

# Dr. Kiran Bedi

India's highest ranking Woman Law Enforcement Officer  
Founder of India Vision Foundation running women's empowerment  
programs, drug rehab and Gali Schools for children in slum re-settlements

*"The only thing that can change this country is a woman; A woman with power, who doesn't become like the men."*



My belief, my practice, my internal spirituality is that if I take up a task, I do it fully, and then I burn all the bridges around it because that must survive. My focus is entirely on that. When I say burn the bridges around it- I mean for me that's the focus, that's what gets my attention, I have no temptation beyond it. What happens next I do not know, but this must get its due.

*If you want to break barriers, make girls play with boys and sensitize boys to play with girls. It begins with co-ed education, not to fall in love, but to compete with each other on equal terms.*

*I never let any push down happen. If someone dared push me down, I held them by the scruff- who are you to tell me this? Let's compete and see who wins. It wasn't overconfidence- but tremendous self-confidence of who I am, what I want to be, and what I want to do with my life.*

# Dr. Kiran Bedi

India's highest ranking Woman Law Enforcement Officer  
Raman Magasaysay Award Winner for Reform  
of the largest Maximum Security Prison in Asia  
United Nations Civilian Police Advisor at the time of Iraq.

***Terrorists also understand the way we fight- Why we fight- Our intentions.***

- **America could still pay for its security. How does the rest of the world pay? How do the developing countries pay? And all of us are paying for it, because all of us are sinking in the cost of security which has gone up.**
- **It's such a Frankenstein monster- Monsters- how do you bring them back into the bottle? I think that's one act of history which would never ever be forgiven, when our children sit down and analyze history.**
- **When I was visiting American prisons, I looked around for mission statements outside the buildings. Not a single one said: 'We're here to reform.' All said: 'Heightened security.' Nowhere was the word: 'Reform.'**
- **When you have fear, then you only heighten the need for greater security. And every time you end up spending higher and higher on security, whether it's electronic or physical or architectural security, with the result that by the time he comes out, he's coming out of a cage- and his animal instincts are heightened, and he's a bigger threat to society.**

# Kiran Bedi

India's police force is not Sikh, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Regardless of all else, Indian police is one of the finestly secular police forces. One of the biggest strengths of this country is its services, even if its bureaucratic, even if its red tapist, even if it's conservative, and even though its politically inclined- when it comes to national integrity, national security, it stands together.



- If security is good quality, terrorism becomes more difficult. But if security has gaps and vacuums, then terrorism thrives- will make its inroads, and achieve its limited goals. When I was posted in the state of Mizoram to counter terrorism, they ended up signing a peace agreement with the government, because we had an edge over them, not by killing them, but by gradually integrating them. Humanizing them, but also having the edge of fire-power. We employed a Multi-Economic strategy, in which policing played a role, even though that was not my role as a Police officer. But say, if you don't have a road, if you don't have work, if you don't have schools, if you don't have economic development- what will my security do?

Politics has become above the law. "WRONG PROTECTION! WRONG PROMOTION! WRONG POSTING!" is at the root of problems in the Indian Police Force.

Political use, political abuse, and corruption is a very dangerous combination. Courage, neutrality, and integrity: These three things have brought in those islands of changes wherever you've see them. It was not because of neutral sustained political leadership. Never! Because we never had it

Indian media doesn't spare. That's what is sustaining this Indian Democracy. That's why Indian democracy is today alive. Absolutely, it's a vibrant democracy. And it's becoming a very questioning democracy. But it just needs to be questioning more. The challenge to this democracy is rising by the day.

