

A VEGAN'S DIARY

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I am a vegan and I come in peace!

We all tend to stick to our own kind, but being a vegan in Bangladesh, there are not enough of us to form a "kind" of any sort and my non-vegan family and friends are too awesome to replace. However, I often find myself in situations where people feel judged or even attacked by my mere presence or by what's NOT on my dinner plate. This happens even though I always wear my 'I come in peace' smile when in company of non-vegans and never bring up the topic of veganism voluntarily. Nevertheless, people react usually by making inappropriate jokes about vegans or by instigating a debate on the significance of plant life vs. animal life. I keep my smile intact because I can empathise with how they feel. There are 101 social situations where I am the minority, and I too revolt by making inappropriate jokes.

Veganism comes from a place of love, and not a label. When I ask my baby sister to lay off the meat, it's because I am terrified of what it might do to her health. When I talk about how animal farming hurts the earth, it's because I am worried sick about the future of my toddler nephew and the world we are leaving behind for him. When I post a picture of a cow on his way to a slaughter house, it's because I can relate to how it feels to not be seen, heard, or understood. We all can. We have all been there.

Last month, I was holidaying with a group of friends, some of whom, I have been friends with for a long time, and as for the others, I met them for the first time. I gener-

ally don't enjoy meeting new people, but this particular group was unpretentious, vibrant, fun, and transparent. I felt right at home with them.

We had half a dozen meals together, so the "V" bomb was dropped quite a few times. "Where shall we eat"? "What shall we eat"? "Will she eat this"? "Will she eat that"? I cringed every time I caused any inconvenience, but the discomfort was

no one ever questioned or interfered with his choices of food. Not even me. I am used to going to dinners and looking for some hint of vegetables somewhere on the table for me to eat

and be happy with. I was prepared to do the same here as well. Except, at every meal, our menu curator took his time with the waiter to give him careful and detailed instructions on how to veganise some of their dishes for me. If the rest of the gang had three non-vegan things to eat, then he made sure that I also had three vegan things to eat. This is when I first had "dhoka" - a savoury barfi made with lentils and cooked in rich, spicy gravy. I was in food heaven!

One evening, it was just me and another friend, who loved his biriyani and kabab. Since it was just the two of us, he ordered only vegetarian food for himself with no encouragement from me. A few minutes into our meal, and I notice that he hadn't poured his yoghurt dressing over his salad, and was just chewing on the raw leaves. When I asked him why, he casually said that he wanted me to be able to nibble on his salad.

I suppose the point that I am trying to make is that whether we eat meat or not, we all understand veganism if we understand love and compassion. Note to self: there is no us and them. There should be no us and them. We must connect with others and allow others to connect with us. The message of love cannot be sent with a bullet. And the recipient also needs to hold their cup up with an open mind and an open heart.

DHOKAR DALNA

Ingredients

1 cup chana daal, 1 bay

leaf
½ tsp cumin seeds
2 tsp ginger powder
½ tsp sugar
Salt, to taste, 2 tsp ghee
1 large potato, peeled and chopped into cubes
1 tsp asafoetida
2 tsp cumin powder
2 tsp red chilli powder, ½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp garam masala powder
5 tbsp mustard oil

Method

Soak the daal overnight or for a minimum of 3-4 hours. Take a blender and make a smooth and thick paste of daal. Now take a deep pan and heat oil. Take the paste and fry in oil at low flame for a minimum of 10 minutes from all sides. While frying, add cumin, ginger, red chili powder or paste each of 1 tsp and sugar. Add salt according to taste. Take a big plate and grease it with oil. Take the paste and pour it on the plate. While it is warm, pat the paste with your hands and form a flat, little-raised structure. Take a knife and cut the paste in small kite or square or diamond shapes. Let the lentil paste get cool, and harden. When the structures are ready, take them out slowly. Marinate potato cubes and the lentil cakes with salt and turmeric powder. Now fry them in oil till they get golden brown on both sides. Take a deep pan and heat fresh oil. Add cumin seeds, asafoetida, and bay leaf and saute for two minutes. Now add the rest of the cumin, ginger and red chilli paste and half cup water. Saute till the spices start leaving the water. Now add potato cubes and 2 cup water. When the potato cubes are almost boiled, add lentil cakes. Cook it five minutes in medium flame. Add garam masala powder and ghee. Cook for another two or three minutes. Switch off the burner. Serve it with steamed rice.

Photo: Collected



short-lived. Our group had a designated 'menu curator' who loved his meat. The man was brilliant at his job, so