



Dr. Vijay Raghavan

Interviewer: Prof. Anjali Monteiro

Camera/Sound: Prof. KP Jayasankar

Date: Circa 2011

Place: TISS, Mumbai

Keywords: Class of 1988-90, Criminology and Corrective Administration, Prayas, juvenile justice, Sheela Barse, Dr. Desai, fieldwork, Koshish, criminal justice system, Nirmala Niketan, Child guidance clinic, Muskaan, campus life, rights based approach

Dr. Vijay Raghavan is Associate Professor and Chairperson, Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work. He has an MA and Ph.D. From TISS. For more details: <http://www.tiss.edu/lefttop/faculty-staff/Academics/>



0:00:00.000

Q: You have been a student here and now you are here as a faculty, talk about your student days and what has made you first come to social work?

VR: I originally wanted to be a doctor, some altruistic motive that many of us have. I couldn't make it. Till 12th I had done science, and then I changed over to the arts. Then my next goal was, I wanted to be in the civil services so I was trying for the UPSC and when I finished my graduation I was planning to move to Delhi and try and go to JNU and do political science and international relations.

0:01:04.918

I just happened to see this advisement in the papers, it said TISS masters in social work. That is the first time I came to know there is a masters in social work, that kind of intrigued me and I decided let me just take a trip to the institute and see what this is all about. I came here I entered the campus and I just decided I want to be here. It was as simple as that. I just dumped that JNU idea and I applied here. I had applied for community organization and development practices, in those days it was URCD (urban and rural community development) and second preference criminology and social administration. I got the second preference.

0:02:03.598

That is how it all started. Basically I did not know anything about social work, I hadn't done anything at the college level in terms of NSS and all that. even in the interview they asked me if you are interested in social work how can you have never done anything in the field and that was it. then in the whole of first year I was not feeling great about the fact that I didn't get my first preference. I had a lot of friends who were in the other specializations and I used to constantly keep feeling that I didn't

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



get what I wanted. Everything changed for me once I entered the second year.

0:02:49.238

We were to decide our field work choices and one of my seniors told me that in the second year please make sure that you put your choice as prison then you will be supervised by Sanobar and she was the one of the faculty in the institute, everybody liked her and sought after. She had taught me group work in the first year already I used to like the way she used to teach. So that's how the decision was made of choosing prison as my field work placement. Once I started going to prison for my field work everything changed for me, I really felt I was in the right place, I really like my field work, enjoyed it.

0:03:45.479

In those days 89 there were hardly any outside organizations that were engaging with criminal justice system, infract Sanobar based on her PhD thesis that was the time when she realized that we need to put social workers in the adult criminal justice. Earlier to that in the criminology department, most of the field work placement were in either children's institutions or women's institutions and beggars' homes. Adult CJS was never part of the canvas. She started placing students in Arthur road, initially in the women's section and then in the male section. I was the fifth batch of the students who had been placed at Arthur road.

0:04:38.079

She also started placing students in police stations, in Deonar police station; in courts it was all absolutely new at that point of time. Nobody had thought that you can put



social workers in these kinds of places. There was something really exciting happening around that time, so that is how we got into doing field work at all these places. somewhere around that time she also asked me if I would be interested in working full time towards the end of my second year and I dint really have very clear ideas in terms of what I wanted to do, so I said ok for a year I will do this. So that is how the whole connection with Prayas fell into place.

0:05:34.998

VR: The first time I went in there was obviously a lot of mixture of feelings, as well as fear and excitement, some amount of apprehension, what kind of people are going to be here? Are they going to accept you? Our field work placement was in the young adults barrack which is boys in the age group of 16- 23. Now new juvenile justice act it is 18-23. Below 18 means they become juveniles. In those days it was 16 and above was adults. Largely young boys and when I went for the first time it was who are you and why have you come here? Sometimes it is good not to know too much.

