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## Vikas Khanna's Amazing Journey

The 40-year-old Michelin-starred chef Vikas Khanna became the toast of the New York city when he started Junoon, a “modern Indian restaurant that showcases the glories of centuries of Indian culture.” The journey to America of this handsome – but still unmarried – lad from Amritsar began in his granny’s kitchen in Punjab where he learned the art of cooking and using spices. True to the entrepreneurial blood that runs in all Punjabis, Khanna was just 17 when he set up a successful catering business – the Lawrence Gardens Banquets – and soon graduated from the Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration in 1994.

Khanna moved to New York in the winter of the year 2000 but could manage to land a job in a restaurant only as a dishwasher! Never mind though – surviving by his sheer grit and determination, he went on to be voted the “Hottest Chef in NYC” by the influential “Eater” blog and cook for the White House. His restaurant Junoon gets rave reviews and boasts of a Michelin star. Our Mumbai Bureau Chief Nivedita Jayaram Pawar caught up with Khanna in Mumbai for a free-wheeling chat. As a true entrepreneur, he gives the entire credit of his success to his team and mentors and, yes, he still loves to do the dishes!

Back here in India, the social drinking culture is taking firm roots, driven by the rising incomes of the urban youth and exposure to Western lifestyles. Benefitting from the trend, the pubs and bars industry in the country is growing fast despite suffocating government controls. Our correspondent Varun Jain spoke with the leading players to discover the challenges the industry is grappling with and the road ahead. Read all about it in our cover story for this issue, “Bottoms Up!”

Well, it is the dawn of the new year and already there is some happy news. This March, we will be introducing a brand new HoReCa platform to bring the entire foodservice industry of India together. It is called the India Foodservice Forum 2012 and is to be held at Delhi. Be there!

Your feedback is welcome, as always. Here is wishing you and your family a very happy new year!

**Amitabh Taneja**  
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The bars and pubs industry of India – one of the fastest growing alcohol markets in the world – is flourishing with rising business opportunities. It is expanding at 15 percent year-on-year due to a slew of factors like the rising per capita income and changing lifestyles. But it can grow even faster if the suffocating regulations and extortionate taxes imposed upon it by the government are relaxed. Varun Jain investigates the market.



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The Michelin Star chef, restaurateur and Master Chef Season 2 judge Vikas Khanna became the toast of the New York city when he started his Indian restaurant Junoon. His journey from Amritsar where he ran a successful catering business at the age of 17 to the White House is made of grit, determination and loads of perseverance. The celeb chef spoke to Nivedita Jayaram Pawar on the power of food and the secret to running an award-winning restaurant.



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Travel Food Services (TFS) has established a prime position in airport food retailing in India. Its CEO Rajeev Panjwani talks to Sanjay Choudhry about the challenges and growth opportunity TFS faces as one of India's leading airport F&B operators. Also, excerpts from a White Paper on the Indian restaurant industry published by the NRAI.



“ We have totally stayed away from the fine-dining format. We feel it is not replicable and lacks scalability ”

To tap the rapidly growing F&B retail space in the country, Lite Bite Foods is currently expanding its footprint in the casual dining and QSR categories on a pan-India basis. The company is also exploring opportunities in the international markets for its popular brands such as Punjab Grill by Jiggs Kalra and Zambar. Lite Bite Foods Chairman **Amit Burman**, who is also the Vice Chairman of Dabur, talks to **Bhavya Misra** about his business and the Indian foodservice industry





“ In London, restaurants exist in the price bracket of 100-120 pounds or 8-10 pounds. There is none serving at the mid-range price of 30-35 pounds. We are trying to plug this gap by providing a concept that offers casual dining at mid-range prices. ”

**Please tell us about the portfolio of brands you have under Lite Bite Foods.**

We are mainly present in casual dining and quick-service formats. In the casual dining business, we have brands such as Punjab Grill by Jiggs Kalra, Fresco, Asia 7 and Zambar. Punjab Grill by Jiggs Kalra serves North Indian food while Asia 7 offers pan-Asian cuisine. Fresco is focused on the Italian Mediterranean cuisine, and Zambar specializes in coastal cuisines. When it comes to the business proposition of casual dining, we are clear we want to stick to the Rs 700-800 price point with service on the table.

In the quick-service format, we have around eight Street Foods of India (SFI) outlets all over the country with a non-vegetarian positioning. We have also entered into a franchisee arrangement with the Pollo Campero chain that is based out of Guatemala in Central America. Consumers in India like Pollo Campero because it serves spicy fried and grilled chicken. The health-conscious consumers are driving its sales. The brand is seeing 40 percent more take-offs in the grilled chicken burger compared to fried burgers. This is a shift that has been taking place over the last one year, and will continue over time.

