



BODY WORK

“Instinctually, We Are Attracted to Plant Smells, Not Death and Decay” – Dr

Nandita Shah on Veganism and Health



BY ESHE

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By Neha Kirpal

Recipient of the prestigious Nari Shakti Award 2016 for her pioneering work in the field of health and nutrition from the President of India, Dr Nandita Shah is the founder, director, and a trustee of [SHARAN](#) Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature.

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She founded SHARAN in 2005 with the vision of helping people connect to animals and nature in order to heal

themselves and the planet. A registered medical doctor, she had a thriving practice in Mumbai as a homeopath and regularly taught all over world at seminars and conferences. Brought up as a vegetarian, she is also the author of the book *Reversing Diabetes in 21 Days* (Penguin, 2017, 299).

In this exclusive interview, the Auroville-based activist speaks to us among other things about her personal foray into veganism, its benefits for one’s health and the environment, and advice for the uninitiated to begin the vegan journey.

How did you decide to become a vegan?

I grew up as a vegetarian. The very thought of eating dead animal body parts was unbearable. When I learned that in order that we can consume milk, cows are artificially inseminated at the age of two years, I was shocked. Like any other mammal they, too, only produce milk for their young.

I learnt that in order that this milk can be sold, the newborn calf is separated from its mother as soon as possible. When we consume colostrum, it means that the calf has not had even the first milk from its mother. This causes the cow extreme grief; they have been seen with tears and heard crying out in agony for days. If the calf is a female, she will be raised to be a new milk machine. She will be tied up away from her mother, and taken to her mother just to start the milk flow and then tied up again until her mother’s udders are empty.



The cow is then artificially inseminated again within two months of her delivery so that her dry period is minimized. The repeated pregnancies and lactation while pregnant takes its toll, and after three to four such deliveries, she is sent for slaughter.

Being a woman and a doctor, I know that every mother has the strongest bond towards her baby and it's no different for cows. I also understand that artificial insemination is just fancy word for rape. Cows are victims of repeated rape for our needs (greed), and this is accepted by our society. I just knew that I could not partake in this ritual anymore. This is why I became vegan.

How did you decide to start your organization SHARAN? Tell us a little about its work.

When I switched to a vegan diet, not only did I see a huge shift in my physical well-being, I also saw huge shift in my emotional well-being. I also began to see this recorded in medical journals and articles. But most of us are still clouded by our culture and tradition.

We are all not just physical beings but also energetic beings. When we create the energy of rape, victimisation, separation, pain and suffering with the way we are treat animals in our food chain, this comes back to us through the stress hormones such as adrenaline in meat and dairy. We are seeing this energy of stress and suffering increasing in our society and we have to break the cycle.



Dr Nandita Shah conducting vegan cooking classes

I came across an organisation called Farm Sanctuary in upstate New York. I decided to go and stay there for a month to do an internship. I learned that there was another way to relate to animals that we traditionally consider as commodities.

Being a doctor, I wish to help people make a connection between our current state of health and the way we were meant to be. As a species, we are suffering from many lifestyle diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, hypothyroidism, PCOD, infertility, autoimmune diseases, digestive disturbances, respiratory problems and even cancers. Now that we have Covid-19, it's all the more reason to prevent and reverse these in

order to prevent Covid-19 related co-morbidities.

Through SHARAN’s events, publications, online programmes, cooking classes, talks, webinars, training programs and consultations, we help people recognise that most of the diseases that we face today are preventable and reversible and that we are the authors of our health.

SHARAN has helped at least 1 lakh people reach their highest health potential. Till date, we have conducted our signature 21-Day Health Retreats 16 times. Our clients from all over the world have one common goal – to get healthy again. Some of them are on many medications – as much as 24 or 26 doses a day!

During the course of the programme, we enjoy multiple fun activities, regular buffet meals, cooking classes and reduce medications whenever possible. We do all the lab reports at the beginning and end so that they can actually see the effect of lifestyle changes on their health, not just in the way they feel, but also scientifically. Many of our participants leave being free of all medications and others are on minimal doses. All of them leave with the knowledge that they can take charge of their health, and that our lifestyle is easy and sustainable.



Please tell our readers the short-term and long-term benefits of veganism for one’s health as well as for the environment.

Every animal should eat what nature has designed for him to eat. Every species in the wild instinctively knows what food to eat. A lion cub instinctively goes for meat and a calf instinctively for grass. We humans do too, but our conditioning battles with our instincts and usually wins when it comes to food. We eat anything that is made to look and taste appetizing.

In the process, we have stopped eating according to our instincts. Human beings have now learnt to eat dog food (chicken), cow and bird food (wheat and rice), lion food (goats, sheep, cows and pigs) and calf food (milk). No wonder we are sick!

For a moment, let me put you in touch with your instincts. Imagine that you are in a farm or orchard and you see vegetables and fruit ripe and ready to be plucked. What would you feel like doing? Picking and possibly

eating them, right? This is instinct. We enjoy eating freshly plucked fruit and vegetables.



If you see a goat, a pig or a cow, you wouldn't salivate but a lion would, because that is his natural food. Think about it. If you saw a dead chicken on the road, would you feel like consuming it? Only when a chicken has been cooked and presented on a plate do some of us salivate and feel like consuming it. This is conditioning, not instinct.

Instinctually, we are attracted to plants and their smells, not to animal flesh and the smell of death and decay.

One of the first things that parents teach us is what to eat, even before we learn to think. These habits are further reinforced by society and advertisements. Our instincts are still intact when we are children. Children usually refuse to drink animal milk because they know instinctively that it's not the best food for them, but we cajole and coax them, and make it palatable. And soon, they become addicted.

