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## Global, then local: How Vahdam India is aiming to scale revenues of IN₹500 cr by next year

*For Vahdam India, going global first was a deliberate move to capture a larger chunk of the pie by catering to a more evolved market, says its Founder & CEO Bala Sarda.*

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### Article Content:

As Founder & CEO of tea and wellness brand Vahdam India, Bala Sarda, remembers the early days of the brand in 2015 when the chief marketing officer (CMO) of a leading company cautioned him against placing India at the heart of the brand positioning. “He said build a brand but don’t talk about India because then you won’t be able to take it to the world,” Sarda recalls, reflecting on the advice he ultimately chose to disregard.

“My point was simple. If Scotland can proudly market Scotch whisky as Scottish, then someone has to proudly say they are from India too,” says Sarda. “That became our core piece, and fortunately we did it. Our logo, even in the early days, said ‘Vahdam Teas’ with the tagline ‘India’s finest tea’. India was right up there in our branding, packaging, and storytelling,” the entrepreneur says fervently

While India was at the forefront of the company’s brand identity, Sarda launched the brand first in the US market. The move, according to him, was deliberate, as at that time, the Indian market was predominantly controlled by CTC (crush, tear, and curl) teas. “These are teas typically consumed with milk and sugar. That is a massive market, but it is not the segment that we operate in. Our focus has always been wellness teas, green teas, herbal infusions, and premium orthodox teas. In 2015, there simply wasn’t enough depth in those categories within India,” he says.

For Vahdam, the US market at that time translated to a large market where consumers were open to innovation; e-commerce adoption was high and it being an English-speaking country. “Looking back, it was the right decision,” says Sarda.

#### **Building Trust:**

The US and Canada together account for roughly 60% of the brand’s business, while Europe and the UK jointly contribute 30%. The rest comes from the remaining regions worldwide.

However, building credibility in a market where people perceive Indian products unfavourably wasn’t an easy task. The biggest challenge in the US, according to Sarda, was trust, as consumers weren’t used to Indian brands in premium packaged tea. “Many brands from India at the time didn’t present themselves as premium global brands. We wanted to change that perception. Our goal was to build a modern, premium brand from India and offer products that were better in quality since we were sourcing directly from the origin,” he says.

Sarda remembers, initially, the brand received several queries on where the product was made, whether it met quality standards, what the factory looked like, and if proper hygiene and testing protocols were followed. Transparency became a key part of their communication, showcasing the tea gardens, the sourcing process, and the people behind the product.

What made a difference was “innovation,” says Sarda. The brand vacuum-packed the loose-leaf teas, even for retail customers right from the start. “Even if someone bought 100 gm of Vahdam Darjeeling tea, it arrived in vacuum-sealed packaging. At that time,

very few brands were taking such steps. Small innovations like these helped reinforce our quality credentials,” he says.

At the same time, the company identified wellness as a key consumer trend, with most of the innovation happening in health-oriented beverages. The company responded by introducing ingredients like turmeric and ginger, expanding its portfolio of wellness-focused products. “We were among the first brands to launch turmeric-based wellness infusions in the US market. Initially, our portfolio consisted largely of black teas and chai, but within a year and a half to two years, wellness became a major focus area,” he says proudly.

By 2017, the company began seeing strong signs of growth and demand in the US, supported by strategies that proved effective over time.

### **The India Launch:**

Today, the company ships its products to customers in over 160 countries through its global website. Late last year, Vahdam formally launched in India as well, expanding its tea portfolio and introducing the supplements business in January 2026. Sarda says the Indian market has now evolved significantly, with categories like green tea, herbal infusions, and wellness products growing rapidly.

“India as a consumer market has matured. Digital commerce has evolved dramatically, with D2C and quick commerce creating entirely new distribution opportunities. Besides this, the nutraceuticals market with ingredients, such as turmeric, ashwagandha, moringa, tulsi, and giloy is seeing strong consumer demand, whether in tea form, capsules, or other formats. All of this made us feel that this was the right time to invest aggressively in India,” he says.

From a scale perspective, Sarda believes India can become a much larger business and achieve faster growth than markets such as the US or the UK. “It will happen far more quickly. The demand environment is much more favourable today,” he contends.

Data supports Vahdam’s narrative. Since formally activating business in India, the company has already achieved a Rs 30 crore annualised run rate within the first few months. “Based on the current performance, we believe India can become a Rs 100 crore business this year,” Sarda says.

The company claims that they are on track to reach nearly Rs 500 crore in revenue this year compared to the Rs 350 crore projected for FY26. The company says that its long-term goal is to reach around Rs 1,000 crore in revenue by FY29.

### **Marketing & Innovation:**

India is the second-largest producer and consumer of tea in the world, with a reputation more focused on its tea-production than on branding its tea. From a broader perspective India needs to change its approach to capture more value from the tea market.

Ramakrishnan M, Managing Director, Primus Partners, says while some of India's teas are already globally respected, the real gap lies elsewhere. "If India wants to capture more value, the focus must move from (largely) exporting tea as a commodity to (more of) selling tea as a finished consumer product. That means increasing the share of branded and packaged exports, strengthening traceability and sustainability practices, and building direct relationships with consumers through digital channels. The opportunity is not necessarily to produce more tea but to earn more from every kilogram of tea that is already being produced," he says.

He highlights how premiumisation can play an important role for the future of Indian tea exports since competing purely on volume or price will not be a sustainable strategy in the long run. "India has many advantages that can support a premium positioning. The challenge is building globally recognised brands and experiences around that premium identity. This is a long-term exercise and not something that can be achieved through export promotion alone," he says.

Sarda brings it down to one simple solution—marketing which should include the entire mix of product, price, promotion, and place. "It's not just advertising. We need to become better marketers and better innovators. Innovation is probably one of the biggest opportunities to tap into," he says.

Elaborating further, he says that brands haven't always been willing to change the playbook. "Take wellness, for example. Many traditional tea companies resisted it for years because it wasn't considered part of the conventional tea category. In doing so, they missed a major growth opportunity. Today, almost everyone is embracing wellness products," Sarda explains.

He says that the lowest-hanging fruit is to build brands around products that India is already known for. "These are categories where we have natural credibility and heritage. Tea, herbs, botanicals, wellness products—India already has an advantage here. The issue isn't a lack of intent. Building a brand in India is hard enough. Building a global brand is significantly harder. That's really the reality," he says.