

BEHIND THE BOTTLE



THIRD EDITION

THE CULINARY OWL

KEEPING THE SPIRIT ALIVE AND SAFE

Indian mixology has moved past the era of cheap college spirits and generic mixers. Today, people between 25 and 40 want premium, experiential drinking. Whether it is small-batch gins, homegrown single malts that can beat international rivals or smoke-infused cocktails served in swanky lounges, the modern Indian market demands a wow-worthy, experience. Today's consumers are not just buying a drink; they are buying a memory they will never forget.

Those Affordable "Whiskeys" Are Not Whiskeys



LET'S BEGIN WITH RECENT HEARTBREAKS

If you believed that your favourite cheap drinks were what the labels promised, you might want to pause for this

Old Monk is not really a rum? Yes you heard it correctly. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) recently made an announcement in the Bombay High Court saying that Old Monk should not be sold as a rum, in its current version. Why? Because the regulator says that Old Monk is mainly made from a neutral spirit mixed with rum flavouring instead of being made in the usual way and aged for a long time. FSSAI took Old Monk to the Bombay High Court saying it does not meet the definition

of rum, which requires natural sugarcane distillation and traditional aging. Lab tests showed that the famous drink is more than 95% un-aged Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) and only less than 5% real matured rum, which means its famous taste comes from artificial flavouring and not real aging. Because FSSAI stated that labels like "7 Years Old Blended" were incorrect and false, the manufacturer finally agreed in court to remove the aging claims, instead changing the labels on the bottles to "Flavoured Rum."

And it is not only the rum that is affected. If you are buying an Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) "whisky" that costs usually less than ₹500, you are probably not enjoying a whisky that meets global standards. Most of these low-price bottles are made from sugarcane molasses. The molasses is distilled into a flavourless spirit, then artificial flavours and colours are added to make it look and taste like a whisky.

Hold onto your highball glasses because this golden age has a hangover. As India's desire for high-quality spirits increases rapidly a hidden underworld of booze is making money. Honestly the last thing you want, after spending half your pay check on a "premium" drink is a bootleg knockoff that tastes like hand sanitizer, or worse it can send you straight to the ER. These bootleggers even act like scientists dumping synthetic dyes into bottles just to make their toxic sludge look like an aged masterpiece.

Your Survival Guide

This edition of the newsletter is your survival guide, delving into some ancient bizarre history, along with some essential tips to keep in mind when sipping your next drink. Let's dive into India's fake liquor industry, and subsequently it's consumer rights (including how to legally score that ₹5 drinking permit [contd. Pg.3]).

BOTTLED BLUFF !!!

THE FAKE LIQUOR GUESSING GAME



Beyond the definitions there is an actual villain to the story: The fake liquor mafia is the real problem behind the counterfeit drinks.

It is not just a person mixing drinks in a bathtub. The fake liquor mafia runs an organised refill market. Bootleggers raid the trash of bars and clubs, gather pristine empty bottles of premium brands, fill them with hazardous cheap knock-offs (and sometimes literal toxic sludge with synthetic dyes) and seal them up to sell at massive margins.

Over the years we have seen everything, from 1,400 fake bottles with irregular holograms seized in Gurugram to licensed stores in Delhi and Ghaziabad acting as mini bottling units—filling Black Dog and Johnnie Walker bottles with cheap booze and water. The fake liquor mafia is, behind all of these operations

CATCHING THE CON BEFORE THE CAP COMES OFF

Don't let them destroy your weekend! Here is how you can tell if something is fake:



•Cap Check:

Always inspect the seal closely. If the plastic wrap around the cap feels loose or sits unevenly, that's a red flag, skip that bottle. A genuine, unopened product will have a tight, neatly applied seal with no gaps, tears, or signs of tampering. If anything looks disturbed or poorly aligned, don't buy it.

•App Scan:

Do you see a QR code? Scan it! It should take you directly to information about the product. If it sends you to a website that doesn't work or doesn't look like the real thing from the brand, that is a big warning sign.

