CUP CULTURE 2.0

SPECIALITY CAFÉS, MICRO-ROASTERIES & HOME BREWERS ARE TURNING THE HUMBLE CUPPA INTO A FULL-BLOWN LIFESTYLE

Bindu Gopal Rao

Remember when Café Coffee Day burst onto Bangalore's coffee scene in the 1990s with its now-iconic promise, "A lot can happen over coffee"? Three decades later, the tagline sounds less like an advertising slogan and more like a prophecy.

Because a lot is, indeed, happening over coffee in the city. Only, the humble cup has acquired a rather sophisticated makeover.

Bangalore's coffee culture has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past five years. What was once largely about a quick filter coffee at a neighbourhood darshini or catching up with friends over a cappuccino has evolved into a full-fledged lifestyle movement.

From speciality cafés and micro-roasteries to coffee clubs, tasting sessions and home-brewing experiments, the city is brewing up a storm. And its increasingly curious coffee drinkers are keen to savour every bit of it.

"Everyone wants to be part of it, and there is a growing excitement around coffee," says Rajkumari Jayapalashri Anil, granddaughter of Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, the last ruling Maharaja of Mysore, and founder of The House of Berunda.

She believes the city has become more curious about what goes into its cup, creating room for speciality cafés that bring global coffee trends together with beans sourced from Indian estates.

The change is particularly evident among youngsters, who are no longer content with simply ordering their usual brew.

Coffee-themed events, brewing sessions, tasting experiences and opportunities to meet fellow enthusiasts are drawing interest. The conversation has moved beyond whether one prefers coffee hot or cold to the finer details of Arabica versus Robusta, single-origin beans, roasting profiles, processing methods and brewing techniques.

And it isn't just happening inside cafés. Home brewing has found its own enthusiastic audience, with coffee lovers experimenting with French presses, pour-overs and an assortment of brewing equipment.

Filter coffee gets a makeover

But before anyone declares the traditional filter coffee passé, let's get one thing straight – Bangalore isn't abandoning its roots. If anything, it is finding exciting new ways to celebrate them.

Hamsini Appadurai, President of the Speciality Coffee Association of India (SCAI) and organiser of the India International Coffee Festival (IICF), points out that filter coffee is now making its presence felt on speciality café menus.

"Filter Coffee, which has been long associated with darshinis, is now on the menu of a speciality café where they are putting together more interesting filter offerings and creating drinks around filters. The next step is in the cup. Some growers are pushing for 100% pure coffee in filters, which can deliver an excellent result, and I expect more cafés to follow," she says.

Meanwhile, consumers are becoming more discerning. They want to know where their beans were grown, how they were processed and what makes one cup different from another. Manual brewing at home is also gaining ground.

The takeaway? Bangalore is perfectly happy to have its traditional filter coffee and its carefully brewed single-origin coffee, too. Why choose when you can have both?

Not just a pretty café-face

A distinctive menu, individuality, a comfortable atmosphere and a memorable experience are becoming just as important as the coffee itself. And increasingly, the conversation between the person behind the counter and the customer is part of the attraction.

Kiran Vijayakumar, founder of Kura, believes these conversations can turn casual customers into curious coffee explorers.



(Left) Kiran Vijaykumar and Prajwal Venugopal Founders of Kura



Kura Cafe













Yahvi Mariwala, Co-Founder, NandanCoffee; Mulla House Cafe Entrance

"When founders or baristas speak with guests about coffee/food, guests begin to understand and value what is in the cup or plate. They remember something we discussed and come back to try it another day. Some guests already know what they want. Others need to feel comfortable asking questions. Once that conversation starts, they become excited about exploring. Social media helps, but location with the right product is our pick," he explains.

In other words, a beautifully styled café may get people through the door, but the experience has to do the heavy lifting.

Prajwal Lokesh, founder of Chins Bar, Coffee and Kitchen, agrees that the city's young, well-travelled and increasingly informed audience is open to experimenting with new concepts.

Social media has undoubtedly made discovering new cafés easier. A tempting photograph or an interesting concept might spark the first visit, but repeat customers are won through consistency.

"People may visit because something looks interesting, but they return because the coffee, service and overall experience consistently deliver," says Lokesh.

So, while social media might be the invitation, the coffee still has to do the talking.

Every bean has a story

Here is where Bangalore's coffee revolution gets particularly interesting. The modern coffee drinker wants more than a beverage; they want to know its backstory. And India's rich coffee-growing heritage is providing plenty of material.

Consumers are now familiar with individual estates and processing methods, and some can identify their favourite coffee origins with surprising confidence.

Yahvi Mariwala, co-founder of Nandan Coffee, sees this growing awareness as a testament to the stories being told about Indian coffee.

"They can name their favourite estates and processing methods the way someone might name their favourite soda flavour. That is a testament to the stories being told about Indian coffee," she says.

For an increasingly informed audience, such transparency adds another dimension to the drinking experience. Knowing where a coffee comes from is no longer just an interesting detail; it is becoming part of what makes the cup special.

And India's position as a major coffee-producing country gives its cafés a compelling story to tell. Rather than simply following international trends, they can celebrate the estates and growers closer to home.

Where coffee meets community

Of course, coffee has never been only about what is inside the cup. Its greatest strength has always been its ability to bring people together.

They are where friendships are forged, familiar faces become regulars. In a city that has seen its café culture evolve through several generations, that social connection remains remarkably constant.

Prathish Nair, co-founder of BLR Bistro, says the idea of bringing people together is central to the experience.

"I believe the most memorable places are not necessarily the most elaborate ones. They are the places where people feel comfortable, return often and begin to associate with their own memories," he says.

It is an interesting reminder that while the coffee scene may be getting increasingly sophisticated, the emotional appeal of a café remains wonderfully uncomplicated.

Nair traces the city's coffee journey from the legend of Baba Budan and the early coffee houses to the darshinis, the Café Coffee Day generation and today's speciality cafés.

"From sharing a by-two filter coffee after breakfast to exploring a carefully brewed single-origin coffee, the formats have changed, but the emotion hasn't. Bangalore has never stopped loving its coffee. It has simply found new ways to express that love," he adds.

And perhaps that is the secret ingredient in the city's enduring coffee romance - the brew may change, but the need to connect over it doesn't.

Brewing a stronger Indian coffee story

As Bangalore's coffee community grows, there is also a larger conversation taking shape around supporting Indian growers and bringing homegrown coffee into the spotlight.

The India International Coffee Festival, held every year, aims to bring estates, roasters and cafés together on a common platform.

Instead of café owners having to spend days or months travelling between estates to understand the available coffee, the festival allows them to taste a range of offerings in a single day.

It also creates opportunities for growers. Workshops have helped participating estates learn how to market themselves and connect with roasters across the country.

Appadurai believes cafés and micro-roasteries can do much more to celebrate Indian coffee.

"Cafés and micro-roasteries are beginning to tell this story, and I would like to see more of them tell it, particularly with beans from Karnataka's own regions, such as Chikmagalur and Coorg. We are also seeing many roasters export speciality roasts to cafés around the world," she says.

For Bangalore, the transformation is already visible. From the familiar steel tumbler of filter coffee to the carefully measured pour-over, city's coffee journey has come a long way.

Three decades after Café Coffee Day made its memorable promise, one thing is certain – Bangalore still believes that a lot can happen over coffee. And judging by the way the city is brewing, the best conversations may only just be beginning.

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