Greta Thunberg: The Wunderkind at Work!

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By Pritish Gupta

The sign that reads “Skolstrejk for Klimatet” in Swedish, has been her companion for some time now. A 16-year-old girl with braided hair sits outside the rose-colored building of the Swedish Parliament and looks innately gritty when strands of sunlight fall over the cobblestone streets of Stockholm. Greta Thunberg is the new climate-change foot soldier in the fight to save the planet. She believes that ‘Some people can let things go, I can’t.’ What’s the story of this student activist who turned a jacquerie into a global movement? Are the climate strikes working?

Last August, a young girl Greta, on a usual weekday, skipped school and sat outside the Riksdag in Stockholm on a balmy summer day with a hand-painted placard echoing the words ‘School Strike for Climate’ in English. For few weeks, people expressed their sympathy and gave little attention to her plea, but after the COP24 conference in December 2018, the strike gained the media attention and there was no looking back. Her actions have inspired thousands of school children to stage climate strikes on Fridays worldwide.

For decades, the issue of climate change has taken a backseat and there has been no concrete plan of action in place to deal with the catastrophe. The Paris Agreement promises a lot but the progress is very slow. With activists such as Al Gore, Leonardo DiCaprio stressing the need to deal with the crisis, it just didn’t resonate with the world, despite repeated efforts. Perhaps the debate had become so tired and self-referential that an outsider was needed.

‘You are stealing my future’ is the message this teenager is trying to put forth. Both Greta and her sister Beata have been diagnosed with autism and A.D.H.D. At the age of 11, Greta suffered from severe depression and her parents believe that climate change protest helped her recover from it. At first, Greta’s parents were skeptical about the strike, but soon realized that there is no off the whiff reason to stop her from going forward. The family also sacrificed and supported her by first buying an electric car and eventually giving up flying. This ended the career of her mother, a renowned international
opera singer. The family also became vegan to reduce their carbon footprint. Her parents were gobsmacked at Greta’s change in attitude towards life and were chuffed at the improvement in Greta’s condition.

Greta has won accolades from all ages for her determination and panache. At last year’s UN climate talks, she told international climate change negotiators, “You are not mature enough to tell it like it is. Even that burden you leave to us children.” To attend this year’s World Economic Forum, she travelled 32 hours by train to Davos, Switzerland. At this year’s meeting in Davos, she gave a moving speech explaining all the reveries of climate change before a bunch of CEOs investors. She even accused them of putting profits before the planet. Her message echoed in the WEF: “Our house is on fire, I want you to panic.” She later said in an interview that most emissions are caused by a few people, the very influential people, who are here in Davos.

Though the Swedes pride themselves on being the most reformist on climate change legislations in the world, still little was said in last September’s general elections about the issue, even when Sweden witnessed wildfires in July. Sweden’s actual emissions have gone up 3.6 percent. Greta wrote a piece in which she pointed out: “Sweden is not a role model” and much more needs to be done. She prefers action rather than words that look good on paper. Her inspiration has been the survivors of the Parkland shooting in the US who are protesting against the gun laws. At the tender age of eight, when she first learnt about climate change, she was appalled as to why adults or people around her are not taking the issue seriously. She kept on brooding whether she would have a future at all. After giving it a thought, she started off on a journey that must have felt like swaying to the mellow rhythm of an invisible song. Along with her triumvirate – placard, bike, and yellow slicker – she just sat outside the Parliament swinging for the fences.

Greta has inspired climate strikes across the world. School children from more than 71 countries and more than 700 places have taken part in the strike, and the numbers are increasing every week. She has been invited to speak in Parliaments worldwide and has become a figurehead for climate change. She is as buzzed as the guy who landed on the moon. Thunberg has been compared to Joan of Arc and to Swedish fictional character Pippi Longstocking. Recently she has been nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize by three members of the Norwegian Parliament. Greta’s name has also been included in TIME’s 2019 list of world’s 100 most influential people. Let’s shoulder the burden of Greta & work on #fridaysforfuture. We can’t wait till the penny drops. Can we?

Bio:

**Pritish Gupta** is a student of M.A. International Relations (Diplomacy, Law and Business) at Jindal School of International Affairs at O P Jindal Global University, India.