0:06:44.718

You just start responding on the basis of what people come and talk to you in terms of what they feel needs to be done. Someone would come up and say, I have been arrested and my family does not know because they picked my up from the road. My immediate response was giving my address I will go and find out. This is how the whole thing.... I was the second or the third batch of students who was placed in the male section. I remember Sanobar saying, when the first batch of students were placed in 85 in the women's section, at the end of the mid semester review of field work students were saying should we continue this placement because we don't know what can be done. From there to move to a point where it was becoming clear there is



a road and there is a need and there are things that social workers can do.

0:07:49.558

Both field work and in the initial first two years of Prayas' work we really did a lot of crazy things. There is a boy who I met in prison who told me that he used to live on the foot path near Bycullah, his father was an old man who used to earn his living by begging and he was working somewhere as casual labor. He was picked up because there was a fight between two people in that area and according to him he had gone there to separate the people. Somebody hit somebody very hard and there was an assault and a case was registered. So he said I am completely innocent.

0:09:03.278

I got so taken in by the fact that someone who is saying that he is completely innocent and he has been picked up by the police. I said tell me what happened and I took a piece of paper and just wrote down a series of what happened on that particular day and I addressed it to the magistrate saying that I am so and so and I have been arrested. I read it out to him and got him to sign it and gave it to him and said when you are produced before the judge just give it to him.

0:09:37.799

He said they don't allow us to even stand there when we go there. The moment we go there the next date is announced and they take us away because there is a huge pendency of cases. I said I will come with you and I will wait there for you. He went on that date and he sat there along with all the other people sitting there. When his turn came he gave the application and the judge read it. After having read it he said, who gave you this application? So this boy looked at me and said he gave me. SO he



looked at me and said who are you? I said I am a social worker from Tata institute. HE said whatever you have to say come to the witness box. So I got up and went to the witness box.

0:10:32.439

He says what happened? I said sir I work in the prison and this is what this boy is saying, I have only written it down for him it is his story and it is up to you. So he said you have no legal rights to come and do these things. Are you a lawyer? So I said I am not a lawyer I am a social worker. SO this is not your job. You should appoint a lawyer and let the lawyer do these things. He said if you do this again I will hold you in contempt of court. I said I am sorry..HE said now go and sit there. So I went and sat there and he discharged that case. The next order he passed was, case discharged. Somewhere he got the point that this was a wrong arrest.

0:11:21.638

So many funny things. IN court you are not supposed to sit cross legged. I again learnt by hard experience because I was sitting in court cross legged and a policeman kept looking at me and making eyes at me and I didn't know what he was meaning. Then he came up to me and whispered please sit straight because it is dishonor of the court. You are not supposed to sit cross legged. Those were the days when every single new thing was a new thing you are learning. Today people know about it and there are so many people working on these issues, but really those were the times. If you are looking at opening up of the criminal justice system in terms of civil society initiative then of course the credit goes to Shiela Barse who wrote about these issues and they became PILs and the judgments in Justice . Bhagwati and Krishna Iyer.



0:12:26.718

Therefore it was largely journalists or human rights lawyers who were intervening very, in a concerted way. This was the 80's when the under trial was becoming an issue. But, social workers entering the system and trying to activate the system and bring in the human element. the system tends to generalize and through the social worker you have a mechanism to individualize, that you cannot lump everybody in one group and within that there are categories and within that there are individuals and the role of the social worker can be to bring these individual issues and problems to the notice of the authorities and there are enough provisions in the law which can be used to find ways to dis aggregate the categories of people who are caught in the web of the system.

0:13:26.398

It was fun. Everything one did was something new and we would come back and discuss it over cups of tea. The first time somebody got released from prison we didn't have a place. We used to talk to these boys and say bahar nikalne ke baad humko milne aana, kidhar aana toh we used to say Tata Institute mein aana. Actually one day a boy turned up. Then we realised that we need a place because if this number increases we need space where you can actually sit talk, discuss.