**What are your overseas expansion plans?**

Our established brands are generating a lot of interest in the overseas market, especially Punjab Grill by Jiggs Kalra, which is our flagship. We some months ago received a query from the Marina Bay Sands Hotel in Singapore which invited us to bid for the restaurant space they had. Subsequent to our bid, they liked us and wanted us to be there. We also got a franchisee who wanted to invest the capital required to set up the restaurant. This is how the Punjab Grill by Jiggs Kalra in Singapore came into being. Now that we have entered Singapore, there have been many enquiries from Dubai, London and Bangkok too. The talks are on but nothing has been finalized yet.



As far as the opportunity in the foreign market is concerned, I believe there is a huge scope. Take the London market, for instance. You will find there a restaurant either in the price bracket of 100-120 pounds or of 8-10 pounds. There is no one serving at the mid-range price of 30-35 pounds. We are trying to plug this gap by providing a concept that offers casual dining at mid-range prices.

**How do you assess the different formats?**

The way retail spaces are opening up in India, you need to be present across different price points. You need to keep the customer profile in mind before getting into the restaurant business. If customers want to have dinner in a casual setting at a good price point, you should give them that option. There should be no fixed lunch or dinner

“ Restaurants abroad run on less front-end and back-end staff. Go anywhere in Europe and you will find only 2-3 persons manning the restaurants. Here in India, we are over-staffed in comparison. ”

**The bars and pubs industry of India – one of the fastest growing alcohol markets in the world – is flourishing, with rising business opportunities. It is expanding at 15 percent year-on-year due to a slew of factors like the rising per capita income and changing lifestyles. But it can grow even faster if the suffocating regulations and extortionate taxes imposed upon it by the government are relaxed**

# Bottoms Up!

By Varun Jain

**T**he last two decades have witnessed a seismic revolution in the economic, social, and cultural landscape of India. As the country liberalized with a vengeance and opened up to the world, foreign funds and brands entered through the door, but so did the Western social drinking mores.

The Indian pub-and-bar culture which began in the 1990s seems to have reached a tipping point. Hundreds of clubbing hot spots have cropped up all over, led by changing lifestyles in the metros such as Bangalore and Mumbai. Drinking – long been frowned upon in the land of Mahatma Gandhi as something undesirable – is fast losing its social stigma as the young upwardly mobile Indians flock to the bars to let their hair down and socialize over a glass of their favorite poison.

India is one of the fastest growing alcohol markets. According to industry body ASSOCHAM, India's alcoholic beverage market comprising beer, wine, and spirits will cross 19,000 million liters by 2015, up from 6,700 million liters now. Sales will grow at 30 percent y-o-y to Rs 1.4 lakh crore, up from Rs 50,700 crore now.

The country is one of the world's top consumers of whiskey, which accounts for almost 80 percent of the entire Indian liquor market. Owing to India's affinity for hard liquor, the Indian whiskey market, which currently stands around Rs 40,500 crore, is expected to cross the Rs 54,000 crore mark within the next two years. The popularity of beer made

from malt is increasing too and its consumption is expected to reach 2.4 billion liters by 2012.

Kerala and Punjab are the leading liquor consuming states in India, accounting for 16 and 14 percent, respectively, of all the liquor consumed countrywide. Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are the leading liquor consuming states (in that order), accounting for 40 percent of all liquor consumed in India. Chandigarh and Pondicherry also record high consumption levels.

The world's top bar chains like Hard Rock Café, TGI Friday, Ruby Tuesday, Pop Tate, and Manchester United Cafe Bar have seen the opportunity and made a beeline for India. The home-grown names are not too far behind, with some of the popular ones being Shalom, Underdogs, Kink, TC, and Route 04.

Despite the tremendous growth in the number of stand-alone bars and pubs, the industry is yet to achieve its full potential. For that to happen, the government's policies have to undergo a sea change in terms of operational hours, the minimum drinking age, granting licenses, and so on. Indeed, there has been a huge churn in the Indian bars and pubs space, with many of them opening and downing shutters in a short span of time because of the socialist hangover (pardon the pun!), the absurd and suffocating nature of government regulations, residential issues, space constraints, overcrowding in the metros, and so on. The glass for the industry is clearly both half empty and half full.





“With evolving employment avenues and work culture, there is rising acceptance of alcoholic beverage consumption for socializing along with the stand-alone drinking association with sports and music.”