# Self Help Groups

## Navjyoti/India Foundation

### Women taking ownership of their lives and their futures



- *It is the women who realize that yes, it is their problem. The men don't care. It is the women who have to bear the brunt of fetching water from seven kilometers down the street. So it is easy to motivate and mobilize women. And once they felt they had ownership of the project, there was no looking back. --Chandni*

*Only a woman knows the pain of another. When mine drinks a little bit, and I have a problem for ten minutes, then those whose men drink a lot, what must happen to them? I want that from my village, liquor and all intoxicating substances should go away. Everyone should spend their days with each other in affection and happiness. There should be good savings. And there should be no torture on women. And we don't have to spread our hands in front of men. --Gyanvati Ji, President of Self Help Federation*



Chandni, Dr. Bedi (founder of India Vision,) Author and volunteers

# Self Help Groups

## Navjyoti/India Vision Foundation

*If we do Purdah, we open our eyes also, No?  
Nobody can see from outside whether eye is open  
or not? We square our eyes and talk Madam!  
That's why we keep Purdah, so he doesn't know  
whether she's meeting his eyes or not!*



Anita Raghav, Babita, Chhamlesh , Asha, Krishna  
Devi, Mukesh Kumari, Gyanvati ji, Aanchal

*Our Self Esteem has risen! It's  
risen a lot! Most important of all  
we have learnt to talk after  
coming out, because we are all  
suppressed daughter-in-laws.  
And we have learnt to do our  
savings in the village. Not to be  
dependent on anyone. Before  
when a girl was born, all family  
members used to cry!*

- *My group in my village started almost 2 years ago. Now through the medium of these groups, I am doing environmental work in my village, and have got some roads fixed. And I have helped make 10 to 11 more groups.*

# Mrs. Meena Baldev

Social Worker at Family Counseling Center outside Delhi

## Grappling with the new face of HIV/AIDS

I think if Government pays attention to FCC's and supports them, so many problems that are coming on the women can be improved.

- I do FCC because, for very small reasons, families that are breaking apart today, I don't want them to break. There is dowry law and women have got many rights- but they don't know how to use them.
- If people just get tested- and know at the time of HIV- then we can be saved. So stop it at HIV. Don't let it turn into AIDS. But it is the misfortune of our country, that we only know when it turns into AIDS.
- *When both have HIV, the woman is kept till the man is alive, for his service. The day the husband dies, she's turned out along with the kids.*
- *Where before we used to get 1 case in a month, now 3 or 4 people come in a month, and for that through your medium I would like to ask the Govt. to open Rehabilitation centers for these women thrown out on the streets.*
- *Along with other NGO's we did a walking journey from Jaipur to President's house in New Delhi, and then arranged for free medicines in Haryana. Now many places have free medicine. Govt. is giving it.*

**Anjali Gopalan**  
**Founder, Naz Foundation**

Providing a space for discussions on topics like sex, sexuality and sexual health, and enabling persons affected by HIV/AIDS to gain access to health care services.

Project Goal: Empowerment of Girls through sports

***I think we need to experiment more in what we can do to work with young woman, because that may be the only thing that would protect them finally.***



- *One thing that has been bothering me for years is no matter how much prevention work we do, young women are getting on being infected. And empowerment is easier said than done. So we said let's look at developing leadership through sports. Our pilot project was very successful. So, I think there's hope. But we really need to get our act together in this country.*
- *By 7th 8th standard most boys have seen a blue film. That's quite something. In rural areas it is quite common. Yet we don't want to talk openly about these issues, because somewhere we are scared that we will corrupt our moral values! Whether we like it or not, we are one of the most sexually active cultures in this world.*
- *There's absolutely nothing for these children who are orphaned and infected. They are out on the streets and this is what really riles me- most donors don't want to look at care for children. And we're expecting people who are already overburdened- who are dealing with poverty themselves- to take care of children who have a terminal disease! What are we thinking?*

Once you create the space for people to talk about sexual issues- people don't stop talking! Everyone wants information. So its key for us to create those spaces, I think. Because that's the first step towards combating HIV.

# Anjali Gopalan

Clearly, in this country male homosexuality has been accepted always, I think. It's only when it becomes an issue of rights, that it gets people riled up. Long as it doesn't rock the boat, no one cares. Its only when you talk about it in the framework of rights does it become an issue.



