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Vegan wheel

Kaavya Chandy May 19, 2013, 06.40AM IST

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Tucked away in a corner of Koramangala 6th block, the heart of Bangalore's food district, is a new eatery. You might miss the inconspicuous signboard while driving down the main road unless you're specifically looking for 'Carrots, the Healthy Kitchen and Store'. You may think it's just another restaurant, but to some, this place is a long-awaited, much-appreciated answer to a vegan's prayers.

"When it comes to eating out, Bangalore is not very vegan-friendly. Dairy is used in a lot of Indian dishes and even more so in Western dishes," says Deanna Widner, an expat and vegan who recently moved to Bangalore. "Most people in restaurants have no knowledge of what a vegan is. Some think it's the same as being a vegetarian. Some restaurant staff will refuse to veganize a dish, saying it will not taste good, even after you have explained why you do not want an item in your food."

But as Carrots shows, vegan dining doesn't need to be monotonous. The eatery serves innovative dishes like avocado chocolate mousse, mango coconut-milk shake, potato buttermilk bread, tamarind gojju and spaghetti in cilantro tofu pesto. It also uses a number of healthy, locally produced cereals like millets. "Here vegans can order anything without being apprehensive about dairy contamination. They can also avoid having to call in advance to ask for special requirements," says Krishna Shastry, co-founder of Carrots.

Some believe being vegan in Bangalore is becoming easier. "Although only a few places are all-vegan, there are quite a few that are vegan-friendly. People think that vegan food is boring and tasteless, but they don't realize that even a simple meal of dosa and sambhar becomes vegan when you don't use ghee and butter to make it," says Pooja Jairaj, who has recently turned vegan.

Over the years, Bangalore has seen a rise in awareness about veganism as a lifestyle choice. A number of non-vegans, especially those with lactose intolerance or those on dairy-free diets, visit vegan fairs that happen in the city quite regularly. Websites such as [veganbangaluru.wordpress.com](#) keep them informed of such events, where experts in vegan cooking showcase everything from peanut-curd rice (made from milk extracted from peanuts) to tofu scramble sandwiches. Stores like 'In the Pink Organic Bazaar & Restaurant' in BTM Layout also host vegan buffets from time to time.

Paradigm Shift Vegan Cafe is yet another 100% vegan eatery that will open soon. The company has been catering at awareness programs around Bangalore, and has seen an increasing demand for vegan food. Soumya Reddy, founder of the company, says, "I've seen a significant increase in the number of vegans in Bangalore. When I started out, I knew around 50 vegans. Now, there must be hundreds of us scattered around Bangalore."

A Facebook page specifically for vegans in Bangalore has helped a number of them connect with fellow vegans, sharing recipes, events, restaurants and even the locations of vegan-friendly shops. Susmitha Subbaraju, the person behind the vegan blog 'Veganosaurus', says, "The main aim of my blog is to break the myth that vegan cooking is difficult. There are tons of Indian foods that can be easily veganized and I hope to encourage more and more people." On Saturday, Subbaraju hosted a cooking session for vegans, 'The Great Vegan Fix', at the restaurant Soul Kadhi. Nirmala Balakrishnan, owner of the restaurants Under The Mango Tree and Soul Kadhi, says: "Though I'm not a vegan, I respect the initiatives taken by vegans and wish to spread awareness about the fact that vegan cooking isn't difficult. In my restaurant as well, I serve a few vegan dishes. Some vegan customers also call before hand and order their food, giving us time to veganize their choices," says Balakrishnan.

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Curiosity about the vegan lifestyle has increased in the past few years. Although restaurants like Carrots cater mainly to a vegan customer base, there are an equal number of non-vegetarians who dine here and find no difference in the taste of the food, says Shastry. "Soul Kadhi, too, has quite a few non-vegan customers ordering vegan dishes, which they enjoy," says Balakrishnan.

In a seminar hosted by Carrots to increase awareness of the benefits of healthy eating on diseases like hypertension and diabetes, Dr Nandita Shah, founder of Sharan India, said, "I have seen cases where hypertension, heart disease, and sometimes even cancer have been reversed simply through a change in one's diet."

GREEN HEART

Veganism is the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products, particularly in diet, as well as an associated philosophy that rejects the commodity status of sentient animals. A follower of veganism is known as a vegan. Dietary vegans refrain from consuming animal products – not just meat and fish but also eggs, dairy products and other animal-derived substances, such as honey. The term 'ethical vegan' is often applied to those who not only follow a vegan diet, but extend the vegan philosophy into other areas of their lives, and oppose the use of animals or animal products for any purpose (For more: wikipedia.org/veganism)

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