0:14:08.039

We went and met Dr Desai and this idea came up that there is a closed room in Worli which used to be the Worli community centre where bus loads of students used to go for fieldwork, that was closed so she said you can take that place. We went there and it was dusty and in a mess and all the files of the old Worli community centre and



people around that area knew TISS. TISS had really done good work. People remembered Mrs. Gujrati who was the team leader of that project. She had retired and after that the project kind of closed down.

0:14:49.679

Converting that into an office... once in a week I used to go and sit there, that was our after care day. Fridays I used to go and sit there. I remember the initial days; nobody would come so I used to doze off. Keep the office open and put my head on the table and go to sleep, but then gradually things moved. SO really very fond memories of those days, both as a student and the initial couple of years.

0:15:24.718

Q: What were some of the issues within the justice system that the social workers began to take up and how was it different from the work earlier within the communities?

VR: What social workers tend to gravitate towards is people in some kind of distress or people who need immediate relief or people who are vulnerable and marginalized. So one found that in prison, prisoners are of a particular type and image of image of prisoners or criminals being portrayed in the media or through main stream literature etc was very different from what one actually found.

0:16:15.679

You almost felt like, they look absolutely normal, there is nothing so called abnormal about these people. Then one started to identify people within that who came from either very poor backgrounds or families being broken families or weak family



support, people who have migrated from other parts of the country in search of employment or someone who is mentally disturbed or in depression. What gradually began to emerge through the work of Prayas is from prisons then the idea was to move to police stations and then to courts and over a period of time what began to come up is that that social workers have a role to play with regard to certain vulnerable sections and these were women, children, senior citizens, psychologically and emotionally disturbed and people with other kind of disabilities.

0:17:14.879

These are categories, if they don't have family support, the system is not able to reach out to these groups and 1- their rights gets completely ignored. In this system the only way to exercise your right is through a lawyer. That is how the system has been created. To represent you and your problems and your issues you have a legal person trained, who has got a status within the system to represent you. Now these categories of people remain either remain denied of this legal representation or it is of a very poor quality because they are not able to afford.

0:17:57.438

That is where the social worker comes in at one level of trying to represent to problems and issues of this group before the system and also to be able to say that these groups require legal representation and something has to be done about it. The other part of where really the social workers role is... the first part is let's say in an Indian context, but if you look at the universal role that social workers can play in the system is with regard to rehabilitation. Because that is a specific role for which we are trained, unfortunately there aren't enough mechanisms or structures in place to be able to absorb this trained person in that system as part of the system to play a very



specific role.

0:18:49.798

The objective of the criminal justice system includes the issue of rehabilitation, but there is no structure in place to implement that objective. so you have the police, you have the prosecution, you have the institutional structure, you have the judiciary and to some extent you have some amount of welfare within that system, but what you require as the fifth or sixth arm of the system is the social worker who can play a very specific role with regard to 1- protection of legal rights or promoting legal rights and the second part is the issue of rehabilitation.

0:19:28.078

What we found was that the social worker by the very fact that he was mobile, 2- he was aware of the legal provisions, 3- he had knowledge and information of the welfare system and the structures and the schemes and programmes. he became an extremely useful person within that system floating around, going from one place to the other, trying to connect parts which otherwise don't seem to meet at all and be able to bring the system together towards the welfare and the rehabilitation of the neglected person within that system. I think that is a role, through the work of Prayas and many other projects of TISS, special cell or off late talks of Koshish, these are all projects that have demonstrated the role that social workers can play within the criminal justice system.

Here 20.25

0:20:30.279

I think the endower of TISS is, as far as this area is concerned, to how does one be



able to make a dent at the policy level through demonstration that this is a service and a structure that is lacking in our country and specially in a country where otherwise you might just get left behind you need this input.

0:20:58.519

Q: Can you talk a little bit about how the idea to start Prays, and the origins of Prayas.

VR: As I has said you know, Sanobar had started placing students in different wings of the criminal justice system. Started with prisons and she extended to placing students to police stations. Started with Deonar and then experimented in courts, so gradually the concept that social workers can have a role in the CJS became more and more clear. How it started, you know it was not that difficult at that point in time.

