



Leader dares to inspire social change

Freelance writer **JANE MILBURN** meets supercop Kiran Bedi during a study tour to India

There is no room in Dr Kiran Bedi's head for negative thoughts. As an agent of change working with the rural poor in India, Dr Bedi focuses single-mindedly on a positive future and how she can do things better today than yesterday.

"Literally here and now, you need to be a traffic manager in your mind and drive your own self," Dr Bedi told Course 16 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program during a study tour to India earlier this year.

"This is not theory. You need to practise every day – being conscious every moment, here and now, you are literally listening to yourself, observing yourself and monitoring yourself. If a negative thought comes there is no room for it because it gets summounded by the rest of the positive energy that says – there is no place for you, get out. You need to be continually steering yourself. It is a very conscious habit and you nurture it by good reading, good deeds, good environment and doing the right thing," she said.

Breaking new ground and searching for innovative ways around challenges and obstacles has been the story of Dr Bedi's life – from student to tennis champion, senior police officer, prison leader, social justice campaigner, motivator and social change agent.

In her book *I Dared*, Dr Bedi outlines how she resolutely faced obstacles placed by powerful opposing forces and emerged stronger after each ordeal, including her stymied quest to become the first woman commissioner of Delhi Police and her appointment instead as inspector general of prisons at Tihar jail in New Delhi.

From her descriptions of breakfast with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to hugs from Mother Theresa, Dr Bedi tells her story of innovative and reformative policing and is a compelling lesson in positivity and commitment to the greater good.

In approaching any problem, Dr Bedi advises looking over, under and around it. As a reformist police and prison leader,

she applied herself to thinking about crime solutions. This eventually led to the setting up of Navyoti India Foundation, to help the impoverished move towards self-reliance through skills and opportunities.

ARLP course 16 visited Navyoti (meaning, new light) based at Gurgaon, on Sohna Block south of Delhi, to observe its work with women and children in disadvantaged rural communities.

Through the integrated community, women and rural development programs, Navyoti is providing education, skills, mentoring and support to enable and empower.

"This program is the product of an attitude to crime prevention because I started this when I was a serving cop in 1987. It was a solution to a problem, the problem of drug abuse – the problem of children involved in drug peddling, problem of women and drug traffickers, and the problem of police officers and women," Dr Bedi said.

"I had a whole constituency of drug addicts who were committing crimes and here I was, a cop who was charged with preventing crimes. The drug addict is a problem to me because he is an addict. If I catch him and send him to jail for five days, his drug abuse is not gone, he comes back with more friends in prison where he linked up with robbers and thieves. I am only increasing my problem by sending him in there. Something in me thought there must be a better approach."

"Navyoti was born from that – it was a problem-solving approach. You have got to break the cycle of crime – crime, drugs, jail, bail and back to crime. You have to get to the root of the problem."

Dr Bedi's solution was to set up drug abuse centres for men, vocational training centres for women and schools for children to help people deal with crime-related problems. Crime fell by 50 percent.

"I didn't read it in a text book, I had a problem and I

looked for a solution," she said.

"The police station became a healing centre and people started to flock there for treatment. I had a huge number of volunteers I could ask for help because it was a selfless asking. All I did was put up a big barrack and the centre was ready. I was surprised, but all the good deeds and good intentions started to give rewards?"

"After two years, I was to be transferred and people thought I had to institutionalise this work. Navyoti was born in 1988 out of people's demand, not my intention. For five years we operated with no government grant and I would cash in my goodwill cheques. I would tell people, I am doing this for them, what can you do?"

Dr Bedi says the ongoing success of Navyoti requires it to be absolutely transparent, participatory, truly democratic and totally directed to always looking for solutions and not stopping at the problem.

"It is reaching out to the problem, not waiting for the problem to come. Our rule is to start from the field, don't start from the office. Reach out where your instinct takes you," she said.

In a nation where men own the land and still control most of the opportunities, Navyoti supports disadvantaged women and children to be the best that they can be.

Reflecting on her creative and positive approach to life, Dr Bedi says some are born with a positive mental attitude and some acquire it.

"I was born with it and never unlearned it. My approach is to think about how I can do better than yesterday, not how I can defeat people. I have to be a winner for myself and work out how to do it."

Dr Bedi's story has been captured in an award-winning documentary *Yes Madam Sir* by Australian film-maker Megan Doneman <http://www.yesmadamsir.com/>



(Above) Jane Milburn with village women at self-help group meeting



(Left) Dr Kiran Bedi and Keelen Maitman

Kiran Bedi's philosophy of life

Kiran Bedi outlined her convictions on life in one of her books *I Dared*, which is in its second reprint in 2010 after being first-published in 1995. Below is a short extract.

On childhood Values learnt as a child stay on, unless consciously and persistently unlearned.

On life Birth, being by destiny or accidental, should be considered a basis for take-off and not for relaxation or repentance.

On time management Time management and value for time learnt as a child are two of the most valuable assets earned early in life.

On women As long as women continue to be in a position of receiving rather than giving, they shall continue to bear injustice. **On controversy** Decision making in certain situations, is always controversial.

The only way one can avoid this is to take NO decisions and leave the problem as it is. Seniors who do not solve a problem become a part of the problem themselves.

On Leadership Leadership is a trait that entails responsibility, not merely a position. It is a workshop for doing things and getting things done.

Tough times go, but the tough stay on. **On service** Service in government is a service of trust. Anyone not doing all that should be done is liable for prosecution for breach of trust.

On the police One of the strongest safeguards of democracy is a professional and humane police service.

Jane Milburn is being sponsored on ARLP by Rural Press Ltd.