

PM award in one hand, a sapling in another, Prasiddhi is on a green mission



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Prime Minister Narendra Modi, surprised by the grit and determination of Tamil Nadu's Chengalpattu-based 8-year-old Prasiddhi Singh, tweeted how at the age of 7 (in 2020) she could dream and execute such tall dreams, taller than the thousands of fruit trees she planted with her green thumb at various school grounds and neighbourhoods—with a plan to increase the biodiversity. On winning the Pradhan Mantri Bal Puraskar Award 2021, PM sent kudos to Singh, saying, "May you keep serving Mother Nature and inspire others as well." She has also won accolades as the Youngest Fruit Forest Creator by the India Book of Records 2020. In an interview with Times NIE, Prasiddhi shares with us how she finds Swedish environment Greta Thunberg inspiring and the green goals India needs to achieve fast...



YOU ARE BEING REFERRED TO AS INDIA'S GRETA...

I am glad to be mentioned alongside Greta Thunberg. Our journeys are both similar and different in many ways.

My culture and Indian roots have influenced my journey. I am doing something which is deeply rooted in Indian culture where we have been taught to treat trees and water as God and Earth as our Mother.

Our journeys are similar in a way that we both don't wait for help but initiate actions ourselves! However, it must be mentioned that in developing countries like India, we face a lot more challenges than just a change in law and it is us, as individuals, who have to bring about a change—I want to do all of this as Prasiddhi Singh of India; while I continue drawing inspiration from many revolutionary eco-warriors.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY...

I was only two years old while my curiosity had already peaked about the environment, cleanliness and climate. This was largely because I would join my parents on a lot of marathons that supported some of the environment-related causes. Gradually, as I understood more and more, I wanted to do something noticeable for our planet -

something that will not only make this planet better for our future generations but also urge people to become the movement. Thus, began my journey towards increasing the green cover of the earth by planting trees.



Today, I am 8 years old and I have already created 14 fruit forests in government schools, offices and community areas, planted 14,000+ trees, created community nursery via door-to-door seed and tea dust collection. I have been able to connect with 15,000+ enthusiastic lives via many offline and online awareness sessions on the environment



HOW DOES PRASIDDHI FOREST FOUNDATION FUNCTION?

While I conduct a lot of online classes on yoga, wellness, DIY recycling, etc., our team has been actively pushing sustainable and eco-friendly products by setting up stalls at various fairs, exhibitions and even corporate events. Various national & international partnerships have also been a great boost in this direction. My army of eco-warriors from across the globe are the front runners of the vision that the Prasiddhi Forest Foundation holds. Thanks to the collective efforts of the entire foundation and the eco-warriors, I was bestowed the Pradhan Mantri Bal Puraskar Award 2021 and the Youngest Fruit Forest Creator by the India Book of Records 2020.

WHAT MADE YOU COME UP WITH THE G3 PROJECT?

G3 means - Generate your own Oxygen, Grow your own food and Gift the community - something that I learned from Padma Bhushan

Paramhansa Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati - "Serve, Love and Give". In essence, it is a sustainable ecosystem project in which we will lay emphasis on sustainable living and renewable energy.

ARE YOU LOOKING AT TIE-UPS WITH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES?

Yes, our foundation will soon be launching the 'Happy Living through Sustainable Solutions' where we will be partnering with schools, colleges, corporates, social life spaces and many more to multiply the good effect of this work. While conducting the plantation drive at several places



and connecting with students, corporates and young activists alike, I realised that people are not much aware of the importance of biodiversity and the role of trees.

DO YOU THINK CHILDREN CAN PLAY A BIG ROLE IN THIS?

I believe that when children are made to understand these things at a very young age, it gets imbibed as a natural way of doing things. This can happen dramatically well if children have a hands-on curriculum for such activities. For this reason, every school that we go for the plantation drive, we hold workshops for them.

TELL US HOW YOU FELT WHEN YOU WON THE AWARD AND YOUR FUTURE PLAN?

Winning the Pradhan Mantri Bal Puraskar was nothing less than a big dream come true. I feel immensely honoured and determined to keep moving. Many people also joined the cause of Prasiddhi Forest Foundation. Furthermore, the money that I have re-

A small seed of 4mm has the capability to grow as tall as 400 ft and does so much positive for this one big planet. Or a small honey bee has the potential to blossom flowers and fruits; or microorganisms on which the entire life depends

ceived as a part of the award, will make our cause bigger and better. We'll be able to plant more and more trees now and reach our mission of planting 1 lakh trees by 2022. It wouldn't be wrong to say that along with the message of pro-planet and sustainable living, I want to propagate the message of mindful living too among people. With the visibility that the PM award has offered us, I don't see that as a far-fetched dream. Right now, we have already reached out to 15,000+ people. Our aim is to touch 50,000+ lives this year.

DO YOU THINK SCHOOL CHILDREN IN INDIA TOO CAN MAKE A LARGE IM-

PACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE? ACCORDING TO YOU, WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Undoubtedly. The potential that small children hold, is one that you see today - the Prasiddhi Forest Foundation. Similarly, kids have the determination, passion, and the potential to make things turn around in a much more wonderful way!

WHO IS YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL ICON? WHY?

Environment icon - Jane Goodall and Ameenah Gurib Fokeem (plant scientist and former Mauritius president). Both have used their experience and positions for the utmost benefit of our environment and planet. They truly inspire me and I wish to work like them.

ARE YOU GROWING NATIVE FRUIT TREES TO INCREASE BIODIVERSITY?

Yes, absolutely. We grow a lot of Indian native fruit and medicinal trees like Jackfruit, Amla, Guava, Custard Apple, Mango, Jamun, Arjuna, etc. They are easy to survive since they are the native variety. They grow well in the soil and give us the tastiest fruits.