– Mamta Sharma,  
Executive Director,  
32nd Milestone,  
Gurgaon (Terrazzo)

### High on Growth

Not much data exists about this disorganized and fragmented industry, but the number of pubs and bars existing in India today is estimated to run into thousands. This is still not sufficient considering the growing population and the rising per capita income. As the new generation of Indians increasingly demands more bars and pubs, the market still has a long way to go. Says Conroy Saldanha, Assistant General Manager of Hakkasan, Mumbai, the recently opened high-end restaurant and bar: “India is still largely an untapped market and hungry for high-profile pubs and bars.” Agrees Deepali Narula, CEO of Delhi’s F Bar & Lounge: “India is a flourishing market with rising business opportunities.”

It would be difficult to put a number on the exact size of the industry due to the presence of different formats in the country. “There are many local joints where they target volumes and are focused only on providing drinks,” says Gaurav Goenka, Director, Mirah Group, which runs the Manchester United Café Bar franchise in India. “On the other hand, the number of established bar and pub players is moderately low compared to the international

market, mainly due to the infrastructure and government policy limitations.” He reckons the annual growth rate of the industry to be almost 15-18 percent. “The growth of 15 percent plus will sustain due to higher spending power of the corporate segment in India and also due to the workload factor where people want to wind down in a nice environment with good music, drinks, and food,” Goenka adds.

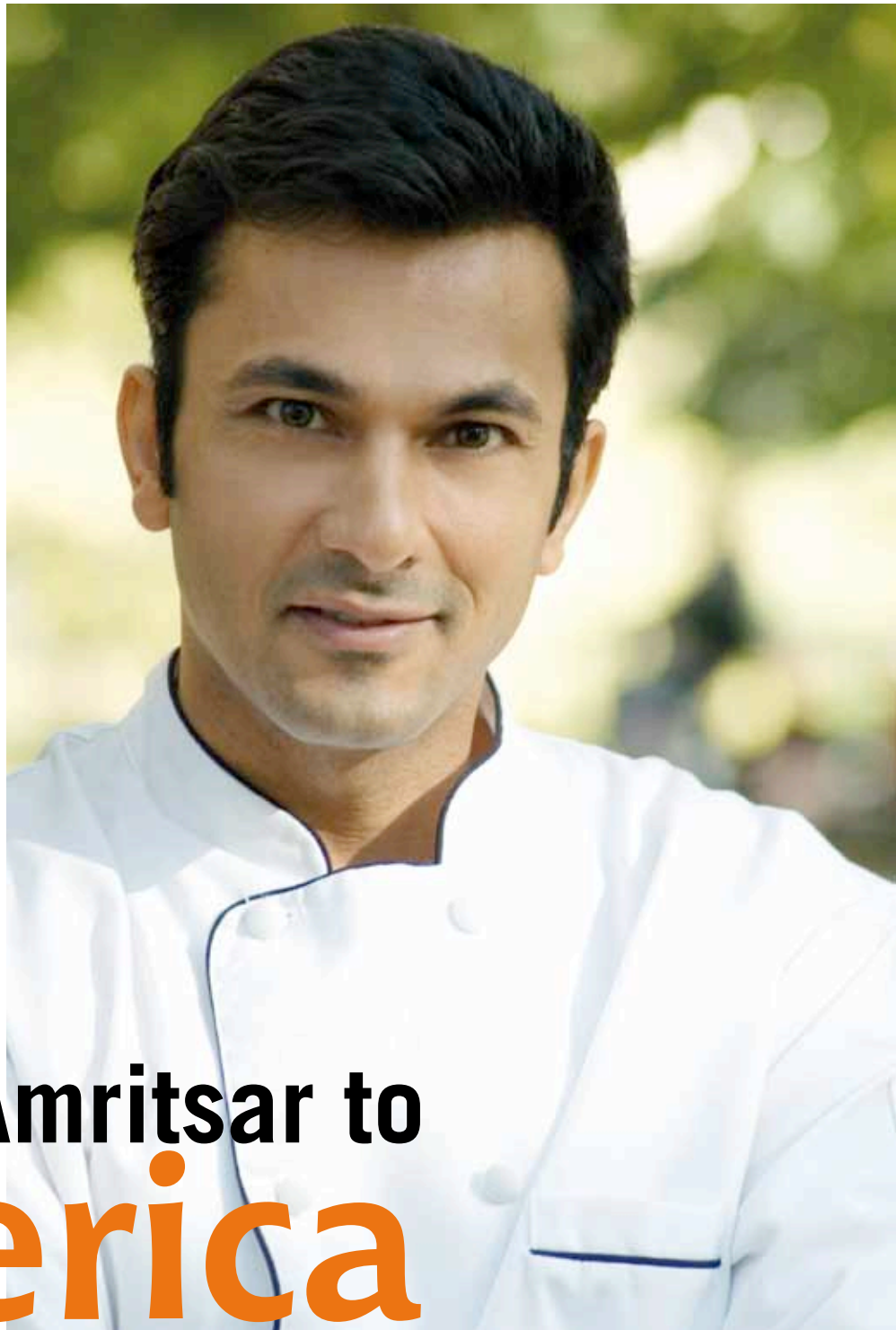
The Indian pubs and bars market is extremely diverse; its character varies from state to state. “A wide range of dissimilar setups exist to cater to customers from all walks of life and different sections of the society,” says Kushagra Nagrath, COO, Alchemist Hospitality, which owns bar brands The Second Sin, Spice Water Trail, KINK, Zazen, Café Amor, and Kebab Khan. “India also does not have a uniform drinking age or excise laws. These are different in different states, which in turn affects the opening and closing time of bars.” The market is still young and largely a part of the unorganized sector. Its development is linked to licensing which is a state subject.

