



BRIKESH SINGH

**Head of Public Engagement,
Greenpeace India**

Age: 31

Born: India

Current location

Bangalore.

Why Greenpeace?

"Let's see what that's all about," Brikesh told himself when he saw that Greenpeace India was advertising for a fundraising position. He rather liked what he saw: "It was like imagining heaven. I took to Greenpeace like a fish to water." He dropped out of college – and jumped into Greenpeace; that was nine years ago. His fascination for the organisation hasn't changed. It's still in that one, powerful word: Action.

Hope for the future?

Brikesh hopes that Greenpeace will bring on board as many people as possible.

Brikesh, you were one of the activists who scaled the roof of the British parliament in 2009, unfurling a banner that asked British politicians to 'Change the Politics, Save the Climate'. What was it like up there?

It was absolutely outstanding. The action happened around the same time that the anniversary of the protest at the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station was approaching. We scaled the roof of the British Parliament. For me that was a life-changing experience. It was also a very big story for India. It was sending out a very bold statement - there's an Indian on the roof of the British Parliament! I was taking action in the UK, but I was also getting involved in actions in my own country, telling my own government that we need to cut down coal.

In 2007, you climbed a coal-fired power plant in India and painted 'Smoking Kills' on the chimney. Climate change issues are close to your heart, aren't they?

Yes. I would love to see India become an example for the rest of the world when it comes to implementing decentralised renewable energy. I want the Energy [R]evolution to start from India. We are located in a place with a lot of sunlight. We're a developing country; we need the energy. We know we don't have much coal. I want our politicians to take notice – and Greenpeace can play an important role in making them take notice. Right now, the dominant thinking is that when it comes to development, there are a certain parameters set in stone for developing countries. We don't have to follow these parameters! In fact, if we do, everyone is going down the drain. There's an alternative. We have to learn from the mistakes that have been committed by many western countries – and really re-think the way we produce and consume energy. Change has to start somewhere. Why not in India?

In September 2011, Greenpeace India will celebrate its 10th birthday. What does it mean for you to have Greenpeace in India?

India has a history of civil disobedience that goes back to Mahatma Gandhi. In a land that gave birth to civil disobedience and non-violent direct action, it's fantastic to have an organisation that works on these basic principles. Greenpeace is working in India – and that means a lot. It provides a lot of people out there with a chance to act on things they are not happy about. Greenpeace is there for these people. It provides an opportunity to everyone, depending on how much you want to push the envelope. It's there for someone who just wants to click on a petition, someone who wants to pick up the phone and call up the ministry, someone who wants to send a fax, and also for someone who's prepared to take non-violent direct action and face arrest in order to achieve a good result for the planet! People get inspired by the kind of work Greenpeace does in India.

You worked as a fundraiser for many years, then as a public engagement officer for the climate campaign. Your current job is all about working with volunteers. Why is that so important?

What we're trying to achieve is a bit difficult to achieve all by ourselves. We need a lot of people to come out and support us. Without citizens participating, it's going to be very difficult. That's the role volunteers play. There are a lot of people out there who want to act every time they see something going wrong. I see Greenpeace as servicing these people, as providing opportunities so they can act on their concerns. The more volunteers we have, the more significant Greenpeace will become. In a country like India, where we have some one billion people, you need people across the country and you need them to participate. Having volunteers on board means the voice is coming from Indians, not from an organisation that was set up in Vancouver, Canada.



40 years after it was founded, what does Greenpeace mean to you today?

To me, Greenpeace means hope. I see a lot of people out there who talk about climate change, about natural disasters, about what's happening and about things getting worse – but there are only a select few who want to do something about it. The majority of people have bought into this tendency. They say, "I alone cannot make that change happen. We are fighting against a very big system. No matter what we want to change, we can't do anything about it." As Greenpeace, we are more than just individuals. To me, the organisation is the opposite of giving up. Greenpeace will not give up. We understand that we're up against something very big and that we won't necessarily see the results in five years, or in ten years, but through the action we take, we make sure that we keep going on. What we're doing is not going to stop. That's for sure. People will join in. This is only going to become bigger and bigger.

And what's your feeling? Are people up for it?

Definitely, yes. To quote Gandhi: "First people ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." I think we are somewhere in the middle. At first, people were ignoring us, but now that's becoming much more difficult. We take inspiring actions and we are very vocal and critical about certain things the larger part of the country is very proud of – mainly because people don't know much about them. The nuclear issue is one example. The rest of the country thinks it's a good idea, because so many people just don't know what risks are involved. Greenpeace as an organisation takes a stance. It polarises people. That's what's important. It makes people think and take notice and some are maybe saying: "That's right, you have a point." What we're doing – no one has done it before. People have just blindly followed. I think Greenpeace as an organisation keeps raising that question mark, every now and then. And slowly but steadily that is breaking down a certain sheep mentality and brings more and more people into the fold, who start questioning. After that, it's up to them whether they want to join us or not. What's clear, at this point is: You can love us. And you can hate us. But you can definitely not ignore us.

You dropped out of college for Greenpeace. How has the organisation changed your life?

It made me change the way I think. If it wasn't for Greenpeace I wouldn't be on top of the issues I am campaigning about, the things I'm inspiring people about. I would have ended, I don't know, as a salesperson, somewhere, or an accountant. Joining Greenpeace has polished me a lot. It has given me the larger picture. It made me understand development. It helped me to read between the lines. I was looking at developments as flyovers, dams, roads, buildings. But that was nine years ago. Now, I look at it completely differently. Personally, professional, as an individual, Greenpeace has given a lot to me. Right now, I can't imagine myself working for any other organisation than Greenpeace, or for any other cause.

For more information contact:
enquiries@greenpeace.org

Greenpeace International

Ottho Heldringstraat 5
 1066 AZ Amsterdam
 The Netherlands
 Tel: +31 20 7182000

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