Food

Monika Siriya, 28, social worker, Mumbai

" I come from a Delhi-based Punjabi family, which likes its butter chicken and naan. Not surprisingly, I was a non-vegetarian, till Fluffy, our pet Spitz, came into my life as a pup in 2001. One day, I took her for vaccination to an animal shelter. I happened to hear crying noises and on enquiring I learnt of the horrific plight of the animals at the shelter. I turned vegetarian that day.

"The year 2009 brought a lot of changes into my life. I got married to a Gujarati Jain boy and moved to Mumbai. In mid-2009, I joined Facebook and noticed a lot of vegans online. Veganism is the practice of eliminating the use of all animal products and I had been thinking of adopting a vegan lifestyle for a long time. Unfortunately, I hadn't found support, as I hadn't met too many like-minded people in my life. However, in April 2010, I met up with two vegans I found on Facebook who encouraged me and even gave me ideas on what changes I could bring into my diet.

"Finally, on August 17, 2010, I switched to a completely vegan diet. A couple of months later, my husband followed suit. I chose veganism for three reasons: for the sake of animals, my health and the environment. But a lot of people don't really understand these reasons. Everyone understands why vegetarianism and cruelty to animals are linked to each other, but no one understands why using milk products too should be considered as cruelty to animals. The simple fact of life is that milk is meant only for the infant or the baby of the animal that produces it—by consuming milk and dairy products you are denying an infant of what it rightfully deserves.

"Most of my friends know my stance on animal rights, so going out with them is not tough. Besides, Chinese and south Indian food, minus the curd rice/buttermilk, is primarily vegan. I get my dose of calcium and protein from other sources. I don't miss out on desserts, I simply use milk from almond, cashewnut, coconut, peanut, etc, to make desserts. People often ask me if a vegan diet is really healthy. I think it is. I feel less stressed and my haemoglobin count has improved."

As told to Deepa Suryanarayan ▶

MAKE THE CHANGE
"Make tea or coffee with almond milk. Replace paneer with tofu, and butter or ghee with peanut, almond or cashewnut butter."

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMEER MANGTANI