

Aussie filmmaker's film on Kiran Bedi makes it to TIFF

Renu Mehta

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New Delhi, September 19: There was enough of [India](#) in Toronto last week — from the slums of [Mumbai](#) and the sets of Kaun Banega Crorepati? flickering on Danny Boyle's Slumdog Millionaire to the razzmatazz of Punjab in Singh is Kinng. And then there was Kiran Bedi — in Australian filmmaker Megan Doneman's compelling feature-length documentary, tongue-in-cheekily titled Yes Madam, Sir. The story of the first woman IPS officer, narrated by Academy Award-winning Helen Mirren, was screened as part of the Toronto International Film Festival's Real to Reel section that showcased 20 of the finest non-fiction films of 2008.

Doneman first read about Bedi when she was just 13 in a newspaper article her mother brought home from India. "The story was headlined 'Kiran Bedi: India's First Woman Police Officer Doing it her Way!' Even as a young girl, I knew how significant and bold that was," says Doneman, who next spotted her on television. She watched in disbelief the programme on Bedi introducing Vipassana meditation in Tihar Jail. "About 1,000 prisoners practised Vipassana in complete silence for 10 days and emerged from the experience weeping in the arms of the stoic prison guards, repenting their criminal behaviour. It was unbelievable," reminisces Doneman.

Nine years ago, Doneman began e-mailing Bedi, hoping that she might agree to let her do a film. "Bedi is one of these fascinating people. What motivates her to live her life the way she does? What drives her to continually oppose the status quo in the face of huge adversity and personal consequence? I had to know," says Doneman. Even as she pursued Bedi over the years, Doneman, a graduate of business communications and film at the University of Technology, Sydney, worked as assistant editor in Mission: Impossible 2 and The Lord of the Rings trilogy's The Two Towers and The Return of the King. But Yes Madam, Sir was to be her directorial debut. Doneman is not surprised by that. What she wondered, instead, was why did Bedi decide to go with an "unknown girl from Australia after turning down offers from esteemed filmmakers for 15 years". Finally, when Bedi invited her to fly to India, Doneman put the question to the top cop. "She replied, 'Because I am going to enjoy watching you struggle and fight to somehow pull this off.' I guess she had done that all her life," smiles Doneman, who watched Bedi at home and...

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