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'Not followers, we need a generation of leaders'

Sakshi Arora (Expressindia.com)



She's just two years younger to India and has seen the country evolve from a frail child to a young nation. From Chacha Nehru to an inaccessible leadership, Dr Kiran Bedi has seen it all.

Says Kiran Bedi, "Those times were different. Pandit *ji* was *Chacha* Nehru. I was a part of the group that welcomed him in Amritsar. You could touch them. They were more accessible. Today it's become a security-prone society. In these times, if you even try to go near the car of a leader, you are considered a threat, leave alone calling them 'Chacha'."

Dr Kiran Bedi, currently the Director General of Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), began her career as a Lecturer in the Punjab University. But the need for greater challenges and more intensive work drew her to a man's domain. She became the first woman IPS officer in 1972 and has been the face of woman empowerment since.

And she holds strong views about status of women in this country. While she points that today's women have more choices but says at the same time compulsions still exist. She remarks, "Today women are more visible in every field but they are not strongly participating in policy making. They are there in media, Bollywood but when it comes to hard talk, women are not visible. Hard talking women are targets where they are challenging the status quo."

She believes that women are determined and hence they are walking the road by themselves. She reasons, "Women may have large public following, sympathy, admiration but they are walking the road by themselves. Their only support comes from their family."

While the country has got its first woman President in 60 years, Dr Bedi says it's too early to judge Madam President Pratibha Patil. "Let's see how she prioritises. Let's see when it comes to decision-making, what kind of decisions she gives to the country. Time will judge," she adds.

As India turns 60, Dr Bedi calls the nation young and says there's still a long way to go. According to her, "In a democratic India, everybody has a right to vote. It's not limited to classes. And that is exceedingly valuable to my mind."

But to her democracy means much more. "There are still many people who have voted governments to power, but they are not participants in the governance in the true sense. Governance systems are still very closed," she opines.

She goes on to add, "Our education is more employ-maker than nation-builder. It's not giving the right attributes to children and the youth. Nation building comes through deeds and learning things at an early age. But today's education is more focused on employment. It's basically teaching them status quo."

Another issue that still haunts independent India is gender discrimination. Though Dr Bedi says she has never thought of it as an issue, she calls the decision of not being designated Delhi's top cop "blatantly unfair".

“It’s an obvious decision which has gone beyond the domain of performance appraisal. Many other factors have played their role,” remarks Dr Bedi.

A woman who draws her strength from her books, Dr Kiran Bedi is hopeful about the future. She believes plenty can be done to take India to the pinnacle of success.

“As parents, teachers, government officials, corporates, political executives, law enforcers, panchayats, neighbourhoods, professionals, students, we need to start focusing on responsibilities rather than our rights,” suggests Dr Bedi.

Talking about responsibilities, she says, “We need to raise the Patriotic Quotient, what I call the PQ, of the next generation. And PQ will be raised through home and schools incorporating projects that serve the community.”

She suggests encouraging NCC, NSS, Scouts and Girl Guides and developing a system with the police force for more training and more Scouts and Guides.

She also thinks focusing on those who sacrificed their lives for us will be useful. “We need to include the life stories of freedom fighters and Independence struggle in our lives. There should be regular discussions so people take part and the focus should be on those who sacrificed for us. We need to be a grateful nation,” she remarks.

Talking about the challenges ahead of the country, Dr Bedi says, “Along with the PQ, we also need the LQ or the Leadership Quotient.”

She believes in a new generation of leaders and says the nation should work towards it. Dr Bedi comments, “We don’t just need followers, we need leaders - Leaders who would be willing to stand up for what is wrong and participate in the process of leadership.”

She goes on to add, “From a nation of bylookers and followers, we need a generation that is willing to change things through hard work and character. That is the need of the hour and that’s the real challenge of the years ahead.”