0:22:03.399

By then Sanobar by herself had done enough experimentation in terms of what could be done and 89 I was graduating and she asked me if I start a full time project will you work in the project. I said ok. I was still nursing ambitions of civil service. So I needed time to prepare, so one year I can give this work and simultaneously I will also study for my exams. So what we did was we wrote down a proposal of how the work can be done and that time the proposal was called social work with under trial prisoners in Mumbai central prison. Long name. The name of Prayas came much later.

0:22:51.239

We sent a proposal to the IG prisons and within a month we got the permissions which was very surprising because we had no clue if or if not it would get permission.



Probably the fact that we were TISS and secondly five years students had been doing field work at Arthur road and there was no untoward incident, so I think they had some faith. TISS and the administration in Maharashtra or even else where there has always been this sense that they will do the things in a systematic professional way, so we got the permission and we started. We dint have any money to start the work and there was another project which the department at that time was doing I think sponsored by the UGC a research project on after care and there was some money left from that, I think four thousand so the decision was you can transfer that money to this project or that money will lapse so that money was transferred to this project and we started with four thousand rupees.

0:24:05.718

Then we went to DR Desai and within a month we got fifty thousand from Mahalakshmi temple trust and another fifty from Tata exports that's how prays started. Initially me and within a month another alumni of TISS from CCA she joined so Laskshmi Singh. Two of us started the work.

0:24:38.159

Q: Coming to the idea of field action, can you talk a little about that?

VR: I think this is probably the most unique contribution of TISS to education and social work education. I think apart from college f social work Nirmala Niketan and TISS there are very few academic social work institutions which have really invested in field action. From what I understand the first few field action projects of the institute were started because field was an absolutely essential part of social work education, students had to go to do field work and there weren't enough agencies where students could be placed.



0:25:42.598

IT was born out of necessity. Child guidance clinic Muskan and the Worli community center, much later. A lot of emphasis on field action as labs for students just like you have labs in physical sciences it was felt that need to have a place where students can go and do field work and it is also a very unique way by which faculty can remain engaged in field work the structure of this field action is such that you pick and choose an area where you are interested as a faculty. The only requirement of starting the field action project is that the faculty concerned should be willing to run the project and should be willing to willing to take responsibility to raise money for running the project.

0:26:38.119

You have full time people. Trained social workers, para professionals, allied professionals but social work intervention becomes a focus. You start work in an area where there is a need to demonstrate the role of social workers and social services. You up scale it to a point where you can feed it into policy. It can either get converted in terms of community based organization where the organization takes over or it feeds into policy in the way Child lines has happened or special cells are now getting accepted by the system.

0:27:18.918

In those years the family courts is an outcome of an experiment started by Professor Apte with the Bombay high court asking to put social workers setting up a reconciliation cell of sorts. What it has done is it has provided a place for faculty to experiment and remain in touch with the field, it has provided opportunities to understanding issues at the grass root level and feed it back to teaching. So many field



action projects have spiraled of research projects which have generated knowledge. It has provided a space for students to go and learn and engage in an environment where they feel... there is a sense of ownership which is different from doing field work in some other agency. It was almost the need of at day at a particular point of time.

0:29:11.239

today unfortunately, I would say we are not finding as many faculty members engaging with field action because 1- the number of organizations have really grown in the field so they don't feel the need and there are enough opportunities to place students across in these kind of organizations.2- there was a very active promotion, almost like a culture which may have seen some shifts in terms of what is considered as more important within social work education. This is one of the issues about which at least those of us who have been part of that culture feel concerned about that many faculty are engaging. One could also see this as there are other forms this whole engagement is panning out in terms of associating with movements or kind of a new form that has now started is our own alumni starting work on their own with some amount of backing and support from faculty.

0:30:34.038

TISS has now started giving fellowships. We already have five fellows who are working in different areas. Two of them working on agrarian crisis in vidharbha and two are working with de notified tribes in Mumbai. One person is working in Bihar with youth. Again this year there are a number of fellowships being offered through the school of social work? Probably even the profile of students has changed; they are much more independent and willing to take some risks where as our generation was in terms of looking up to your teachers and kind of implement their ideas. Those could



be the reasons but field action has really played a very important role and contributed to the growth of the institute.