Over 70 billion land animals are slaughtered every year for food to feed our population of less than 8 billion. India also has the largest population (14 percent) of cattle in the world. All these animals need water, land, air

and food. If we consumed less or no animal products as humans, there would be less water shortages; more trees, forests, greenery, wildlife, and available energy; less global warming and climate change; and less pollution of land, air and water.



Dr Nandita Shah receiving the Nari Shakti Puruskar 2016 from President Ram Nath Kovind

What are some of the ill effects of consuming dairy products and meat?

Dairy, meat and all animal products are high-protein, high-fat and have no fibre. All lifestyle diseases are caused by excess fat and protein and lack of fibre. All animal products are full of fat. When we consume these fats, they go quickly into our bloodstream. This makes the blood viscous raising blood pressure.

When we consume fat over a period of time, the viscous blood injures the delicate artery walls and causes a deposition of plaque as a bandage on the injury. Over a period of time, the arteries get narrower, and it causes disease. Lack of oxygen to the heart causes angina or heart attacks; in the brain, it causes strokes.

Similarly, the main cause of diabetes is not sugar, but fat. Fat in the muscle cells causes insulin resistance.

Further, the incidence of cancers is also connected to increased fat intake. Only animals produce cholesterol, so

if we do not consume animal products, cholesterol levels will naturally remain low.

Excess protein is the main cause of kidney disease and gout. It also causes acidity, osteoporosis and cancer. Protein is the food for growth and repair, and cancer is a growth. Excess proteins cause cancers and other growths.

Lack of fibre is another major cause of disease. Fibre holds on to water giving the stools their bulk, and helps to remove toxins. Fibre is found only in plants. This is why those who do not eat enough fibre have constipation. Constipation is the mother of many diseases. We can also make our blood thin with full fibre foods.

How would you advise the uninitiated to begin the vegan journey?

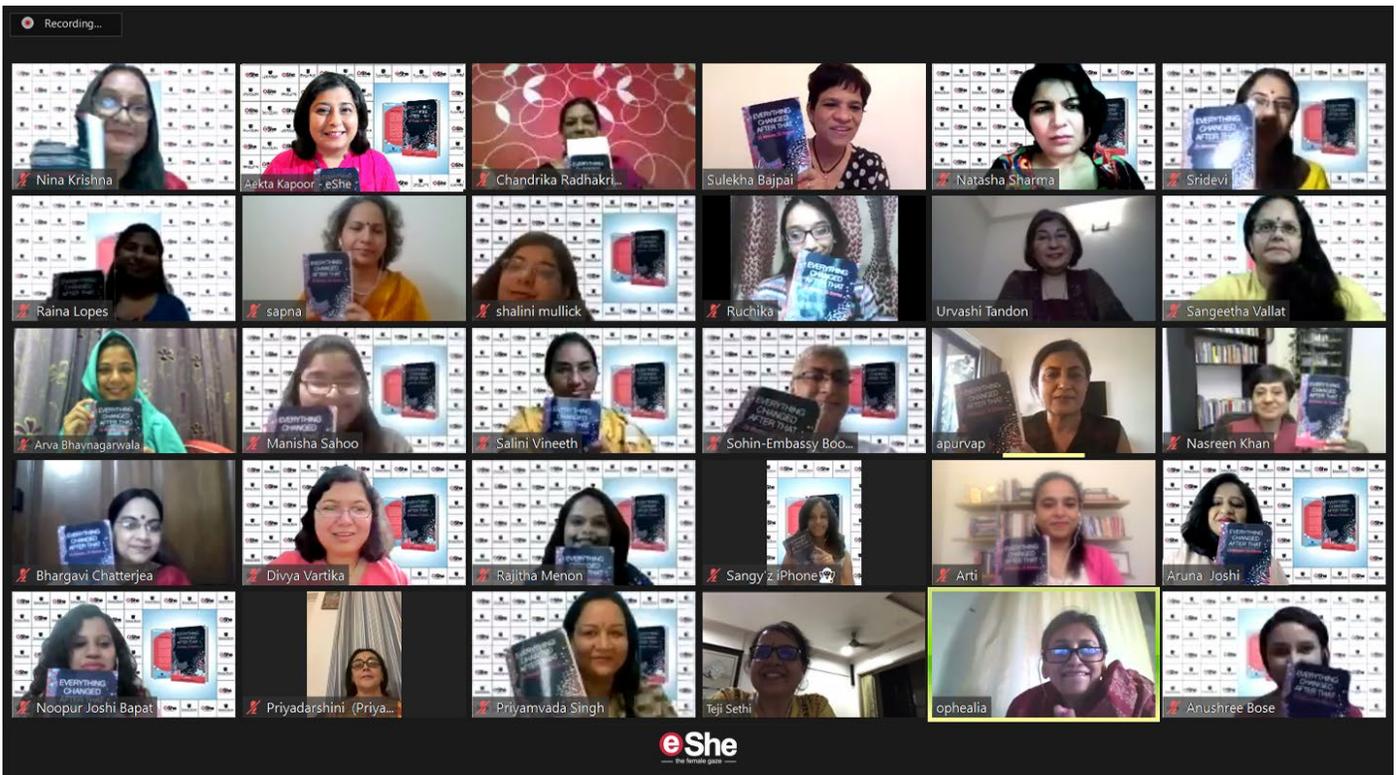
Learn as much as you can and be clear about the reasons why you wish to begin the journey. Find a few alternatives to your favourite foods, learn a few recipes and visit a few good vegan restaurants. It's surprisingly easy when you start.

Read also: [*Why More Indians Are Turning Vegan, and How They're Right*](#)

[*Love Indian Food But Want to Stay Vegan? Try These Alternatives*](#)



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