# Is India heading towards a vegan future?
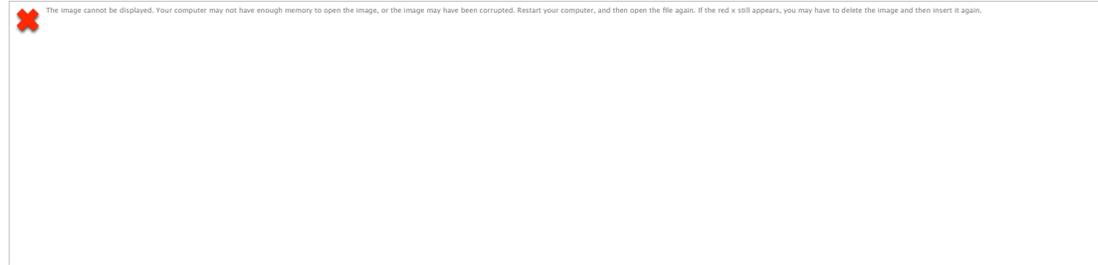
By Siddharth Kothari
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Increased awareness of global trends, a growing focus on personal and planetary health, and the appeal of a greener, cleaner way of life is motivating many Indians to embrace veganism.

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No longer a novel concept, Veganism is evolving from a fringe movement to a mainstream choice associated with health, ethics, and eco-sustainability. The meteoric rise of plant-based diets around the world is proof that more than ever before, we're living in the age of **Veganism**.
How did we get here? A rising educated middle-class, increased awareness of global trends, a growing focus on personal and planetary health, and the appeal of a greener, cleaner way of life.

Although veganism spans across generations and cultures, it's a lifestyle choice led by the youth. With veganism skyrocketing around the world, India, as a young country with almost half its population under the age of thirty, is keen to follow.

## Vegan influencers

Instrumental in the rise of veganism are influencers who have tapped the young, tech-savvy generation by increasing awareness of the cause through social media. Hundreds of vloggers sharing wellness guides, nutritional advice, and vegan recipes can be followed on YouTube.

Dr Nandita Shah, Founder of Sharan, is one of the many nutritionists who have been catalysts for the vegan movement at home. Athletes like Virat Kohli and actors like Aamir Khan and Ayesha Takia have also brought awareness of veganism's health and performance benefits to the masses. Vegan for almost a decade, Takia is set to launch a vegan food company called Plant.

Celebrity couple Ritesh Deshmukh and Genelia D'Souza, too, is launching their vegan initiative Imagine Meats, presumably inspired by the multi-billion dollar success of US giant Beyond Meat.

On screen, powerful documentaries such as Cowspiracy, What the Health, Dominion, and most recently, The Game Changers, have been inspiring people across the spectrum to adopt a **plant-based lifestyle**. In covering a range of topics from the atrocities of factory farming to its damaging effects on climate change, these thought-provoking films have successfully converted a niche campaign into a popular cause.

Opinions of these films and all aspects of veganism are able to spread rapidly across social media through Twitter and Instagram.

In a world of unabashedly sharing photos of our food on social media, Instagram's ability to propagate vibrant vegan dishes has rebranded its reputation as a 'hippie plant food' to being a fresh aspirational lifestyle approach.
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# The vegan diet

Millions of people across the globe have transitioned to vegan diets for its numerous health benefits. In steering away from meat, dairy, and fish and towards fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds, a vegan diet is naturally rich in nutrients and low in saturated fats.

Following a plant-based diet can reduce the risk of certain conditions, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, prostate and colon cancer, and obesity.

Most recently, COVID-19's exposé of the vulnerability of the meat and dairy industry has highlighted the link between food and health and encouraged a revaluation of consumer diets.

The public health dangers of industrial meat farming and the pandemic's overwhelming impact on those with underlying health conditions have created an unprecedented demand for plant-based products.

Consumer behaviour has also shifted towards a vegan diet as the threats and effects of climate change become ever more real. At present, almost 65 percent of India's greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture come from livestock.

Increasing awareness of the environmental impact of industrialised animal agriculture has made Indian citizens realise the enormous consequences of their food choices.

# The market

In 2019, the global plant-based food market was approximately valued at $12.1 billion. Research indicates that it will raise to $74.2 billion, over six times that amount, by 2027[2].

Across the world, as young consumers drive the force of the global consumer economy; venture capital firms are fuelling companies to keep innovating in the vegan sector.

Major investments in vegan food companies from the likes of billionaire Bill Gates (Impossible Foods) to private equity giant Blackstone (Oatly) have helped solidify plant-based alternatives as the future of food.

Inspired by the meteoric rise of plant-based food companies abroad, the plant and nut milk sector in India is gaining dominance and increasing its outreach.

While well-funded dairy startups like Epigamia are responding to the changing consumer preference by launching vegan products, traditional FMCG firms such as Nestle have been introducing new vegan goods to their existing range.

A range of exclusive vegan homegrown brands, including Good Dot and Vezlay, specialise in plant-based versions of fried chicken, bhurji burgers, mutton tikka, and fish fingers, among other staples.

In addition to some of these brands selling over ten thousand meals a day, many dishes have already reached price parity with their non-veg fast-food competitors.

Similarly, homegrown vegan milk brands have made dairy-free milk, yogurt, and butter easily accessible to Indian consumers with a selection found in almost every supermarket or specialty store.

As meat and dairy substitutes become more prevalent, their price points are becoming more competitive. Once a lifestyle only attainable to the privileged sector, vegan products are now matching their non-vegan counterparts in affordability and accessibility.

As more plant-based companies get funding, and consumer demand turns up the volume on veganism, the green machine revolution is set to explode in India.

Growing proof can be found outside the major urban hubs where dietary decisions are becoming more experimental and virtual communities of vegans are forming. In addition to a growing number of vegan-friendly dishes making their way into various restaurant and cafe menus, many plant-based restaurants have cropped up to cater to vegan consumers.

In 2019, PETA India awarded Hyderabad, the most meat-consuming city in Asia, the title of Most Vegan-Friendly City in India - a dichotomy that serves to show that the wave of veganism in the country knows no bounds.

*The article is authored by Mr. Siddharth Kothari, Chief Investment Strategist - OM Kothari Group. Siddharth has been a vegan since ten years and advocates like minded brands to propogate the principles of environmental friendly and animal cruelty free lifestyle.*

Edited by Megha Reddy

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