0:31:39.519

Q: If you look historically the field actions projects in the 30's and 40's and 50's what happened in the 80's?

VR: May be there will be able to talk on this but my understanding will be that initial phases there will be more focus on service delivery. Creating services for vulnerable people in set ups like hospitals schools even in the community with a very welfare approach, but over the years with the changing realities in the country the kind of work the field action projects have tried to demonstrate have also undergone a change. There is much more focus today on basic rights of people and looking at... focusing on policy level changes trying to directly hit at that. Looking at sensitization of systems through trainings and workshops and to some extent making interventions that are socio-legal in nature so that is the kind of shift that I see. If you look at the field action projects that are there today they are more focusing on issues of engaging with larger communities in terms of movements & people centered, mass based or it is more in the area of socio legal struggles. That is how I would look at that.

0:33:38.038

Q: The work of Prayas itself. Prayas has been around for 21 years....

VR: Largely I would put it into two broad areas 1- issue of protection of legal rights of citizens being processed by the criminal justice system 2- issue of reiteration the need for rehabilitation, almost like a right. Currently it is not seen as a right. You have some programmes... this is particularly reaching to custodial populations. There is the issue of who are the people in custody and you find that they are from the same



communities who are otherwise marginalized and living in the open community. You will find large numbers of people in custody whether it is penal custody or protective custody would be dalit, tribals minorities OBCs women in different kinds of violent situations. That is your majority population. You see an overall development paradigm which is playing out in the country and you find a... The process of marginalization happens in layers and the last layer are those who will end up in custody. we are able to see that link. The work through Prayas has shown us this link that at the end of the day what we really need to fight for and work towards is the issue of citizenship rights.

Largely people who have been non-citizenised. They don't have basic documents, they are seen as a floating population and the entire response of the system and civil society towards this group is look to them as law and order problems.

0:36:07.678

Either they are of nuisance value. So beggars, a person on the streets that is one category, the other is people who are seen as threats to law and order. There is the image of the terrorist or the gangster or the habitual thief you know there are these images but the reality of the fact is that there is a process by which somebody becomes a gangster. If you try and understand that process you find that at some level some existing systems have broken down. Either in terms of social protection or in terms of the processes of development taking place in urban India so looks at crime it is inter-related to the issues of urbanization, migration and marginalization. In a rural context the face of crime is a little different. It would be couched in terms of caste and gender violence. Which is again an institutionalized type of exploitation, but in urban areas the kind of crime we come face to face with either through media or movies or reading in books and how we get the insiders view by having worked with these



populations its very different and it is not so difficult. The process of reintegration is not so difficult. It requires a systematic attempt to address the issues which would be true for other marginalized populations.

0:38:01.999

It is not so different. The image of the criminal who is psychologically deranged is not really the pictures that really apply in the Indian situation. We don't have too many of those categories of criminals that you might find in the west or America. The system that they have developed for dealing with crime would not necessarily apply here. Again I am talking about the majority. There might be people who require therapeutic inputs, but largely groups if certain kinds of social services as well as the existing processes of development through inclusive policies.

0:38:59.158

One talks of vocational training or employment generation schemes which are applicable to youth in general. If you look at majority of youth in prison you would see that they fit into these schemes but they would get left out. You talk of this right to vote and people in custody get left out. There is a continuous process of getting left out and at all levels at the civic economic, political and social levels. You are increasing the isolation to such an extent that, then the person has no choice but to resort to their own networks. Then you are reinforcing this thing that these are criminal groups and they can manage. So the systems response group is that they can manage, there is no need to have any special... but the other side of it is you are pushing them into a corner and telling them now there is nothing else so you manage.

0:40:07.279

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



If we are talking of social security for largest groups of informal sector in our country, this group will be at the margins of that in-formalization process.

