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Yes Madam, Sir: Kiran Bedi's Incredible Story

by Preeti Thandi

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Challenges don't inhibit her, she re-invents them. From an instinctive winner and a top-notch police officer to an instrument of social change, Kiran Bedi revolutionized any hurdles that came her way.



Yes Madam, Sir a riveting documentary on her life by Megan Doneman doesn't present Bedi, simply in her moments of glory. Rather it delves deeper to unearth what went into making Kiran the landmark she is today. This is where her family's pivotal role comes in. Doneman's documentary not only takes a peek but also exposes the emotional and vulnerable side to Bedi which has never been done before.

Shot over a span of six years Yes Madam, Sir which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival 2008 follows Bedi's career from the time she joined the police forces in 1972 to her voluntary retirement in 2007. Narrated by Academy Award winning actor, Helen Mirren, the documentary is absolutely captivating. Utilizing archives and footage Doneman creates a feature like feel to the story of this incredible woman.

She is always making headlines but this time around Bedi is happier because her parents share the limelight. The strong bond with her parents is clearly evident as she shares a proud moment, plays tennis or voices her concerns. Bedi's father, Prakash Peshawaria wanted his four daughters to receive a good education even if it meant going against the norms of the time. Kiran became the star who outshone all her father's expectations. First she became an Asian tennis champion and then created a stir when she became the first woman ever to join the Indian Police forces in 1972. The spotlight followed her all throughout her illustrious tenure even when she was in the midst of a controversy. Allegations were thrown at her but she smashed each obstacle just like she hit her tennis shots.

Bedi got her way if she thought she was right. From towing away Indira Gandhi's illegally parked car to reforming Tihar Jail to transforming a police training centre into a model academy. "I seek justice and give justice," she states determinedly in the documentary. Bedi reformed Tihar Jail, India's largest prison which was "a human warehouse" to a platform of social enlightenment. Prisoners practiced 'vipassana', an ancient meditation technique. For her revolutionary contributions Bedi was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award (equivalent for Asia's Nobel Peace Prize) for Government Service in 1994. Bedi also served as the Police Advisor to the UN Secretary General for Peace Keeping Operations.

Her critics however, wrote off her actions and accomplishments as "populist measures" and accused her of an "obsessive hunger for publicity." She had it rough but emerged un-fazed.

Bedi states that life changes dramatically for a woman who chooses to become a mother in her mid-thirties. Yet it didn't change dramatically for her because she had the support of her parents especially her mom, Prem Peshawaria. "Fortunately because of my family support system which was so unique," reveals Bedi. "But not for my family support it would have been very tough." Bedi admits, "I would not have been the same. I am a product of my family."

With family support Bedi was able to devote her time and energy towards her social causes. She is the founder of two non-governmental organizations which provide counseling, health care and education. But her personal life suffered. Her husband, Brij Bedi poignantly states that she forgot about him and Bedi is candid enough to admit that in the film. Doneman takes a refined approach in using the unrestricted access she had in filming. The documentary is sure to grab a lot of attention and applause wherever it travels.

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