

FOOD THERAPY

THE RISE OF THE VEGANS

SAYING NO TO CHEESE AND NOT WEARING A LEATHER BELT MAKES YOU WHAT? A VEGAN. IN THE LAND OF VEGETARIANS, MANY ARE SHUNNING DAIRY PRODUCTS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Rashmi Shrikant | TNN

Shahi Tukra, a dessert made with fried bread, condensed milk and sugar is a lip-smacking choice at the restaurant of Our Native Village, an eco-resort in the outskirts of Bangalore. The rich, sinful item is too much to resist, even for those on a vegan diet. Not to deprive them of the royal treat, chef Ambika Ramakrishnan prepares a special recipe for them, replacing dairy milk with coconut milk and sugar with jaggery. Instead of frying the regular bread, she toasts the whole wheat bread and stirs, and lo! Shahi Tukra is ready to savour — exotic, exciting and yet catering to a vegan palate.

Dairy butter is substituted with cashewnut butter. Peanut yoghurt comes in the place of dairy yoghurt. Tea with milk is passé, black herbal tea is in. Well, vegans in the city are having their say and choosing their way. Their clan is growing in the city and so are the number of restaurants and shops that cater to their needs. “Some of our guests come here looking for the vegan experience. They find that vegan food can be delicious too,” says Ambika.

For someone like Dilip Bafna, founder of Vegan Bengaluru Club, it is the compassion for animals that drove him to veganism, a philosophy and lifestyle that seeks to abstain from the use of animal and animal produce in food, clothing, or for that matter, anything else. Started two years ago, Bafna’s club now has 85 people. They meet once a month in the city for a vegan potluck, sharing food and thoughts. “We are a bunch of healthy people, guided by the doctrine that man should live without exploiting animals,” says Bafna. The doctrine, advocated by Donald Watson — the founder of the Vegan Society in Britain and the man who coined the word vegan in the 1940s — has spearheaded the movement for compassionate living.

A Google search for vegan celebrities drops down a long list, with names like Oprah Winfrey, Mike Tyson and Bill Clinton. Vegan gurus endorse non-cruelty to animals as a way of life. While vegetarians do not consume animal meat, fish, eggs and chicken, vegans go a step beyond and shun even milk and honey, the products derived by causing harm and pain to sentient creatures.

The argument in favour of a diet without milk goes like this: Any animal-based product is not natural to the human body. Man, a herbivore, gets his protein and calcium from plants in sufficient quantities, so milk is not a must. Cow-milk does more harm than good to humans. While proteins found in human mother’s breast milk serve to promote an infant’s health and immunity from disease, foreign proteins in cow’s milk stimulate the production of antibodies, which limit the production of insulin by the pancreas. Milk fat leads to intracellular fat accumulation and, in turn, results in reduced insulin action.

As against the common notion that diabetics should not eat rice, a vegan diet recommends whole, unpolished rice for patients. Idli, dosa made of whole rice, whole wheat chapati, a variety of fruits and salads are advised. A dietician’s guidance is essential before starting the diet. Some people committed to a vegan diet prefer to go organic as well, picking their weekly basket of grocery and vegetables from organic shops. Era Organic in Dollar’s Colony sells all the kitchen needs — from sugar to cooking oil and fruits and vegetables. They have a green tea evening on the third Saturday of every month. Pristine Nature has started an organic box delivery service, catering to different locations. Fabindia outlets retail organic food products like cereals, spices, tea and coffee.

Carnival Cakes & Breads on Sarjapur Road has more than 30 vegan bakery items to offer. Choco Bon Bon is a vegan chocolate that you find on the shelves of departmental stores. The vegan buffet at E-inn Time Traveler at Bommasandra contains continental, Chinese and Indian dishes. Serving vegan lunches on their menus are Green Path on New BEL road and Modak at Koramangala. “Our sajje rotti and kempakki rice are favourites among vegans,” says H R Jayaram, founder of Green Path. Come December, Modak will introduce RAVE diet, where RAVE stands for ‘no refined product, no animal product, no refined oil and no exception to these.’ Satish Bangalore, an IT professional who promoted the Modak chain of restaurants says he lost 14 kg in three months after adopting this diet.

Many vegans lament that sourcing organic food and eating out on a daily basis continues to be a challenge. “Providing vegan and organic food at office canteens will go a long way in addressing this problem. Companies should bring about this change at the HR policy level, for the larger benefit of their employees,” says senior journalist S R Ramakrishna. Working in this direction, Sharan, an organization run by Dr Nandita Shah, a Mumbai-based homoeopath, plans to start vegan lunch catering service to offices in Mumbai, extending it Bangalore at a later stage.

So, is veganism just an effort to establish an individual’s ethical choice and lifestyle? Or is it a fad? While critics harbour such doubts, a growing number of middle-aged people in the city insist that sticking to a vegan diet is neither a fashion statement, nor a fad. “It is an absolute necessity for people with diabetes and other health complications,” says Ramakrishna, who attended a reversing diabetes programme, conducted six months ago in Bangalore by Dr Nandita Shah. Agrees Rani Swami, another diabetic, who took part in the camp. “The day I returned home from the camp, my husband stopped by the milkman. Since then I have stuck

to vegan diet and found amazing results. My insulin intake has come down by 30% and I am on the verge of stopping taking tablets,” Rani says.

Peas versus pills; the former strives to win over the latter. Studies have shown that a high-fibre, low-fat, plant-based vegan diet works wonders in patients with heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, arthritis, several types of cancer, asthma and many other disorders, points out Dr Shah.

Diabetes is not necessarily a one-way street, Shah says while quoting reports from The China Study, a celebrated book on vegan diet and nutrition by T Colin Campbell.



SHARING FOOD AND THOUGHTS: Members of the Vegan Bengaluru Club at a potluck



COOKING THE HEALTHY WAY: Dr Nandita Shah demonstrates how to prepare a vegan dish to participants at a reversing diabetes programme held recently in Bangalore

Advertisement

