

Pale ale to be the next wave in the beer industry

Lagers have largely dominated the beer market in India but the scope for IPAs (Indian Pale Ale), wheat beer, sour beer and pilsners is immense and their consumption will pick up significantly in times to come.

By Fernando Bustamante

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Beer is one of the oldest alcoholic beverages in the world, dating back to the fifth millennium BC. Its use has been recorded in the written history of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. So when we sip that refreshing mug of our favourite beer, we are actually tasting a brew that was much preferred by our ancient ancestors. That said, beer has evolved both with time and across cultures. So much so that today there are multiple types and brands of beer – virtually from every country across the world, each with its distinct taste and following.

As per the recent report by BMI Research, the beer industry of India presents a huge potential. In terms of volume, the Indian beer market grew from 18 million hectolitres in 2011 to 25 million hectolitres in 2015. The market is expected to cross 32 million hectolitres by end 2020, which is an absolutely amazing statistic! Beer has one of the lowest ABV (Alcohol By Volume) levels (usually in the range of 5-8%) among all alcoholic beverages, and that is perhaps one reason for its popularity both across the world as well as in India. That's considering the fact that the Indian palate has a tendency, by and large, to tip towards stronger beers with an ABV closer to 8%.

There is another reason for the unprecedented growth of the beer market in India. It could be because of the openness of beer connoisseurs in India to experiment both with brands and with freshly brewed craft beers. Experts feel that the impact of imported brands on the beer market in India will be akin to those of the coffee chains on the coffee business in India. Global beer brands such as Corona, Stella Artois, Hoegaarden, Mahou 5 Star & Mahou Clásica have been hugely successful in India. The rise of microbreweries has also opened India's palate to the charms of fresh as well as craft beers. Dating as far back as 2009, when India's first microbrewery, Doolally, opened its gates for the beer lovers in Pune, today India boasts of several hundreds of such microbreweries across all the major



metros with unbelievable variety such as the exotic mango beer or the delicious wheat beer. In turn, India's thirst for this delightful brew is ever growing!

But it's not just about business or alcohol content. Beer is seen as a social drink, one that is to be savoured in the company of friends, while sharing positive experiences. The beverage is associated with exuberance, passion, and energy. For example, it is par for the course to watch a game of football with friends while sipping beer. Beer is not usually consumed with the intent to get the so-called 'hit'. Instead, beer aficionados enjoy the brand for its taste and flavour and its association with football. Mahou, in particular, has a deep association with the world's most beautiful game. Mahou 5 Star is the official sponsor of La Liga in Spain, which sees fierce competition from powerhouses such as Real Madrid, Atlético de Madrid, Villarreal, Getafe, Leganés, Alcorcón, and other clubs.

When I think of India in terms of its beer consumption patterns, it has been largely dominated by lagers. The next wave in the industry will ride on IPAs (Indian Pale Ale), wheat beer, sour beer and pilsners. The scope is immense and these will pick up in India in times to come, which is good news for the consumer.

So the next time you want to enjoy beer – try it in the Spanish style of Cañas and Tapas. Roughly translated as 'beer and snacks' – a Caña is a small glassful of beer containing roughly around 200 ml of the brew, while Tapas are small portions of delicious bite-sized snacks that go with tempered amounts of beer. Mix and match the Tapas with the Caña to suit your palate and for that perfect taste. You will be pleasantly surprised to find that your evenings last longer, the conversations become more interesting, and the experience is memorable. **PG**



The writer is CEO, Mahou India, a fully owned subsidiary of Spanish beer company Mahou San Miguel.