

Interview with Mathivanan Rajendran, abolitionist vegan and Kollywood actor



Corey Wrenn, Roanoke Vegan Examiner
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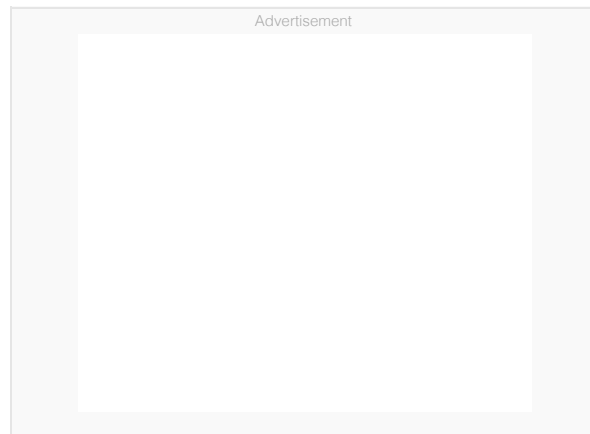


Mathivanan Rajendran
Credits: Prabu Prasad S

In celebration of [World Vegan Month](#), I have hosted a collection of interviews with vegan abolitionists from across the globe. I was excited to have this opportunity to showcase vegan activists and give a face to our beautiful movement.

Our final vegan abolitionist interview is with Mathivanan Rajendran of [Chennai](#), India. Mathi is a close and personal friend of mine whom I met in graduate school at Virginia Tech. I'm excited to see him continuing his vegan outreach in Southern India. Mathi is an actor in the Tamil [cinema industry](#), [Kollywood](#) (separate from the Northern, Bollywood industry).

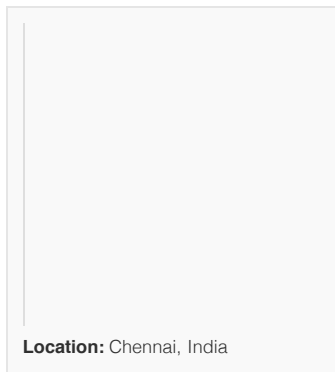
Mathi, please tell us about yourself. How did you become vegan? What type of activism do you participate in?



I work with theatre and film as an actor. I'm also the artistic director for [Stray Factory](#), an entertainment collaborative based out of Chennai, India. I grew up eating

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meat even though my folks were vegetarians. While growing up it somehow became the "cool" thing to do. In the schools and colleges I went to, meat-eating was a way of breaking the status quo, especially since 30-40% of Indians were vegetarian and probably more in the institutions I was a part of largely because of social/religious reasons. Having spent most of my life in Dubai and Chennai, both of which are vegetarian-friendly, I decided to turn vegan in Southern Virginia while studying at Virginia Tech. For me turning vegan was about the politics of it. I realized that I could face and address racism, sexism, and speciesism three times a day with every meal of mine. That was in 2007 and I have been vegan for four years since then.

What do you think should be the focus of the non-human animal rights movement?

I'm not entirely sure since I haven't met many vegans here to be a part of the movement. However, at a basic level being able to ensure every vegan is able to make a sensible argument to "Why are you Vegan?" is important. Else, the few brand ambassadors we're sending out will fail us. :)

What are some of the biggest obstacles to reaching our goals?

I can speak for Chennai and maybe a part of India. There are too many practices steeped in tradition and religion that talking to people about non-human animal rights issues becomes difficult. In a country where people pride themselves as being one of the oldest civilizations, changes in lifestyle are extremely hard to influence. What's worse is that a good number aspire for a lifestyle seen in the West. To dumb it down, eating at McDonald's and a Louis Vuitton Leather wallet are both aspirational. Addressing this mind set is probably the toughest I would say.

How is your activism impacted by where you live?

Dairy is a very important part of an Indian diet. It has also taken a level of religious importance as well.

Cows are revered and ghee (clarified butter) is made as an offering often. It's difficult to talk to folks without hurting their sentiments, let alone turning them off for life. I also found it interesting that people around me here seem to look at 'ingesting' and 'using' animal products differently. I often meet folks who are strict vegetarians but use leather heavily. What is even more interesting is the fact that most people I have met here seem to believe that cows come from really happy farms and leather is processed after the natural death of the cow. Another challenge is the fact that a good percentage of the population does not operate online which means that they go by mass-media which will NEVER focus on animal-rights issues. So online videos or using social media serve no purpose in reaching a good percentage of the population.

Also, a good number of honest, hard working, daily-wage earning individuals make their money selling meat and animal products. It might be unfair to walk up to him/her to shut shop, and to be perfectly honest I have no idea how to

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Corey Wrenn's Preferred Links

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address issues like that.

What are your other interests? Where else does your activism materialize?

I love theatre and film and, of course, a good beer...not necessarily at the same time. I just did my first mainstream Tamil movie recently called 'Mayakkam Enna' which released this month. Recently, I've met some vegans online and I'm hoping to talk about it more in the future.

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By **Corey Wrenn**
Roanoke Vegan Examiner

Corey Wrenn is a doctoral candidate in sociology currently researching the vegan movement. She is an abolitionist vegan and is adviser to a...

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