•Label Logic:

Watch for spelling errors, awkward fonts or bad quality printing. People who make bottles can copy the container but they usually make mistakes with the small details, on the label or the special marks that show it is real.



BOUNCING THE BAD BOOZE

HOW TECH GUARDS YOUR GLASS

Governments are finally fighting back using tech to guard your glass, moving beyond simple paper labels.

States such as Goa, Haryana, Meghalaya and Kerala are putting in place AI-enabled High Security Excise Adhesive Labels and track-and-trace systems. States are giving each bottle a digital identity, sometimes backed by blockchain tech. This means the QR code on your bottle is cryptographically linked to a distributed ledger so that bootleggers cannot fake the code without setting off alarms in the system.



KEEP YOUR RIGHT KEEP YOUR VIBE

Navigating Indian liquor laws can feel like a PhD.

The ₹5 Permit:

Here's a quirky one, in Maharashtra, you technically need a state-issued permit just to drink, possess, or carry alcohol, even in your own home. But here's the kicker: a one-day permit that lets you legally drink foreign liquor for a day costs just ₹5. Enforcement is rare, sure, but the permit exists on paper, and technically, you're supposed to have one before you raise that glass. (Source: India Filings)

Home Delivery:

Thanks to rule changes made during the pandemic lockdowns, alcohol delivery apps and local stores in Maharashtra were permitted to deliver liquor straight to your door. All you needed was age verification and that same ₹5 permit, often processed right on the app. Some platforms still operate this way informally, though it's worth noting the "official" legitimacy of these delivery services has become murkier since the lockdown-era rules lapsed. (Source: USDA)

Your Ultimate Consumer Right:

Here's one worth knowing: The MRP. No licensed retail shop can legally charge you more than the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) printed on the bottle, full stop. That "cooling charge" some shops try to slap on because the bottle is chilled? It's not a real fee, it's a scam. Know your rights and push back.

Every liquor bottle in India is legally required to disclose alcohol content, manufacturing details, and a batch number. If a label skips these, don't buy it, it's not just shady, it's illegal. That batch number matters most: it's how brands trace a bottle back to its exact production run if something goes wrong.



PACING THE POUR

Today responsible drinking looks a little different than dunking burnt bread into a glass.

Here is the modern checklist:

❑ Pacing Yourself:

Hydrate between drinks! Responsible drinking will have your Sunday self thanking you

❑ Knowing the Law:

Do not drink and drive; remember to get a ₹5 permit if you are in Maharashtra. (TNN, 2020)

❑ Trust the Technology:

Scan QR codes using your phone.

❑ Buying Smart:

Stick to certified, legal retail shops and official delivery apps.

True responsibility while consuming alcohol is based on one's personal diligence and use of the current advanced technologies as well as strict transparency policy. Therefore, while enjoying the properly tracked, legally permitted Indian craft spirit, do not forget to raise a glass and say a toast to the amazing science behind it. *Cheers!*

DID YOU KNOW?

Clinking glasses and saying a "toast" originated in Ancient Rome and Ancient Greece

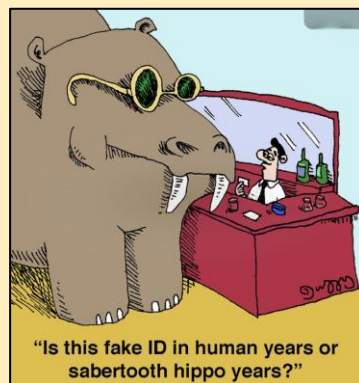
In order to mitigate the excessive bitterness of their wines, the Romans started a strange practice of putting burnt pieces of bread straight into their wine cup.

The burnt bread was used as a crude filtration system that absorbed the bitter taste of wine.

Later on, the Latin name of the burnt bread (*Tostus*) became a name for both the drink and the guest it was served to.



THROWING CAUTION TO THE WIND



TRIVIA

What is the minimum drinking age in Maharashtra?
(FYI : You should know this)

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