- I remember going to schools to let us come in and talk about sexuality with young kids. We had a hard time. Today the same schools contact us.
- Young people can not come 'Out', because for one, we have the anti-sodomy law- Section 377, which we have challenged in the courts. Basically, it means that having sex for anything other than procreation, can be prosecuted. You know we do a lot of work with parents of young gay people-and their final question's always: It's still illegal, no?
- The National AIDS Control Organization is finally responding, and even funding programs for men having sex with men. So they actually took a fairly pro- stand. The first time Govt. has done that. NACO's director Sujatha Rao is an incredible woman. For one, the corruption in NACO stopped after she came. At least she is a very honest woman, which is rare in bureaucracy now.
- This has to do with the position of women in this country. Its not uncommon for parents who know that their sons are gay to say- get boy married, he'll be fine. And the levels of violence against women in this context who are married- not all- but we've come across quite a few cases now- is extremely high.
- Women are facing the brunt of the epidemic. Because again look at it in the larger context of male female relationships in this country. The poor woman who 9 out of ten cases gets infected by her husband and is taking care of him, then gets kicked out once he dies.

Its just incredible how disrespectful we are to women, to children, to servants... Only when I actually went and lived abroad I learnt what it was to respect. I learnt what language can do to people and that's when I realized that this is something we have to teach our young people.



## Leila Seth

### First Woman High Court and State Supreme Court Justice of India

Day before I was sworn in, there was a lot of talk amongst the judges, as to whom I should sit with- because normally a new judge sits with a senior judge, and normally I should have sat with the Chief Justice, but the Chief Justice was like: Oh Baba! I have to sit with a woman!



*You can imagine what kind of courtroom tension there was, two women arguing a case on the subject of rape! And when I won it- I suddenly felt- why, I am as good as her- why can't I say all these things? I had prepared but the confidence to say them, I learnt during that argument which went on for two days.*

- *When Mr. Choudhary saw me he said: Young lady!- and obviously he would have known why I was there- but he said: young lady, what do you want?*
- *I said: I want to join your chambers.*
- *He said: You know, I think this is not a profession for young women, women should get married.*
- *So I said: Mr. Choudhary, I am married.*
- *Then he said to me: Well if you're married, you should have a child. That's very important.*
- *So, I said: Well, I have a child.*
- *So, he looked at me and said: You know if you have a child, it's not fair to have a single child. You should have at least 2 children.*
- *So I said: I have 2 children.*
- *So then he said: You are a persistent young woman. Come and join my chambers. You'll do well at the law. So I joined his chambers and we went on from there.*

# Justice Leila Seth

If a society doesn't have moral standards and high ethical standards, then you are bound to get lower standards in politics, in bureaucracy, in the judiciary. It's bound to affect every limb of society.



Today even though our constitution says that we should have a Uniform Civil Code, political vibrations are such that they don't do it. We need to have a uniform Civil Code- figure out what is best for women, what is best for others.

30 or 40 yrs ago, we had one corrupt judge in the whole of the district court system, but today you can't say that. And a corrupt judge in the high court or the Supreme Court would be unheard of, but you can't say that today. But the whole thing is where do you get judges from? They are lawyers- members of society.

- When I was younger I did think the death penalty had some detrimental effect. As I have grown older, I definitely don't think so. There should be no death penalty.
- Making a law for the minority is always difficult unless the minority wants it. And the minority always feels that our religion is in danger. The Indian Muslim Law discriminates against Muslim women. And in the Christian law a woman if she wanted to divorce- had to prove Adultery plus sodomy or adultery plus cruelty, whereas the man could get a divorce based on adultery alone. Now this was totally discriminatory, and we've been agitating against this for years. I was in the law commission after I retired - there also I had made all these recommendations. And I think about 4, 5 years ago, the Christians then moved towards it and its been changed. So, you see, until the community itself demands it, despite all the efforts that the law commission might make or the general public might make. it doesn't work out.

# Justice Leila Seth

I think people are realizing that you can't have an imbalanced world. From dowry system you will go to a bride price system. One woman and there'll be 10 men waiting for her.



