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## CHEESE GOES ARTY!

Indian artisanal cheeses have come of age

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# CHEESE GOES ARTY!

Indian artisanal cheeses have come of age

*By Bindu Gopal Rao*



In December 2023, Kavuri Hills in Hyderabad saw a flurry of activity as the city saw the launch of **PS Cheese Café** opening its doors. The brainchild of founder, Prashant Sinha, (who is also part of the brands **Roastery Coffee House** - specialty coffee, and **Colocal** - artisanal chocolate), who wanted to do something interesting with cheese, decided to learn cheese making, and practiced for two years, till he was sure about the product. Once Sinha found a good local source for milk, he decided to open PS Cheese Café, with a live cheese factory and now has a range that includes mozzarella, feta, ricotta, and cream cheese. And going by the response, what is clear is the concept is a winner.

### Say Cheese

The artisanal cheese movement in India has its game on point since it started a few years ago. Local flavours combined with international expertise has made Indian artisanal cheese a force to reckon with.

Indian cheese makers are making products comparable to any imported cheese in terms of quality which is why consumers are moving towards domestic cheese. At **Old Hill Foods**, located in Kumaon Himalayas, they make traditional European Cheese such as Cheddar, Parmesan & Gouda and specialises in hard and semi-hard cheese. “We make our cheese by hand without using machinery, thus it is called artisanal. Well-travelled consumers know that European cheese tastes different when it makes it to India. This is perhaps because of the distance that they need to travel or because they keep the Grade A produce for themselves and other western markets. Whatever be the reason, domestic cheese is here to stay.” says **Nitin Dayalu**, Co-Founder, Old Hill Foods.

**Valentin Melchior**, a Frenchman who runs **Melchior Cheese** in Bengaluru adds, “We make fresh cheeses and aged cheeses using traditional European recipes with local



Photo courtesy PS Cheese Café





Photo courtesy Spotted Cow Fromagerie

ingredients and environment. These cheeses are completely handcrafted and produced in limited batches, using local milk, starters, and vegetarian rennet, which make them organic.”

### **Local Love**

Indian cheese makers are getting very innovative with using local herbs and spices giving their cheese an Indian touch. **The Spotted Cow Fromagerie**, a small creamery based in Mumbai, makes European style cheeses like French classics Brie & Camembert as well as classic cultured Mozzarella di bufala and Burrata di bufala which are made the traditional way and with pure buffalo milk. “We work with local ingredients, local produce and milk, our cheeses are made in the traditional cheese making methods which lends it a specific look, feel and texture. The cheeses are made in small batches so they can be aged with attention and mainly the process of cheese making is not standardised like in big dairy plants, the seasonal changes in milk and ingredients adds to the beauty of slight variations.” explains **Prateeksh Mehra**, Founder, The Spotted Cow Fromagerie.

### **Arty Take**

Cheese making is a very patient practice, there are cheeses which are made and sold fresh like mozzarella and others which are aged for a minimum of three months. Apart from the focus on local produce which has become very important recently, the traceability and freshness of the produce, are among the factors driving the cheese movement in India. “Nowadays people generally go toward natural and locally made products, especially in the food sector. With more awareness, and more access to everything, one is constantly on the lookout for new experiences, exploring things they have either tried while travelling or seen on the internet. So, when it comes to a relatively exotic but “made in India” product, people get fascinated.” says Melchior.



Photo courtesy Melchior Cheese



*Photo courtesy Spotted Cow Fromagerie*

Amalgamations of European style cheeses with local spices like cumin, thyme and chili have been a great hit as well as grazing and charcuterie boards that are also very appreciated. Cheese has now become an important part of full course meal events which have become very trendy now.

### ***Crossing Hurdles***

Most artisanal cheese brands have a small setup and face challenges that any small manufacturer would have. Availability of capital for growth is a big one as most of them run in a bootstrapped manner. "I guess the main challenge any cheese maker in India would face would be its main raw material which is milk. Making sure we get the best quality of unadulterated milk which is best suited to make our cheeses, is essential. Cold chain is not the best and especially for small producers like us it is even more difficult, making sure the cheeses are transported with a proper cold chain becomes very challenging," says Mehra. Making aged cheeses in India is a challenge mostly because of the climate. There is also a need to find alternative solutions to natural caves and improvise with all the local challenges. Making sure that their supply is constant and quality is maintained is the focus of most cheesemakers and this helps build trust with partners and customers alike. So, let's say cheese.