

Health-conscious? Go the vegan way

Priyanka Pani & Priya Sheth

BECOMING POPULAR



Two members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) wearing green body paint and holding signs that read 'Eat Green! Go Vegan'. The youth is slowly warming up to veganism. — Paul Noronha

Mumbai, July 31:

Monika Vegan Siriya. Yes, that's what her middle name is. The 29-year-old social activist and animal lover embraced veganism two years ago. Her husband, Chintan Vegan Siriya, is a vegan. Why, even their dogs are. After Mike Tyson, Pamela Anderson and Bill Clinton endorsed veganism, Indians, especially the youth, appear to be slowly warming up to this food culture that does not use animal products, including milk.

There are several vegan communities in the country, where members get together to create awareness about the concept. They also have regular pot-luck parties where members bond over food and share new recipes such as a coffee and chocolate cake with cashew milk or cheese made out of sesame milk, a healthy substitute for many.

"There is a non-dairy substitute for each and every dish. For example, we use 12 different types of milk substitutes made from cashew, almond, soy, coconut and sesame, to name a few," said Ms Siriya.

With more and more people in India embracing the vegan philosophy, companies such as Godrej, Rich Gravis, Organic Haus and Hindustan Unilever (HUL) have come out with products that directly or indirectly cater to this extreme form of vegetarianism. Godrej Nature's basket currently has two vegan brands and is expanding its portfolio. Godrej Hershey has a soy-based beverage called Sofit for vegans and also people who are allergic to cattle milk. Similarly, HUL has a soy-based range under its Kissan brand.

Mock meat

A new 'meat' is also available at the vegan counter — pepper salami, mock fish and sausages. These are not animal meat but 'mock meats' made specifically for vegans.

"The vegan market is still niche, but a growing category in India. We, however, would soon be augmenting the range with 15 new products of mock meats or soy-based products by end-August," said Mr Sreejith Mohan, category head of Nature's Basket, the premium grocery store of the Godrej group. He further said there is a huge potential for such mock meats as they can be consumed by vegetarians too.

Organic Haus is another retail chain that caters to vegan diets that includes a range of gluten-free pasta sauces and salad dressings. "We are also looking at importing almond and oat milk as there is a lot of demand for the same," says Mr Swapan Sharma, COO, Organic Haus, with outlets in Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

Quoting a *Hindu-CNN IBN* survey, Mr Mohan said that 31 per cent of Indians are vegetarian. Vegans would be a very

small part of that and are present in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bhopal, Chennai and Bangalore. According to Mr Siriya, about 17,000 people have embraced this 'philosophy' in India.

Not just corporate, several airlines such as Air France, Emirates and Gulf Air are also offering 'vegetarian non-diary meals'.

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