

The new brew strategy

- **Cover Story**
- **Hyderabad**

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Building upon tradition, a young group of coffee connoisseurs teach us to appreciate the complexity of the coffee their parents grew and the importance of terms like artisanal, sustainable, local and natural.

COFFEE is cool, and Indian coffee is cooler still. That's the message a brave new breed of young coffee growers are taking to the world.

Youngsters with a family background in coffee, they are taking their products to the next level – incorporating quality produce with sustainable agriculture and state-of-the-art production techniques and marketing. To them, the customer is king – and they are pleased to customise their coffees, reach out to educate and grow their customer base. Their final desired outcome is to make Indian coffee a thing of beauty at home and abroad. Meet some of the players.



Rishwin Devaya | 26

Riverside Coffee, Coorg

“A planter's approach is usually to just maximise yield, but I am experimenting to control the end quality. I want to add value to Coorg coffee; I'm in it for the long run”

It was while Rishwin Devaya was working for a wine company that he realised he wanted to return to his roots to create a brand of world-class coffee from Riverside, his own 80-acre coffee estate in Siddapur, Coorg, along the Cauvery river. As he watched his employers go through the process of cultivating grapes, producing and selling wines, he realised he could do the same. “My

family has been growing coffee in Coorg since 1898, but we've always sold the beans to large-scale producers. In fact as I thought about it, I realised that very few coffee drinkers truly understand much about their preferred types of coffee (Arabica, Robusta) or different types of roasts." He quit his job and started processing the 60 tonnes of coffee grown in his estate. "I started sending out samples on a small scale to restaurants in Bangalore last year. I want my own strong brand, and to focus on customising coffee, so different restaurants get their own individual blends." Devaya's single origin coffee is UTZ and Wood certified, and has been launched in custom-designed tins in three variants – a 100 per cent Arabica, a 50/50 Arabica/ Robusta and the popular filter coffee blend which incorporates chicory. "From April onwards, my coffee will be available on my website, besides gourmet stores. For my next phase I plan to offer blends and grinds according to customer requests – the ultimate customised coffee. What I love about coffee is that each person has his own way of enjoying it. I want people to understand how simple it is to make a really good cup." Devaya recently launched Riverside Coffee with a tasting event at Red Fork, where he demonstrated different coffee-drinking styles for guests, a kind of show-and-tell on coffee. This covered the entire production process, from picking the ripe 'cherry', to the pulping and washing stage, to getting the 'parchment', followed by hulling and polishing to get the green bean and finally grading (AA, A, B or peaberry, while BBB – blacks, browns and bits – are usually sold in bulk to make instant coffee.) "A planter's approach is usually to just maximise yield, but I'm experimenting to control the end quality. I want to add value to Coorg coffee; I'm in it for the long run." www.riversidecoffee.in

Tejini Kariappa | 28
Halli Berri Coffee, Chikmagalur



"We sold our coffee in handwritten aluminium foil packets to start with. Then the name was suggested by my sister and my mother liked it, saying, 'We should be proudly Coorg.'"

Tejini Kariappa's idea of creating her coffee brand Halli Berri happened because "we were giving away too much free coffee," she says. Her family-run coffee enterprise is based in Chikmagalur and is headed by her mother and herself – India's first all-women run coffee business. Her estate, Kambihalli, in the foothills of Chikmagalur's Bababudan hills, has been in the family for generations, with Kariappa also running a PR firm, Estrada, in Mumbai. Halli means village in Kannada, and when juxtaposed with 'berry' makes the name sound ethnic, meaning 'the village berry.' Halli Berri grew almost organically, as visitors at the estate café run by her mother started asking for fresh-ground coffee powder to buy and take home. Kariappa explains, "We sold our coffee in handwritten aluminium foil packets to start with. Then the name was suggested by my sister and my mother liked it. 'We should be proudly Coorg,' she said." So Halli Berri was born and now remains a frontrunner in India's single-origin coffee story. Today Kariappa sells a single variant full-bodied 100 per cent Arabica coffee made from premium graded beans under the Halli Berri brand. She prices it affordably, "in fact not much more than instant coffee," she points out. The brand is Rainforest Alliance certified, one of the highest certifications worldwide. She also runs a CSR initiative, 'Be Berri Conscious' tied in with her coffee business – it is mandatory for all her workers to send their children to school, and families are given free meals. Halli Berri also supports wildlife initiatives – tiger conservation and 296 species of migratory birds in the estate. "I want this to be a legacy for my children and their children," she says. The estate also offers a responsible luxury homestay experience. Juggling two different lifestyles has been tough, more so given the innumerable subsidies, certification and licences a business needs for survival. But Kariappa finds the journey "interesting... Indian coffee must get its due recognition. And the youth in India should realise that Indian coffee is cool. This (coffee) has really been my life from the start – so you could say I'm trying to start a revolution." halliberri.com