- *Feticide is absolutely shocking! There's no question about it. Totally, totally wrong! Now we have a law. It's often breached, because people want boys instead of girls. Rather have two sons and no daughter! But what is surprising is that it's the affluent who are involved! I would have thought it's maybe the poor, because they're worried about the dowry system- and one of the things you know when I moved for reform into the law commission - the women getting a part of the joint property, and the law has been passed. What I had hoped for was that it would kill the dowry system, and it would make women equal and I had hoped that many of these ills would die out. But its not happened yet!*

*I say to the father- give her a chance, to the mother, change your tradition, and let her flow and let her go out into the sunlight and dance. And I hope it will be.*

**Ranjana Kumari**

**Founder, Center for Social Research**

**President, Women's Power Connect- Body of National Women's Organizations**

So many horrendous stories, to the extent you think whether this society is worth living for or not, what is happening to us all. Of course, on the other- brighter side there are loads of organizations working against Feticide, to stop it. It's not that nobody is bothered.



- It is the way society imparts values and trains you, you know? You tell your brother not to bring the water for the sister, but the sister must bring the water for the brother. So the mindset! The woman's body becomes impure after menstruation, and boy's body remains pure all his life! You know, it is inferiority that is inculcated in the minds of men and women differently.

- 498 is a provision of the dowry law- any mental or physical cruelty against a woman within seven years of marriage- now extended to whole life- in relation to dowry, she can always complain. It's a very effective law to the extent that now male groups are writing to say: we are here to save the Indian family, and- so we say to them- why don't you say No to dowry! You see every morning my secretary deletes about 50 to 60 mails which are direct abuses hurled on us, who are campaigning for girls to use 498- Eradication of dowry. So we do have a very strong law. I'm giving you this example, because the men are crying 'foul' now.

Gender is a different kind of concept than a sexist concept, and in Indian women's movement, we are totally different in our perspective from the Western women's movement.

# Ranjana Kumari

I think it's important to understand that rape is an attempt at assaulting a woman's being- her body, her soul, her everything. You are not just attacking her vagina, you are attacking at her being. It's a power relation which leads men to attack a woman's body and rape her.



- It's a civil law, so it really provides compensation to the woman- and you don't have to go to the police which is very insensitive in this country. And in spite of our 10 years of gender training police, we can't claim that they have become sensitive! So you can go to the magistrate directly, and the magistrate has to deliver judgment within 60 days for any kind of abuse: physical, mental, sexual or economic.
- When the water is above their nose, and they start drowning, then the girls come out. So, in this law we saw to the possibility that on behalf of the girl, complaint can come from a relative, neighbor, an organization, anybody- who has seen her abused by her family and husband- can complain on her behalf.
- Girls must be sexually educated, because in India the biggest issue at the moment is that women have no possibility of negotiating a sexual relationship in marriage. It's taken for granted that she has to present herself to the man. Whether she's satisfied sexually or not, whether husband has gone through whatever relationships and is giving her illness and diseases, whether there's emotional bonding or not- I mean all kinds of issues- or whether there's rape in marriage! They can't just do away with it and say- Oh! how can you say, rape in marriage? People are not accepting it because of the fact they think that women's bodies should be made available to men when and as they desire to, which is rubbish!

These learning places should be changed. You know men and women relations can be changed when you change the way they are being brought up.

# Professor Zoya Hasan Minorities Commission of India

*The issues close to my heart really don't have to do with women or minorities for that matter. The issue close to my heart is equity.*



- We see American academics writing about India, and they seem to argue that the Indian state has done reasonably well vis a vis these minorities and have these elaborate affirmative action programs, state interventions, quotas and so on. And that gives the impression that indeed we have one of the best world's regimes of affirmative action, which of course we do, but it is a regime pertaining only to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and now 'Other Backward Classes', and it excludes from its purview religious and linguistic minorities.

On the contrary, the Indian constitution prohibits any kind of preferential or special treatment on the ground of religion which is seen to be going against the secular basis of the constitution. So there's a very interesting relationship in India between secularism and affirmative action.

- It is very important to be clear that in India minorities refer to linguistic and religious minorities and there are really no affirmative action programs, or any preferential or special treatment of religious minorities.

