

# Desi single malts at new high, sales up 83%

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**New Delhi:** Desi single malt whisky brands are coming of age and seem to be giving a tough competition to their Scottish ancestors.

These indigenous single malt whisky brands now account for over a third of the market, compared to 15% five years ago, showed data collated by TOI from industry bodies and companies. "Most consumers are loyal to their preferred blended whisky brands. But when it comes to single malts, people have a tendency to experiment," said Vinod Giri, director general at the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC).

While smart marketing and affordable price points — Paul John, for instance, launched single malt Nirvana priced just above blended whiskies — have been attributed for success of indigenous brands, the harsh Indian climate, too, played a role. "Aging in India is three-four times faster due to high temperature variations, which means we get robust body and taste despite losing 10% to angel's share," said Sanjeev Banga, head of international ops for Radico Khaitan, which sells Rampur single malt.

During the current financial year, the single malt segment in India is pegged at around 2.1 lakh cases (each consists of 12 750ml bottles) growing



18% annually, while the Indian single malt industry grew 37% every year over six years. In comparison, imported single malts grew 13% during the period (see graphic).

"Our sales in India are currently higher than all our exports put together," Paul John, CMD at Goa-based John Distilleries, told TOI. "This is different from our initial years."

The new-found potential of made-in-India brands has forced global liquor giants such as Diageo, the maker of Johnnie Walker, to tweak strategy. The UK-based company is looking to launch a range of completely made-in-India single malt whisky. "We believe this segment may become as big as imported single malts in three to four years," said Deepika Warrior, CMO at Diageo India, which has invested Rs 200 crore in its crafts spirits project.

Pernod Ricard, which sells Glenlivet, said it anticipates continuation of strong growth for both imported and domestic single malts in the years to come, but the base of growth for each segment is different.