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In first, Renu Khator to be president of Houston University

October 17, 2007 18:52 IST

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Renu Khator will break a glass ceiling of sorts - in fact, two -- when she takes over as president of the University of Houston.

While Indian Americans have traditionally done well in the field of education, not too many of them have gone on to head American educational institutions. And to complete the double, women heading major universities are rarities in themselves.

Khator's elevation, which is getting considerable buzz on academic blogs and in area newspapers, is the culmination of a life interestingly lived. The story goes that when she was 18, her mother told her that her marriage had been fixed to a total stranger.

Khator, then living in India with her parents, both lawyers, rebelled -- she believed that marriage would

spell the end of her education.

Unable to withstand parental pressure, she finally got married to Suresh Khator, then a doctoral student at Purdue. While her husband completed his doctorate, Renu completed the master's degree she had set her heart on, with political science as her subject.

The couple then went back to India, planning to settle down and raise a family. Five years later, the Khators returned to the US when Suresh got a job offer from the University of South Florida [[Images](#)], and a former professor invited her to complete her doctorate.

Almost by accident, she joined the university's administration -- and much to her own surprise, climbed rapidly up the ladder. In 2004, then aged 48, she was named provost of the University of South Florida, making her the second most powerful administrator in the university. Interestingly, the then president at the college was another woman, Judy Genshaft; Khator joined her to form the only two-woman team running a major American college.

Khator held down that job for close to four years, during which she helped raise millions for research. During her tenure, South Florida's sponsorship kitty swelled from \$225 million to \$310 million according to published sources -- a jump of 22 per cent.

Her success made her hot property in academic circles. She was head hunted by three top universities. The fourth offer, from Houston U, was the one she ended up taking.

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Renu Khator to be president of Houston Univ

Khator's success in the field of academics -- highly valued by a community known for leading from the front in that aspect -- has made her a celebrity in Indian-American circles. She remains active in the Tampa Bay area's community activists, and habitually visits her parents and siblings in India at least once a year.

Despite being fully integrated into the larger academic community, Khator doesn't hide her Indian light under a bushel -- in fact, she is known to make something of a fetish of wearing saris, rather than the more traditional power gowns, to functions.

She and husband Suresh have two daughters, both studying to be ophthalmologists.

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by zinawar on Oct 18, 2007 12:20 AM

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Why only Christian, Jewish and Hindu Women gets high paying jobs.

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by duthu on Oct 17, 2007 10:41 PM

because the burqa gets in the way of administration..hahahahah..

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by amit jain on Oct 17, 2007 10:47 PM

Muslim girls are as intelligent and hardworking as any other, but they get very few chances. They should convert to Christianity and Hinduism and find and create their own destiny.

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by amit jain on Oct 17, 2007 11:01 PM

Now, its clear why Bijlani, Sharmila Tagore, and many others were forced to convert to Islam? Because it ensured an easy place in paradise for their spouses. If you convert one non Muslim, Allah grants you paradise with no questions asked.

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by amit jain on Oct 17, 2007 10:42 PM

Because muslim sisters cannot get out of Burqa, with cruel fathers, brothers and polygamous husband. I pity the muslim woman.

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by amit jain on Oct 17, 2007 10:44 PM

Its really tough for a young muslim girl, family forces her in Burqa whereas brother is roaming around with open d..i..c..k looking for non muslim girls to satiate his animal desires. This is called equality.

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by zinawar on Oct 17, 2007 10:54 PM

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