

Tribe Kombucha on Making Gut Health Beverages Mainstream in India

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Harshvardhan Chauhan, Founder & CEO of Tribe Kombucha

As consumer interest in gut health and functional beverages grows in India, kombucha is emerging as an alternative to conventional carbonated drinks. However, scaling a fermented beverage while maintaining its taste, microbial safety and live cultures presents significant manufacturing and distribution challenges. Tribe Kombucha is addressing these demands

through a dedicated, automated manufacturing facility in Navsari, Gujarat, with a production capacity of 10 lakh units per month. In this interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Harshvardhan Chauhan, Founder & CEO of Tribe Kombucha, discusses the role of automation in ensuring fermentation consistency, the brand's plans to expand its presence across India, and the innovations shaping the future of functional beverages.

What were the key considerations behind setting up a dedicated, automated kombucha manufacturing facility near the Western Ghats, and how does this location support the fermentation process?

Our manufacturing facility in Navsari, Gujarat was set up as a dedicated, automated unit purpose-built for kombucha, rather than a general-purpose beverage plant retrofitted for fermentation. Kombucha is a living product. It needs temperature stability, low contamination risk, and consistent water quality, and Navsari's climate and infrastructure access gave us the conditions to control all three at scale. Automating the facility meant we could standardize the SCOBY culture's fermentation cycles instead of relying on batch-by-batch manual judgment, which is critical once you move from a garage brand to a national one.

Kombucha relies on live cultures and controlled fermentation. What technologies and quality-control measures have been implemented at the new facility to maintain consistency, microbial safety, and probiotic integrity at scale?

Kombucha's biggest operational risk is inconsistency. Live cultures behave differently depending on temperature, time, and sugar content, so we've built in tech and process layers to manage that. This includes temperature-controlled fermentation tanks, standardized starter culture propagation so every batch begins from the same microbial baseline, and in-house lab testing for pH, alcohol content (kombucha can naturally ferment trace alcohol), and live culture counts before a batch is cleared for canning. We test for microbial safety at multiple checkpoints, not just at the end of the line, so we catch any deviation early rather than after packaging.

With a production capacity of 10 lakh units per month, how will this expansion support Tribe Kombucha's growth across India, and which markets or distribution channels are you prioritizing?

This scale of production lets us move from being available in pockets of Mumbai and Delhi to building genuine national depth, especially in modern retail and quick commerce, where kombucha is discovered on impulse and needs to be in stock consistently to build repeat habit. We're prioritizing metro and tier 1 markets first, since that's where functional beverage awareness is highest, while continuing to grow our D2C channel through tribekombucha.in and our subscription model, Kombucha Club, for consumers who want kombucha as a regular part of their routine rather than an occasional purchase.

As consumer interest in functional beverages and gut health grows in India, how do you see kombucha evolving from a niche product into a mainstream beverage category?

Right now kombucha in India sits where cold pressed juice or Greek yogurt sat a few years ago, understood by a health conscious minority but not yet a default choice. What will move it mainstream is the same thing that moved gut health conversations mainstream globally: education paired with taste. Most first time kombucha drinkers in India are put off by a sour, vinegary expectation set by imported or artisanal brands. We built Tribe Kombucha's flavour range, from OG Classic to HIII-Biscus and Zesty Gingerade, specifically to remove that barrier, so the first experience is enjoyable rather than medicinal. As more consumers actively look for alternatives to soda and sugary drinks, kombucha is well positioned to become the default functional beverage rather than a niche one.

What are the primary challenges in scaling fermented beverages while preserving their taste, stability, live cultures, and nutritional value throughout manufacturing, storage, and distribution?

The core tension in scaling any fermented product is that consistency and liveliness pull against each other. A shelf stable product is easy to distribute but often means the culture is heat treated and no longer truly live. Keeping cultures genuinely active means tighter cold chain requirements, shorter shelf life, and more complexity in logistics, especially across Indian climate zones and last mile delivery. Taste consistency is its own challenge too, since natural fermentation has some batch to batch variability by nature, and our job is to keep that variability within a range the consumer can't detect, without stripping out what makes the product alive in the first place.

Looking ahead, what innovations or new products is Tribe Kombucha exploring in the functional beverage space, and how do you anticipate the category developing over the next few years?

We're exploring formats and formulations that extend gut health benefits beyond the can itself, and looking at how kombucha can anchor a broader functional beverage portfolio rather than stand alone as a single SKU. Over the next few years, we expect the category to mature the way flavoured sparkling water did, moving from a wellness aisle curiosity to a mainstream beverage aisle staple, driven by rising awareness of gut health and a broader shift away from sugary carbonated drinks.