Q: what would you say has been some of the major contribution of Prayas in its work, because it was a very new kind of initiative? What would you say it has managed to achieve?

VR: if you compare the effort it has been a fairly substantial effort, if you look at in terms of outcome, I am not going into the numbers issue because a lot of people have got help, either in terms of legal aid or vocational training or employment helping them return to their families, counseling etc. One is that kind of direct helps, direct assistance. In terms of contribution to the field 1- I would say is showing the way that there is another way of approaching these issues and problems and it is possible to work with these groups and with results.

0:41:37.279

There have been a number of similar initiatives that have got initiated as a result of Prayas' work. Some of them by our alumni. eg a similar project in Amravti district called Warhad which works on similar issues. another alumni called Surekha Talhari she has started a project in Bhopal called Sudhar. There are a number of initiatives that has come out of this kind of work..2- Keep the issue of rehabilitation alive in a situation where the system is continuously downgrading its priority. 3- a lot of involvement through public interest litigation having actually tried to make some dent in terms of custodial conditions. Looking at the whole issue of how legal aid can reach out to larger numbers of people in a more efficient way and bringing this into social work practice and education is an important area of work.



0:42:57.319

If you look at the work that Prayas has done it has remained within the framework of criminology and criminal justice social work and they are not too many academic institutions within social work which are focusing on this area today. In fact TISS is the only centre of criminology and justice within social work in the country. Most other colleges of social work, criminology has closed down because of the lack of employment of the graduates coming out with this kind of specialization. We have tried to keep it alive through the work of the centre and the field action projects.

These would be at a very broad level some of the highlights of Prayas' contribution.

0:00:00.000

AM: Talk about your student days and life on the campus.

VR: They were the best phase of ones life because for me it was the first time that I had gone into hostel. Hostel life with all its wild and fun sights, we have had our plate full. Sitting till late outside the DH and we also used to do a lot of group studying so different students would specialize in different papers. Fifteen twenty of us sitting and studying together, running out of the campus before 11'o clock because, interesting rule that you cannot go out after eleven but you can come back at any hour. We'd all be rushing out at eleven so that we can go out and party and suddenly at quarter to nine having food in the DH and they'll say come let's go see a movie so 30 of us would go to Basant talkies or this place Natraj or somewhere and see movies.

0:01:35.958

Also, a lot of the ideological kind of growth happened here and it was the environment the culture. The kind of activists and the people form the field coming

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



here to talk on different issues; we really used to get fired. The whole campus life in TISS was a lovely mix of fun and serious kind of engagements. I remember it was around our convocation the demolition of this near by Eden Garden next to panjrapol there was a slum there and it was around the time of the convocation that the slum was being demolished and we were these twenty- twenty five of us fired up, people saying that here we are graduating from TISS social work and this is happening right in front of our eyes how can we jus turn a blind eye to it.

0:02:53.598

We started going there and engaging and having meetings with people and connecting them with Yuva and all kinds of things and some of us said that we should not take our degree in protest and why the institute is not doing anything. Somehow we were convinced by some of our faculty that, take your degree and then you do what you want to do, but don't take this thing of not taking the degree on the day of the convocation day. We really did that good mix of being able to engage at a serious level. I think it was our batch when for the first time the talk of having a job placement cell came up.

0:03:38.199

I remember that many of us within our batch, we strongly opposed that. We said why should we have... we are not here to find jobs, we are here to work and we'll find our causes and it is not difficult to find jobs in our kind of sector. Of course one needs jobs and one needs to live, but we were opposed to it. I think we did this mix of things. So really we still, so many of us at least 15-20 of us twenty years down the line we still are very close. We meet whenever possible. Many of my batch mates have actually gone and started their own organizations. Trupti has been so closely



associated with the special cell, there is Lakshmi who is part of this organization starting with women rag pickers in Pune starting kagaj kaaz parta panchyat.

There are many other who have contributed to setting up of organizations working on various issues. So one has very fond memories of campus and hostel life.