DO YOU LIKE READING BOOKS ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

Yes, I absolutely do. Along with my practical experience, books like - The Hidden Life of Trees, The Secret network of Nature by German forester & author - Peter Wohlleben are my favourites.

In addition to those, a few books I feel we all must give a read are 'Silent Spring', 'No One Is Too Small To Make a Difference', 'Field Notes From a Catastrophe', and 'The World Without Us'.

YOUR TIPS TO STUDENTS ON QUALITIES NEEDED TO TAKE UP AN ECO-WARRIOR CAUSE AND HOW TO GO ABOUT IT?

- Be mindful of your actions: both that harm the planet and benefit the planet.
- Get into a habit of planting and nurturing trees; it is two-way learning.
- Follow the 4 R's in your life: Reduce, Reduce, Recycle, Reuse.
- Growing native trees helps more biodiversity and supports the fauna - birds, butterflies, squirrels and bees.
- Keep going strong on all four from above.

IF PRASIDDHI WAS TO DESCRIBE HERSELF IN ONE LINE...

The unsettling eco-warrior who wants to bring a greener and happier future for the current and newer generations.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

I enjoy spending my leisure time taking care of my kitchen garden and try different health drinks from what I grow there. I enjoy spending time reading books, doing yoga and cycling with my parents.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE TIME?

Striking a balance between the Prasiddhi Forest Foundation activities and my school isn't difficult. I have a clear boundary between the two wherein I dedicate enough time for both; while ensuring the other activity doesn't get negatively affected. My parents and my teachers have been a great support at both ends and that is what keeps me going very strong.

YOUR FIVE-YEAR PLAN...

1. To see the Prasiddhi Forest Foundation having made bright global impressions, as we take the G3 projects closer to global citizens' hearts.
2. To reach out to 5 lakh+ people and positively influence their lives when it comes to eco-friendly and mindful living.
3. I want to spread moment-to-moment yoga - because it teaches us to be aware of our actions.
4. Influence not just people but corporates to reduce their carbon footprints considerably; and
5. Ensure that the biodiversity in our country starts coming back to normal levels.

Meet the

ALL-NEW SUPERFOODS

SEAWEED

Declared by Waitrose as the superfood of 2021, seaweed is packed with antioxidants, minerals and vitamins. It also contains iodine for thyroid and heart health. It's important not to have too much iodine though, so Sian advises, "Eat seaweed rather than taking supplements." You can make interesting salad with seaweed or stir-fry it.



TRY THIS: Itsu Crispy Seaweed Thins are available online and in a few health shops.

Move over avocado, take a hike kale. These are the immune-boosting goodies rocking our world in 2021. In the past 12 months, around 65% of us have turned to food to build up our immunity, according to a new survey. And 78% now believe it can be used as a medicine. It's no surprise given that some foods protect against cancer, stave off heart disease and boost our immune system - essential for giving us the best possible chance of fending off Covid-19.

WALNUTS

Eating walnuts has been linked with weight loss, as well as improved brain power, heart health and fertility. Rich in fibre, folate and polyphenols, research also indicates they help to improve gut health with enhanced good probiotic bacteria, which boosts our immune system.

TRY THIS: Keep walnuts in the fridge for freshness, and add to salads and yoghurt. Blitz 12 halves with a banana and nut milk for a healthy and tasty smoothie.



PAK CHOI

Despite its well-documented health benefits, not everyone is a fan of bitter kale. Step forward pak choi. Packed with nutrients such as folate (perfect for pre-conception health), iron (for alertness), and anti-inflammatory vitamin C and vitamin A (for healthy eyes), it's a little powerhouse of a vegetable. This one is delicious too.



TRY THIS: Available in supermarkets, the Chinese cabbage tastes great as stir-fries or noodles.

BEETROOT

Beetroot has come a long way since the days when you could only buy it pickled in a jar. These days the humble root veg is more likely to be juiced and drunk daily by top athletes. Hailed for its ability to support the liver - perfect for those of us who like some beverage in the evening - it also lowers blood pressure and increases exercise performance. It protects against cancer too.

TRY THIS: "Blitz them to make sure you're eating the fibre-rich pulp too," says Sian. "Or treat them like any vegetable and roast to enjoy in a meal or grate them."



MUSHROOM

There aren't many foods rich in antiviral vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin, which is why we're all being advised to take supplements during the winter months. Mushrooms are one of the few foods that can really boost your vitamin D levels. But only if they're grown in sunlight. Check the label for 'ultraviolet light' source of vitamin D.

TRY THIS: Mushroom Cups, mushroom-infused coffee that combines organic Peruvian coffee is a must have.

BOOKS: (NYT BESTSELLER LIST)

MIDDLE GRADE HARDCOVER

1 LITTLE LEGENDS: EXCEPTIONAL MEN IN BLACK HISTORY
by Vashti Harrison with Kwesi...
Biographies of inspiring and trail-blazing Black men.



2 ROWLEY JEFFERSON'S AWESOME FRIENDLY ADVENTURE
by Jeff Kinney
Roland and Garg - the Barbarian - embark on a quest...



3 THE ONE AND ONLY BOB
by Katherine Applegate.
Illustrated by Patricia Castelao
In this sequel, Bob sets out on a dangerous journey.



4 WHEN YOU TRAP A TIGER
by Tae Keller
Lily makes a deal with a magical tiger to heal her ailing grandmother.



5 DIARY OF AN AWESOME FRIENDLY KID
by Jeff Kinney
Greg's best friend Rowley Jefferson writes his own diary.

