch up with buddies over time.

The world is drinking more coffee today, they say. And the International Coffee Organization confirms this, predicting demand to rise by almost 25% in the next five years.

Experts here attribute the growing coffee-drinking culture to the spurt of cafes; from the casually relaxing Café Coffee Days, to the uber sophisticated Starbucks.

“Yes. The café culture has positively impacted coffee consumption,” say the coffeepreneurs. They are quick to retort that the domestic and global café brands hold no competition to their expanding ventures; they, in fact, superbly complement their businesses. That’s because the start--ups sell their coffees to

premium cafes (who use it to make the piping hot cups for their customers), apart from selling to high-end restaurants (B2B), through gourmet food stores (B2C) and of course online.

Abhijit's Seven Beans brand is presently available in Bengaluru and Mumbai; and he has plans of approaching Chennai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and New Delhi, "preferably, through the restaurant/café channel and at a later date through retail stores."

Likewise, says Tejini. Halli Berri is again currently in Mumbai and Bengaluru, and Tejini is keen to look at New Delhi and the other metros through gourmet stores, cafes and restaurants.

Ashish though is treading a slightly different path. He is certainly using the B2B and B2C channels like the other two.

But he is soon starting a micro-roastery cum café in Bengaluru where daily roasting would take place. "It's going to be for people who want to be a part of the roasting and brewing experience. People can taste coffee and enrich their knowledge. Ee could start such micro-roasteries cum cafes in Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata," says Ashish.