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City vegans bond over potlucks

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MUMBAI: When Sneha Poojarey (23) decided to turn vegan, she had not expected her will power to be tested at every step.

Her parents were concerned about her health, friends tempted her with *kheer* and the priest at her local temple wondered why she was refusing to accept the curd and sugar *prasad*.

"In the beginning, it felt like I was alone," said the call centre executive. A default online search helped the Vasai resident discover Mumbai Vegans, an active community of vegans in the city. "I was surprised to see so many young vegans at my first potluck meeting."

The Mumbai Vegans community is part of Sanctuary For Health And Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN), which holds health workshops in Mumbai every two months.

The group has about 50 members of which at least 20 make it to the monthly potluck held at one of the members' homes. Members share food, recipes and tips for leading a life free of meat and other animal products.

"People don't join us to become vegan," said Dr Rupa Shah, an active hand in organising these meetings. "Many of us have been vegan for years and are looking for a platform to con-



■ Sneha Poojarey, a call centre executive, discovered Mumbai Vegans while surfing the Internet.

PRASAD GORI / HT PHOTO

nect with like-minded people."

Every member has his or her reason for adopting this lifestyle. Poojarey opted for a vegan diet to promote animal welfare.

Sunil Desai (59) was influenced by a SHARAN workshop on reversing diabetes. He started following a vegan diet last December and lost eight kg. "At my age it is difficult to lose weight. And I never imagined I could lose weight without exer-

cising," said the businessman.

Veganism also has its critics. Anju Venkat, a nutritionist at the Health Awareness Centre, recommends and follows a 'natural healthy diet' that is free of meat and other animal products, but does not believe in being typecast as a vegan.

"I think it's a fad that creates barriers rather than building bridges," she said. "Nature is about integration, not about

WHAT IS VEGANISM?

- The term 'vegan' was coined in 1944 by a British woodworker, Donald Watson, to describe vegetarians who did not eat dairy and eggs.
- Veganism is a philosophy and lifestyle that excludes meat, eggs, milk and any other animal products from one's diet. It extends to the use of products made from leather, pearls, ivory, wool and inorganic fertilisers.
- World Vegan Day falls on November 1.

communities with an 'Us vs. Them' mindset."

Dr Shah said she respected Venkat's argument, but believes that using the term 'vegan' helps people with common ideals find common ground.

"It (vegan) is just a term and an international one at that," she said. "It makes the vegan lifestyle more accessible especially through search engines and blogs."

A vegan diet does not have vitamin B12. We usually supplement this with a vitamin tablet that is available over the counter.

DR RUPA SHAH,

a vegan and Mumbai coordinator of SHARAN

We think we are omnivores because that is what they taught us in school. But we don't have the stomach acids to dissolve meat.

DR NANDITA SHAH,
of Quiet Healing Centre,
Auroville

Cow's milk is designed to accelerate a calf's growth. We are meant to drink mother's milk until the age of two then move on to a firm diet of fruits and veggies.

ANJU VENKAT,
a nutritionist

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