

Yoghurt has arrived, in style

Indian consumers are rediscovering yoghurt, and the reasons run thick and deep

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Yoghurt has been on my mind for many days now, like a pleasant humming tune that refuses to go away. It all started when I recently discovered Epigamia, a relatively new brand of Greek yoghurt that is now widely available in Indian cities. I fell in love with the Honey Banana, with the vanilla bean flavour coming a close second. It is now my favourite light dessert. I have also noticed lots of people in airports eating it, and my neighbourhood *kirana* store says the product is moving very fast.

Yoghurt encounters

Soon after this Epigamia love story happened, my wife and I were invited to a special dinner created by celebrity masterchef George Calombaris, who is well known as one of the host-judges on Masterchef Australia. It was a splendid seven-course meal, inspired by the chef's Greek origins as well as the Indian locale. Amidst an expansive and exciting menu that evening, my favourite dish was the unique slow-cooked egg with smoked yoghurt. As advised by the chef, I mashed the soft egg into the creamy smoked yoghurt, and it delivered heaven on my tongue. The chef reminded us that yoghurt has been an integral part of both Greek and Indian cuisine, for ages.

A few days later, my daughter, who has recently enrolled at university in the US for her graduate studies, told me about her discovery of exotic flavoured yoghurt at her local supermarket, Trader Joe's. She mentioned that she bought two unusual flavours - mocha and green tea - because she found them quite cool. And I made a mental note that she had bought them in preference to ice-creams or other rich desserts.

In India, so many of us have grown up with a close cousin of yoghurt in our daily diet, *dahi*. *Dahi* is served routinely with hot *aloo* or *gobi parathas*, in Punjab and the Hindi heartland. In Tamil Nadu, no meal is



Cooler by the day Yoghurt is in, and how!

ever complete without the ritual of curd rice, often eaten with lime pickle. A bowl of curds is always served with a *thali* meal, and relished at the very end.

Yet I think we have taken *dahi* largely for granted, not providing it the special place it deserves, until the modern marketers of Epigamia, Danone, Nestle and Masterchef Australia all arrived together, on our shores. Suddenly, Indians are rediscovering yoghurt as a very fashionable and contemporary food. However, as Swati Jain, who served as Marketing Head at Danone, once told us: "This is basically *dahi* that went abroad and came back." Clearly, while we do not need Greeks and Europeans to teach us the simple pleasures of yoghurt, it would be worthwhile to understand the reasons behind this recent consumer trend, because these same reasons are applicable to so many other products.

Health, backed by science

Yoghurt is marketed today as a very healthy food, to consumers who crave health and wellness all the time. While we have always known that yoghurt is healthy, the new marketing claims are based on science, not just age-old beliefs, and therefore far more credible to today's generation. Consumers are specifically made aware that yoghurt contains probiotics, which are good bacteria cultures that help gut health, and regulate the digestive system. In fact, Epigamia even highlights two specific strains of good bacteria that its branded yoghurts contain-

S. *Thermophilus*, and *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, names that make their scientific sounding impact, though they are rather difficult to pronounce. In addition, virtually every brand of yoghurt speaks about the product being rich in calcium and other specific minerals, such as potassium, zinc and magnesium. Of course, these scientific claims and proof points sit very well on top of our own age-old belief systems that *dahi* is good for us, thereby creating strong consumer interest and demand.

Lure of the natural

An adjacent trend to health and wellness is the increased desire for all things natural and simple. Today's consumers are rapidly turning away from synthetic ingredients, preservatives, artificial colours and their likes. Yoghurt is marketed as an entirely natural food, and most yoghurt brands highlight that they do not use preservatives either. Nestle's a+ Grekyo yoghurt, a beautifully crafted brand which is also making inroads into Indian cities, talks about how it uses only real fruit bits in its yoghurt. Contrast this with many other brands of dessert, including ice-creams and cakes, which use artificial flavours and preservatives.

With a host of Indian *mithais* bought from sweetmeat shops, you can never really be sure what colours or flavours have been used, because they don't tell you. No wonder then, that branded yoghurt with its natural appeal is making such inroads.

I find flavours of yoghurt such as Honey

Banana, Mocha, Green Apple and Green Tea very exotic, because they are not commonly found in Indian stores, and of course, they are uniquely delicious.

Exotic and cool

In addition, the very concept of eating a 'Greek yoghurt' is also cool, because Greece and the Mediterranean coastline is such a cool place, for its olives, wines, soft relaxed lifestyles, pristine islands and much more. Selling the cool is generally a triumph of marketing and storytelling, as brands of vodka (Grey Goose, or Absolut) and even water (Evian, or Himalayan) have repeatedly demonstrated to us. I am sure many millennial consumers, such as my college-going daughter, find the junction of the natural and the exotic cool a very seductive place to be in, and yoghurt is therefore appealing to their heads and hearts very strongly.

All these three lessons from yoghurt are relevant to product marketers across categories. If you are trying to leverage health and wellness as a trend, use the power of science to truthfully buttress your claims. And it is always best if new science sits on top of a subliminal age-old belief system. Whether you are marketing garments, food or furniture, remember that an increasing segment of consumers craves, natural products. And, finally, injecting the exotic and cool into a brand always makes it aspirational. In fact, every category can unlock this allure if only it finds the right keys - even the humble peanut has become exotic with its new-found wasabi flavour.

Before I conclude, I must comment on two delicious, authentically Indian products which are adjacent to yoghurt, and which I think can give Greek yoghurt a proper run for its money - *Mishti Doi*, and *Shrikhand*. The world is waiting to discover these wonderful treats, and hopefully an Indian marketer will make them the next big craze in the world of yoghurt. Perhaps my daughter will also find them in her local supermarket in the US soon enough, and I suspect she will prefer them to mocha-flavoured yoghurt.

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