



**Kamala Harris – US Vice President**

**October 1964 - present**

**Kamala Harris** has made history as the first female, first black and first Asian-American US vice-president. She was sworn in just before Joe Biden took the oath of office to become the 46th US president on 20 January 2021.

Ms Harris, who is of Indian-Jamaican heritage, initially ran for the Democratic nomination, but Mr Biden won the race and chose Kamala Harris as his running mate, describing her as ‘a fearless fighter for the little guy’.

Prior to taking the oath at the US Capitol, Harris paid tribute to the women who she says came before her, ‘I stand on their shoulders.’



In another first, Kamala Harris was sworn in by the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Maria Sotomayor. Harris and Justice Sotomayor exchanged only a few words as they recited and repeated the vice presidential oath, but their presence together marked perhaps the strongest visual cue of an abrupt change of course as they join a small society of women at the top echelon of the U.S Government.

Born in California, Kamila Devi Harris graduated from Howard University and the University of California, Hastings College of the Law.

She began her career in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, before being recruited to the San Francisco District Attorney's Office and later the City Attorney of San Francisco's office.

In 2003, she was elected district attorney of San Francisco. Harris was elected Attorney General of California in 2010 and re-elected in 2014. She served as the junior United States senator from California from 2017 to 2021. In 2016 Harris won the Senate election to become the second African American woman and the first South Asian American to serve in the United States Senate. As a senator, she advocated for healthcare reform, federal de-scheduling of cannabis, a path to citizenship for



undocumented immigrants, the DREAM Act, a ban on assault weapons, and progressive tax reform.

She gained a national profile for her pointed questioning of Trump administration officials during Senate hearings.

Harris was born on October 20, 1964. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, a biologist whose work on the progesterone receptor gene stimulated advances in breast cancer research, had arrived in the United States from Tamil Nadu in India in 1958 as a 19-year-old graduate student in nutrition and endocrinology at the University of California. Harris' father, Donald J. Harris, is a Stanford University professor emeritus of economics, who arrived in the United States from British Jamaica in 1961 for graduate study at UC Berkeley, receiving a PhD in economics in 1966.

When Harris began kindergarten, she was bused as part of the school's comprehensive desegregation program to Thousand Oaks Elementary School, a public school in a more prosperous neighbourhood which previously had been 95% white, and after the desegregation plan went into effect became 40% Black. Accompanied by her sister, she regularly attended an African American church in Oakland where they sang in the children's choir.



The girls and their mother also frequently visited a nearby African American cultural centre. Their mother introduced them to Hinduism and took them to a nearby Hindu temple, where she occasionally sang.

Harris says she has been strongly influenced by her maternal grandfather P. V. Gopalan, a retired Indian civil servant whose progressive views on democracy and women's rights impressed her.

Her parents divorced when she was seven. Harris has said that when she and her sister visited their father, other children in the neighbourhood were not allowed to play with them because they were black.

When she was twelve, Harris and her sister moved with their mother to Montreal, Quebec. Wanda Kagan, a high school friend of Harris, later revealed in 2020 that Harris was her best friend and described how she confided in Harris that she had been abused by her stepfather. Harris told her mother, who then insisted Kagan come to live with them for the remainder of her final year of high school. Harris recently told her that their friendship, and playing a role in countering Kagan's exploitation, helped form the commitment Harris felt in protecting women and children as a prosecutor.





## Notable quotes:

‘My mother had a saying, Kamala, you may be the first to do many things, but make sure you’re not the last.’

‘If you are fortunate enough to have an opportunity, it is your duty to make sure others have those opportunities as well.’