Abhijit Shetty | 30, & Advith Shetty | 33

Seven Beans Coffee Company, Chikmagalur

“India is the sixth largest coffee producer in the world, but two-thirds of our coffee is exported to Europe, where the beans are roasted and sold; no one knows that’s Indian coffee”

Civil engineers by profession, the Shetty brothers, joint managing directors at Seven Beans Coffee Company, realised early on that their heart lay in producing the best coffees sourced from their five estates in Chikmagalur (their premium estate Woddaegudda is 450 acres and Rainforest Alliance certified). “We grew up spending summers on the estate – here coffee was grown but sold to coffee houses to process and sell,” says Advith, who handles sales. They decided to leverage their engineering skills to develop their business, raising the bar through research and export. “India is the sixth largest coffee producer in the world, but two-thirds of our coffee is exported to Europe, where the beans are roasted and sold under different international brand names. There, they command exorbitant prices, except no one knows that’s Indian coffee,” says Abhijit, who looks after production and operations, adding that they wanted to create a globally recognised brand. They incorporated Seven Beans Coffee in 2013, a complete bean-to-cup enterprise, and started the search for a global partner. They zeroed in on Dr Dante Cagliari, a noted Italian master roaster, and the association recognises Seven Beans for a unique USP in the custom-made single estate coffee market. Seven Beans pre-blends and then roasts their coffee at their own customised Chikmagalur roastery, grinding and packaging both whole coffee beans, powder and capsules. They have begun exporting three variants under their own brand names – Mishta (70/30 Arabica/Robusta), Urja (60/40), and Eka (50/50) – and the packaging is deliberately very Indian. They also import signature Italian blends by Cagliari. Abhijit explains the historical growth of coffee, “The early 1900s saw the patenting of technology for instant coffee. It was followed by consumers, especially those in the US, seeking better quality and asking about origin; terms like ‘fair trade’ became important. The most recent trend saw the term ‘artisanal coffee’ coined. Artisanal producers control every step of coffee production, from bean to cup.” Seven Beans started production in 2015 and now sells its custom coffees to corporate offices and restaurants, as well as online and in gourmet stores. They offer end to end services, including renting and sale of imported Italian coffee machines. Aiming to bring the perfect cup to consumers, they offer barista training, from grinding coffee to frothing milk. “Indian consumers learn quick, want quality and are aspirational, therefore they are aware of artisanal Indian coffee,” adds Abhijit. sevenbeans.co

Expert speak



Indian single estate coffee is an idea whose time has come. The growth of India's coffee story has been generational. Earlier generations saw coffee as a commodity, pooled to sell so there was no individual identity. For today's new generation, whom I call 'marketpreneurs,' marketing is important. They are more passionate in their approach. It's not about production alone now – there are value adds, customised blends, quality packaging, niche brands with back stories happening along with the additional benefit of e-commerce. This is excellent. However, the new generation must be aware of a few factors. They must not ape the biggies – the Tata Coffees or Unilevers – but focus on the 'small is beautiful' dictum. They must also concentrate on physical distribution of their product, not only the virtual via e-commerce. And they need to focus on quality, not get overwhelmed by only branding. Finally, customisation divides markets into choice segments: do this with scale in mind, don't create nano-niches which are unsustainable by themselves. This is the way ahead to lift Indian coffee to world recognition.

— **Harish Bijoor**

coffee expert & brand consultant

Meet the others

Specialised coffee brands like Flying Squirrel (flyingsquirrel.in) and Blue Tokai (bluetokaicoffee.com) have been making their presence felt among coffee lovers in India with customised coffee straight from estates in Chikmagalur and Coorg, sold online and instore. Other players include the Indian Bean Company (theindianbean.com) and Bengaluru's Estatecraft coffee (estatecraft.in).

By Ruma Singh.