

Do we need a Greta

Earth is facing unprecedented environmental concerns, ranging from global warming, ozone layer depletion and acid rain, to glacial melt, pollution, and regular climatic dysfunctions. While these issues may seem disparate, they can all be narrowed down to one colossal phenomenon: climate change. In spite of the alarming nature of climate change and its inevitability, it continues to be neglected and ignored by common people and policymakers alike.

Instead of looking at the bigger picture - one that ascertains that life on Earth will cease to exist unless and until climate change is dealt with - our political leaders persist in focusing on trivial issues, engaging in identity politics, and pandering to vote banks, all in the name of winning elections. What these politicians seem to have forgotten is that they are elected to act for the people; and to make decisions that benefit their constituents in the longer run. This means protecting their fundamental rights, rights that include a clean, non-toxic environment. All of this political infighting and malpractices to rig elections seem meaningless in the face of a future consisting of an inhabitable planet.

It is appalling to see how human beings have the power to change climate, and yet we choose not to act. Setting aside their moral dogmas, many human endeavors in the name of development, leisure, and progress misuse non-renewable natural resources without thinking about the future generations. Why are we carelessly using so much electricity to illuminate empty rooms, burning fossil fuel when our feet and legs would serve us just as well, wasting water as we needlessly run our showers and wash our cars, and living like there is no tomorrow?

Yet if we have the power to misuse our resources, we also have the power to fix our mistakes. Greta Thunberg, a 17-year-old Swedish environmental activist, is a perfect example of this. In fact, she is the example that the environmental movement needs. For the past few years, Greta has been an active participant in climate conferences and protests. Her school strike for the climate has now grown into a global movement. In a very short span of time, she has become the global face of the growing youth movement for climate action.

Stating, "I want you to act as if your house is on fire," Greta urged politicians to acknowledge that they cannot escape from the topic of climate change, as it is an emergency. Inspired by how she voices her opinions and stands up for her rights, many youth environmentalists have sprung into existence across the globe. These local grassroots actors, inspired by Greta, will shape the ideological trajectory of the environmental movement. They are steadily on their way to becoming a symbol of active rebellion against the capitalistic values of the contemporary society that views the environment in terms of its instrumental value, instead of intrinsic value.

Historically, such symbols as Greta have not found much space within the political sphere as they are undermined by politicians who focus on issues that generate a vote bank. However, with everything going on in the world, Greta raised the right issue at the right time.

"One reason that I think why Greta became so famous so fast is that there was already dissatisfaction with ongoing climate politics in general," said Katrin Uba, a professor at Sweden's Uppsala University and Estonia's University of Tartu who has been studying Thunberg's impact since this spring. The push for environmental action to address climate change was already under way, and in its nascent stages, but it took Greta's voice and message to propel it to the global forefront.

As a prominent public figure for the environmental movement, Greta Thunberg's actions have been consistent with her words. Unlike others who may sing the praises of environmental conservation, but then practice unsustainable behaviours as soon as they're out of the limelight, Greta remains consistent in her

words and actions. Even on a personal level, she combats climate change by following a vegan diet, and opting to sail to New York, instead of taking a flight, to avoid carbon emissions..

[Pope Francis](#), [James Hansen](#) and [Jeff Bezos](#) have all tried to spur momentum on climate action using their religious, academic and financial authority, but have faced little success. Even though Greta Thunberg lacks such an elite status, she has still succeeded in inspiring people across the world. Her actions, backed by the power of her fiery words to world leaders at the United Nations, as well as the global following that she has amassed, demonstrate that anyone can challenge powerful institutions and make a difference

Perhaps more importantly that who she is as an individual, Greta stands as a symbol of change, built on logical, scientific, and moral premises. More than needing Greta, we need the idea for which she stands to be ignited in people at a local level in order to transform a grassroots movement into a much-needed social evolution. The idea that only economic progress is required for survival is primitive and short-sighted in a world governed by natural laws. Thus, for the next step of human survival, we need leaders like Greta who will seek solutions beyond temporary economic progress.

Greta is the reason that many have come to believe that sudden, big changes are possible. She is the reason that a generation believes their voices and their concerns matter. She is the face of a movement, and the face of a generation. We need Greta to spur an environmental revolution, to spark hope, and to lead other young people to the belief that they, too, can make a profound difference in changing our world.

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