# Professor Zoya Hasan

**Affirmative action in the Indian context need not and should not, as indeed in other countries, always mean quotas.**



*Affirmative action can take the form of special dispensation, treatment, targeted programs, policies- it can take the form of very focused state intervention through the introduction of policies for economic and social development. It can take the form of let's say, providing scholarships to Muslim girls, for example, or to Muslim children to go to school, or making a special effort to set up schools in areas where minorities have a high concentration of population.*

*It can take the form of giving credit on softer conditions, let us say, because it is well known that large numbers of Muslims are in self employment. They are discriminated against in organized private employment sector as well as in public employment. So it must be one of the largest self employed groups anywhere. Given this characteristic of the Muslim population in India, you can certainly provide them support, atleast here.*

*Interestingly, in the new India that is emerging, there is a greater celebration of religion than ever in the past, partly because people have more money, and people are flaunting religiosity- religious festivals.*

Most surveys in India seem to suggest that among the young today, there's greater increase in religiosity and religious beliefs. Among the young- people who are in their twenties-Yes!

# Professor Zoya Hasan

## Member, Minorities Commission of India

The Muslim woman are worse off in some ways. They suffer from all the disadvantages of being a member of a minority and they also suffer from the disadvantage of not enjoying equal rights with men, that their counterparts in let's say the Hindu community to some extent would.



- Now after 9/11 and all that, everywhere Muslims are being discriminated- so it becomes even more difficult in my view to introduce Uniform Civil Code, because now you have to provide people with a sense of fair play, fair treatment, fair justice, then perhaps you can bring this issue in.
- I think what the United States has done to Iraq, the invasion of Iraq ranks among the most outrageous, disastrous decisions that a govt. could have taken any time in History. And after this completely unjustified, unethical, immoral invasion of Iraq, if the United States could have at-least in the aftermath been able to bring peace to Iraq, bring stability to Iraq, then okay, we'd say, they've made up for it. But they've actually worsened the situation. So there's no peace there, no stability there - a place which had no history of terrorism is now obviously a breeding ground .

The Sachchar committee in its report, submitted to the Prime Minister has provided considerable systematic evidence to indicate that Muslims are deprived and disadvantaged in many respects. More importantly the report has also been able to show that in some senses the government and the state is responsible for this- and that Muslims are under-represented in govt. There is an institutional deficit every which way you look at it. On most socio-economic indicators, their condition is not much better than that of Scheduled Castes today. In fact, in some respects, they are even worse off.



# Munazzah

## A young Muslim Urbanite and Social Advocate

I see a lot of change- difference in outlook- after education that you get. Maybe a Muslim family who is not educated will follow things rigidly without understanding it, while I believe that you should first understand the thing and then follow it. Things are more rigid in Muslim families because people who are propagating things are only giving you one part of it.

- Maybe because my thinking is of sociological background, or maybe it's my assumption, but what I have observed after Godhara incident is that there happened a small breakage which was very strong! Maybe if you know the strong link that people had between Hindus and Muslims earlier in Old Delhi- it was very good. They were like brothers and sisters. I knew Hindus who didn't know Hindi at all but knew how to read and write Urdu, which is rare, and they'd be so good to you that you'd never feel the difference. Now they're a little reluctant. The old people are fine enough. But the young generation has something in their mind which will not come on their face, won't come into their actions, but there is something that will make you feel- why not that much warmth? It is both sided.

- After 15 minutes of talking, people will come up with questions like- Oh! you're a Muslim? And I'm like- Why? Why is that? Or you don't look like- Why? Am I supposed to have horns or come in a Burka- so they're like No! your entire wardrobe, your entire style- it just doesn't seem that you're a Muslim!
- It hurts obviously. I will not lie that it doesn't. It hurts. But unfortunately there's a little bit of truth that the Muslim community is not that educated. But the problem is more in Old Delhi. However, if you move to Jamia University area, which is again a thickly minority populated area, but there the Muslim education level is pretty high- maybe because of the fact that the university is close by, and if one gets into the stream then they continue to do that.
- Sometimes, I say my Namaaz in the temple at work, because I have nothing in mind that I'm in a Hindu temple. I am in a place of worship. It's a clean place. It's pious.
- As far as the Civil Law is concerned, I want to read about it, before I say yes or no. I want to know what Islam says before commenting on anything. I have heard. I don't want to believe it. I want to see things for myself