A ‘Kiran’ of Hope

Dr. Punit Saini
Associate Professor
M.K.P. (PG) College,
Dehradun

In a grim scenario where violence against women is increasing day by day, where women are subjected to innumerable atrocities like rape, molestation, domestic violence, gender bias and discrimination etc., where the disparities in the sex ratio are acquiring alarming proportions, there is a ‘Kiran’ of hope.

Manna for the famished and parched soul, an icon, a stalwart and a role model for the Indian women – the disadvantaged, the chained and fettered, the marginalized and the voiceless – this is Kiran Bedi!

Born in a joint family of the Peshawaris, where stereotypical roles were assigned to both men and women –

Men for the outdoors, authority and sports and women for the household, tears and scolding; men for higher education and women for primary education only; women as a burden and men as perpetrators of the lineage; women for sacrifice and men for adventure, men as providers and policy-makers and women as acquirers of gold and jewellery, ¹

Kiran was cast in a different mould.

She never let down her parents who had defied societal stigma and denials of the Peshawaria family for providing quality education to their four daughters. With such supportive parents there was no looking back for Kiran. Her grit and determination and her decision making prowess, along with her
dedication towards sports and N.C.C. made her physically and mentally tough and a force to reckon with.

Kiran’s remark, “In the Indian society, a woman starts with a handicap. As and when she overcomes it, it is with her own determination and will. Then men come out to support and encourage her...”\(^2\) aptly represents her situation when she carved a niche in the male bastion by becoming the first woman IPS officer in 1973. She brushed aside all apprehensions of her Seniors regarding her capability and led the Delhi Police Contingent at Rajpath during the Republic Day Parade in 1973.

With her soared the desires and aspirations of half of the country’s population whose endless wait for a paragon was about to end. A new dawn was on the horizon.

Kiran’s progressive vision “My concept of a modern woman is a liberated woman..., such a woman is capable of taking her own decisions and standing by them, and – whether she suffers from them or not – she does not look for a shoulder to weep on”\(^3\) served as a guiding light for her.

Her physical, emotional and mental toughness and fortitude were put to test innumerable times but proved impregnable. The day when she single-handedly confronted the Akali agitators, brandishing naked swords, marching towards Rashtrapati Bhavan with only a baton in hand, she became a symbol of courage.

Whatever role was assigned to her in the Police Department, whether in the form of promotions or to clip her wings, there was no deterrent which could stop Kiran from spreading her sunshine. Her postings to Goa and Mizoram and her stint in the Narcotics Department resuscitated the Police Force of those regions and gave them a more humane face.
The callous attitude of the authorities in Goa when she asked for emergency leave to be with her ailing daughter again tested her perseverance. The Chief Minister even issued a notice proclaiming her as absconding from duty! But when Kiran Bedi made a choice there was no going back. It exemplified her statement that, “Empowered women who reach tough or unconventional positions make choices not sacrifices.”

Her posting as IG (Prisons) at Tihar Jail again tested her mettle. Her belief that “nothing is impossible, no target unachievable – one just has to try harder and harder”, brought out revolutionary changes in the administration of Tihar. She renamed Tihar Jail as “Tihar Ashram” and diligently worked towards making it one. Ironically, when she was again handed over marching orders a pall of gloom shrouded her ‘Karm Bhoomi’ and the inmates gave vent to it by renaming “Tihar Ashram” as “Anaath Ashram”.

Pursued by the hounds of politics and bureaucracy she still managed to do her job perfectly and left an indelible impression on the minds and hearts of every Indian. We swelled with pride when she was bestowed with the Magsaysay Award in 1994, the only police officer to receive a peace award! Her posting as Police Advisor, Dept. of Peace – Keeping operations in the U.N. was another feather in her cap.

As a social activist (she took voluntary retirement from the Police Force in 2007) with her two NGOs, Navjyoti, and Indian Vision Foundation, she did remarkable service to the aggrieved and the distressed. Her dynamism resulted in her endeavor on the small screen, 'Aap ki kachheri, Kiran ke saath' where she brought justice to our doorsteps and tried to sweeten up sour relationships.

As far as women empowerment is concerned, Kiran Bedi opines that “women need more quality education and much more vocational training to become truly empowered.” For her
property ownership or joint ownership is essential for empowerment as then “a man cannot drink away the family’s property or sell it and leave the woman and children on the street.” She further iterates that “the key to change lies in the empowerment of village women – the largest percentage of women in India – but (rues that) change in rural areas is agonizingly slow in coming.” For Bedi, population is another major impediment for women empowerment. Women will not be in an abyss if they become aware and are allowed to say “‘No! I don’t want any more than this.’ When that day arrives, daughters will be seen to be as much of an asset as sons, because educated daughters will be equally capable to take care of parents in their old age as sons.”

Bedi, as a renowned social activist, actively supported the Anna-Hazare-led civil society that launched a movement for the promulgation of strong anti-corruption law, the Jan Lokpal Bill. She was B.J.P’s Chief Ministerial candidate for the Delhi Assembly Election 2015, but it could not materialise. Finally, she rose to the esteemed position of being the Honorable Lt. Governor of Puducherry in 2016. Here also she was at loggerheads with the Chief Minister V.Narayanasamy as she opened the gates of her official residence, Raj Niwas, to the public in order to directly address their grievances. As she was becoming the centre of power, it unnerved many heavy weights of politics not only from the opposition but even within the B.J.P.! Her latest tough stance on two-wheeler riders and pillions wearing helmets enraged the politicians and civilians alike. Consequently, she was removed from her position as Lt. Governor of Puducherry for her ‘interference’ in the day to day functioning of the elected government, in February 2021. But nothing can mow down the indomitable spirit of Bedi who once proclaimed that “Empowered women who reach tough or unconventional positions make CHOICES not sacrifices.” (Face Book Post 22nd July 2011). Her journey continues....
Girls/Women have always been in the eye of the storm. The desire to have a male child is so predominant that for some parents even the thought of having a girl child is unbearable. A Girl is considered burdensome and is associated with dowry, branded as ‘पपपपपपप’. Only a son is considered as one who would carry the name of the family forward and lead his parents to ‘पपपपपपप’. But now there is a ‘Kiran of Hope’. Kiran Bedi has become an iconic figure and a role model for aspiring girls who want to reach out for the stars. Girls are already proving their worth in various fields and are no less as compared to boys. So let your daughters see the light of day, educate them and then undoubtedly these innumerable “Kirans” of hope will illuminate your world.

**Works Cited**

2. Dangwal 349.
4. Dangwal 349.
5. Dangwal 168.