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## Sipping Success: The Rise of Wine Culture in India

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In India, wine was once thought to be a luxury or specialized treat, only enjoyed by foreign visitors or guests staying in five-star hotels. That view is quickly shifting today. From wine tasting evenings in big cities to vineyard tours in Nashik, India is undergoing a subtle but significant change: the emergence of wine culture. Although grapes have been grown in India for a very long time, organized winemaking didn't really take off until the latter half of the 20th century. The pivotal moment occurred when forward-thinking business people realized the potential of Indian terroir, particularly in areas like Maharashtra and Karnataka. Currently, between 70-80 per cent of India's wine is produced in Maharashtra alone, with Nashik being dubbed the "Wine Capital of India." A structured wine industry has been shaped in part by favourable climate conditions, government incentives, and technological advancements.

Harvest is when wine quality starts. Wine grapes, as opposed to table grapes, are harvested based on exact measurements of total soluble solids ( $^{\circ}$ Brix), pH balance, titratable acidity, and phenolic maturity. The tropical and subtropical climates of India permit several pruning cycles, but they also necessitate careful harvest planning. Harvesting grapes must take place in the cool morning hours to reduce microbial contamination and respiration losses. Grape quality can quickly deteriorate due to delayed transportation or exposure to high temperatures, thereby affecting fermentation performance, colour, and aroma. A delay of even a few hours under high temperatures can compromise sugar balance and aromatic compounds.

One of the biggest risks during post-harvest handling is mechanical injury. Berries that have been crushed may start the fermentation and oxidation process too soon. In order to avoid this, grapes are harvested in tiny crates with holes (10–15 kg capacity). Transport takes four to six hours to complete. Applying regulated amounts of sulfur dioxide ( $\text{SO}_2$ ) can inhibit the growth of microorganisms. Transport temperature control is becoming more and more crucial, particularly as climate variability increases. Strict hygienic measures are taken in modern wineries to prevent undesirable microbes from interfering with fermentation.

To preserve hygienic conditions and reduce contamination, stainless steel equipment is used for crushing and destemming grapes once they arrive at the winery. In order to turn sugars into alcohol, specific strains of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* are introduced. Temperature regulation is essential and for white wines ranges from 12–18 $^{\circ}$ C and Red wines ranges from 22–28 $^{\circ}$ C. Leading Indian wineries now have stainless steel fermentation tanks with temperature control. These systems are a significant improvement over earlier conventional techniques because they guarantee consistent fermentation and preserve delicate scents.

The final sensory qualities of wine are determined by post-fermentation management. Ageing can occur in tanks made of stainless steel, barrels made of oak and bottled storage in a controlled environment. Post-harvest infrastructure is a defining factor in wine quality because it takes technological investment to maintain these conditions in India's warm climate.

The Indian wine industry has witnessed consistent growth over the past decade, despite regulatory challenges. While per capita wine consumption remains modest compared to traditional wine-producing nations, the trajectory is upward. Premiumization is another emerging trend. Consumers are gradually moving from entry-level wines to reserve labels and sparkling varieties. Domestic sparkling wines are gaining traction, especially at celebrations and corporate events. Additionally, e-commerce and digital marketing have helped wineries reach new audiences, offering educational content and curated experiences. Despite progress, the journey has not been without obstacles. The wine industry in India faces high state excise duties, interstate trade restrictions, competition from imported wines and climate variability affecting grape quality. Yet, innovation and resilience have kept the industry moving forward. Technological advancements in viticulture and fermentation have improved consistency and quality, helping Indian wines gain recognition at international competitions.

Beyond numbers and production volumes, the rise of wine culture signals a broader societal change. India's urban consumers are increasingly embracing global culinary trends while seeking locally crafted products. Wine fits naturally into this evolving lifestyle. Wine appreciation workshops, sommelier courses, and vineyard events have fostered a new community of enthusiasts. Social media has amplified this movement, turning wine tasting into a shared cultural experience.

India may not yet rival centuries-old wine traditions of Europe, but it has carved out a unique identity shaped by tropical viticulture and entrepreneurial spirit. With growing disposable income, expanding hospitality sectors, and increasing awareness, the future of wine in India looks promising. The clink of glasses in urban wine bars and the quiet rustle of grapevines in Nashik tell the same story: wine in India is no longer just a drink-it is a symbol of aspiration, refinement, and evolving taste. As more Indians raise a toast to new beginnings, one thing is clear: the country isn't just drinking wine-it's savouring success.

Ultimately, the story of wine in India is not merely one of aspiration and evolving taste; it is a testament to scientific discipline applied after harvest. Every glass poured carries the imprint of carefully timed picking, hygienic handling, controlled fermentation, and protected storage. The elegance appreciated in a restaurant or at a vineyard estate is the culmination of countless post-harvest decisions made with accuracy and care.

As India continues to embrace wine as a symbol of sophistication and global connectedness, the foundations of its success will remain rooted in post-harvest management. From sunrise harvests in Nashik to temperature-controlled cellars safeguarding ageing vintages, science quietly shapes the nation's journey toward winemaking excellence. In every sip, there is not just flavour, but the triumph of precision, technology, and agricultural expertise-truly a story of sipping success.