



A Doctor reconnects us to Nature through "SHARAN"

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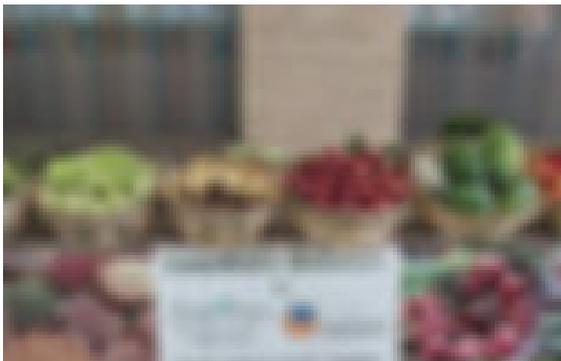
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Packaged food have risen with us

I remember growing up in the suburbs of Montréal where as children we were constantly outdoors and totally in touch with nature. My family returned to Mumbai when I was 10 years old and in India at the time when there was no single use plastic. Ready-made foods were rarely available, and if at all they were in butter paper bags and quite fresh – for example sandwiches or potato chips at a movie theatre or even Parle Glucose biscuits. Mumbai was then still a relatively clean city with not too many cars and a far lower population. Milk was available in recyclable glass bottles rationed at Aarey booths and groceries were bought by weight and packed in paper bags often made from recycled newspapers.

13 years later I had become a doctor. Bombay's population had exploded. Packaged foods were growing, and now a few more things were packed in plastic. Roadside fast food was growing, but even this was served ecologically. Then the milk bags started, and more packaged foods and another 13 years later there were tetra packs. Being a doctor interested in natural forms of healing, I didn't buy the package foods much, but the garbage was growing around me. **I started composting the waste in my house and separating all the dry waste so that I could give it to the garbage pickers.** I thought that we were so lucky that still have garbage pickers to separate the waste, but we could make their load so much lighter if we could just separate our own waste and give it to them. Our building then started distributing garbage bags to be used daily. Each family could mix all their organic waste with all the rest and just put it in the bin downstairs neatly tied in plastic. This troubled me but nobody would listen.





Lets work towards a better health

Meanwhile I was thinking about natural solutions for health. I was in touch with groups that were working with solid waste management in Mumbai. I kept thinking about what nature would have expected from us. It was easy for me to think this way as I had seen a time without single use plastic but the youngsters could not imagine it. I also realised that one of the reasons that we have so many problems is because we eat foods that are not natural for our species.

If we lived in nature, we would be eating foods that we could forage for and eat them raw and fresh like all the other animals. As a species, we are instinctively attracted to fruits and vegetables, but our mouths don't water when we see a chicken or goat or cow walk by. Animal products are not only instinctively unsuitable to our species, they are also not suitable to our herbivorous digestive tracts. We are not true omnivores. The omnivore myth has been propagated too long. According to nature milk is the food that every mammal produces for its young. All the animal products that we consume are now packed in plastic. It's energy inefficient to raise animals for food and eat higher on the food chain. Animal products also need to be refrigerated which makes them even less energy-efficient. And consuming something that our body is not designed to eat is a bit like fueling a diesel car with petrol. It just causes disease.

As the doctor I quickly understood that the garbage that we produce due to our packaged, refined foods, as well as the animal products in our diet are harmful to both nature and ourselves! We are literally eating ourselves to disease and death.



Animals do not destroy nature

In my quest to live a more natural life, closer to nature, I moved from Mumbai to Auroville. When I moved, things were relatively pristine. People want to be closer to nature and many opted to live off the grid - without electricity or with the help of minimal solar panels. My own house in Auroville is minimalistic and surrounded by trees and nature. I love it. But what used to be a vegetarian township when I arrived has now changed into city with lots of restaurants that serve meat. The nature that I loved is covered with garbage heaps. The local people for whom plastic is relatively new, were used to sweeping away the dry leaves but leave the plastic behind since it's not their culture to sweep plastic. Every time they go shopping to get a new carry bag and throw it outside. Even though Auroville shops and restaurants rarely offer plastic carry bags there is plastic and waste strewn everywhere.

I realised that animals in nature do not destroy, but we do, and that is only because we don't live the way we were supposed to. So I started an organisation, SHARAN in 2005. SHARAN is an acronym for Sanctuary for Health And Reconnection to Animals and Nature to help people make the connection between their lifestyles and the disease we are facing today. We help people prevent and reverse diseases just by lifestyle changes. We also run an organic farmer's market and have an organic store in order to reduce the chemical and pesticide load in the food (and on our planet). We definitely avoid plastic carry bags, and minimise plastic packing although we are not completely free of it.

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Better Health and Less Waste

I believe that when people reconnect to nature and to the kind of lives were supposed to live, even just for health, they will be creating less waste just by avoiding packaged food, refined foods, and animal products. Fruits and vegetables and dry groceries can easily be shopped or without any plastic. Not only is this healthy for us but also for the environment. When people understand the effect of chemicals on their health, they automatically buy less personal care and home care products that are full of chemicals. We also teach people to make their own products through cooking classes and Do-It-Yourself classes.

I recently spoke to someone who consciously lives a zero waste life in Mumbai. I thought that was creditable. She told me that she had to change all her eating habits in be zero waste and therefore she is vegan. And we are vegan for health reasons but the natural consequence is low waste. These two lifestyles go hand in hand.

You can know more about Dr. Nandita or Sharan India on their platform [Click here](#)

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