The annual growth rate of bars and pubs in India is 25 percent y-o-y, but the numbers are not uniformly spread across the country, according to Rajiv Choudhary, Director, Adaab Hotels, the company that owns bar brands such as the Turquoise Cottage, Days of the Raj, and the Qutub Residency. “Delhi probably has 400-500 bars, while Bangalore has around 1,800. With the current growth rate, the market will not saturate for another five years at least.”





Cooking's crossover star, the award-winning Michelin Star chef, restaurateur, and Master Chef Season 2 judge Vikas Khanna became the toast of New York when he started his Indian restaurant Junoon in the city. His journey from the Lawrence Gardens of Amritsar where he ran a successful catering business at the age of 17 to the White House, where he recently hosted a Satvik meal, is a tale of grit, determination, and loads of perseverance. In India to judge the second season of Master Chef India, Khanna spoke to Nivedita Jayaram Pawar on the power of hunger and the secrets of running a successful, restaurant in the US.



## From Amritsar to America

### **So how did a boy from Amritsar end up cooking for the White House?**

It's a long, long journey. After graduating from the Manipal Catering School in India, I went on to study at the The Culinary Institute of America (CIA). Moving to the US and starting from scratch was a major milestone. Though I had a very successful catering business in India, I had to unlearn everything I learnt there and start all over again. I had two options – either learn and survive or don't learn and return. I was in New York in 2000 in the winter and it was freezing. The restaurant I went to said they had no place for a cook but needed a dishwasher. I was desperate and needed to survive. I was ready to do anything. Even now I love to do the dishes. When you see the shine and when you struggle to clean a hard spot – it connects to me. A chef should not be shy to clean his dishes. We Indians think of food very emotionally. If we can make a balance of the technique and systems that are taught in the Western countries with the emotions that we grow up with in Indian homes, that combination could be a winning combination



**Your grand mom was a very good cook. What are some of the things you learnt from her? What are your earliest memories?**

I learnt the power of hunger from her. I was born and raised during the 1984 riots in Amritsar. There was always curfew and very little food at home. She taught me to share in hunger. The two other things she taught me were peace and discipline. When my grandmother cooked, it was always peaceful, almost meditative.

**What are the top three factors for developing a successful economic proposition for a restaurant business?**

Location, timing, and the team are the three crucial ingredients for success. If you are aspiring to be successful in a certain market, you have got to be in that market. It's very important. The location has to be accessible and central. You can't have a project which lies in the middle of nowhere.

Second is timing. Junoon won't have been possible 10 years ago in the US. There was lesser awareness about Indian food, lesser market, and even lesser purchasing power. Projects which open before the market matures are set to doom.

Lastly, the team. All the credit for my success goes to the team – people who help me write books, make movies, create menus, and so on. If you think you can achieve something individually, it will always remain a dream. When you mix the right people together, that is when dreams come true. It's no rocket science. You have to give respect to people to get the best out of them. Finally, freshness of the ingredients is king.

**You were awarded the Michelin Star for Junoon in New York. How does it feel?**

I am so happy. It's a once in a lifetime achievement. All people in my team are Indians and I am so proud of them. Awards represent integrity in the team. It's just a representation of what you can achieve in life with just strong determination. We were all holding on to each other when the times were bad. And when the times were good, we were still holding on to each other.



**Icon:**

Julia Child for her honesty and love for food. I had a big misfortune with Julia. She was supposed to give me an honour on August 23, 2004. But she left the world on August 24th. So I have the award but it doesn't have her signature.

**Food philosophy:**

When your mom comes to your restaurant, she should feel it's the food she was craving for. It should be simple and honest. I am a total believer of that.

**Favorite place to eat:**

The langar at the Golden Temple. All the bruises get healed there.

**Favorite kitchen gadget:**

Spice grinder

**Molecular gastronomy:**

It's ok. But my problem is that I can't even pronounce it!

**Signature dish:**

Tandoori bread

**Favorite spice:**

I am in love with Pippali pepper from Kerala.



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