

Kamila Tyabji (Philosophy, Politics and Economics, 1937)

1919-2004

Kamila Tyabji was an Indian lawyer, social reformer and women's rights activist. She was the first woman lawyer to argue a case before the Privy Council.

Kamila Tyabji was born in 1919 in Bombay (now Mumbai), India. She studied at St Xavier's College in Bombay before coming to St Hugh's to read Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1937. She then went on to study for the Bar (passing the Final Bar Examination in 1942), completed the Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) in 1945 and a BLitt in 1959 for a thesis on 'Limited interests in Mohammedan Law'.

She established a practice in London, focusing on insurance issues, before returning to India in 1965-6 to help with relief work during the Bihar famine, working particularly with social activist Jayaprakash Narayan. Through that work she witnessed, and was highly critical of, the deeply inadequate bureaucracy which she concluded to be the result of 'bumbling male planning'¹, and became determined to further the cause of women.

In 1968, she established the Women's India Trust (WIT) in Bombay, a charity providing underprivileged women with training and employment. She also participated in a number of official enquiries and represented India on the UN commission into the status of women, helping to draft its declaration of rights for women.

Kamila Tyabji died on 17 May 2004. In 2014 she was posthumously awarded the KarmaVeer Puraskaar, India's national award for social justice and citizen action, for her lifetime achievements.

Sources

Khan, Naseem, Obituary for Kamila Tyabji, *The Guardian* 15 June 2004

Soutter, Ann, and Mary Clapinson, eds, *St Hugh's College Register 1886-1959* (Oxford: St Hugh's College, 2011)

¹ Naseem Khan, *Guardian* Obituary for Kamila Tyabji, 15 June 2004