0:05:12.079

Q: now you are coming back here as a faculty member how is it to be on the other side?

VR; yes it is fun, but little bit of mixed feelings also. Basically one had absolutely no intention of coming back here because it was quite busy and active with work of Prayas and then Prof Parasuraman spoke to me and suggested that I should consider. His suggestion was that things that you really want to do at the policy level. Prayas is anyway a project of the institute we can really make a difference here.

0:06:02.118

I used to teach a course for the last almost, since 93 I was teaching a course on social work methods in criminal justice. I used to really enjoy teaching that course. I like being with young people and teaching. So I thought yes why not give it a try, that is how I came here and I have enjoyed it, being here as a teacher and the best thing about teaching here is that it allows you the opportunity to be engaged in the field. You don't suddenly turn into quote unquote an academic who has no connections. Social work and some how the culture in TISS is involvement in field is always expected and not just encouraged.

0:00:00.000

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



VR: Being here as a teacher is this experience of constantly engaging with young people, that really gives you a lot of energy, sometimes exasperating too because sometimes the values that you hold very dear, those values are changing. Which is bound to be. You have to constantly reinvent yourself. You have to remain relevant. Obviously you don't want to be somebody who is seen as an old fogey. How you kind of maintain that balance of holding on to what you think is important and yet being able to reach out in a way that they find it relevant. Ya, I kind of like it.

0:00:51.519

Q: Would you like to reflect on the kind of changes you have seen in social work and also the relation between social work and social science.

VR: Twenty one- twenty two years that I have been associated, one is that there is a definite shift away from service delivery into what is now known as right spaced work where the focus is more on mobilizing people to fight for their rights. While I think that is important and needs to be done in the context in which we are living today, but that does not mean it should be at the cost of reaching out to marginalized groups who I think, it will not be easy to mobilize these people.

0:02:00.079

You have to provide initially some basic services and social workers are increasingly are shying away from that. Social work education also, the slant is moving away, almost to the extent that... this may be my personal opinion that the word welfare itself is seen as something that is passé which I don't think there is need for that. I think depends on how you approach the whole issue. Welfare can also be looked at as a right and it's a question of being able to address needs of different groups and there shouldn't be any hierarchy within social work.

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



0:02:50.998

Because social work was essentially a struggle against hierarchy. Sometimes, I am not making a generalization, even within methods there seems to be a hierarchy. Eg, Working with individuals is no more seen as fashionable, you have to be associated with large movements and move towards those kinds of issues and directions. I don't think that is something very healthy. Secondly I think there has been a definite thrust today in social work academics., in terms of writing and publishing, which I think is very good, but gain if it is at the cost of your engagement in the field then I would not be very happy with that.

I feel that to some extent that is happening. If in the earlier time there were two

0:00:00.000

Earlier there was too less emphasis on writing and publishing, it shouldn't go the other extreme now. It is a little bit of a worry that the younger faculty seem to be more involved and interested in more academic "pursuits" than really being able to engage in the field that I see happening. The kind of students who are now coming into social work that is another issue. Because earlier there were very little opportunities for so called monetarily well paid placements so a lot of people who came in were because they wanted to rebel against something.

0:00:57.918

They were not clear why they were doing social work but they were clear what they dint want to do so social work became some kind of... trying to find answers to their lives, but today a lot of people are coming because they see it as a career and there is



nothing wrong with that except that there is no connecting with a issue or a particular group or a way of working. If the decisions are entirely dictated by the market and there is no sense of where and who and why. That is a matter of concern. It was an alternative profession so that is another thing that does bother me a bit.

0:01:45.558

A lot of students coming to TISS because TISS has now become a brand name and that is the most disconcerting part that the students are not coming because they are interested in social work but they are coming because they want to get admission in TISS. That comes across in the interviews also. That is very unhealthy for us. We have to select from whoever comes and a lot of people openly say this that I came here because of TISS and not because I was interested in this or that so that is again a matter of concern.

0:02:27.839

When it comes to the whole issue of social work social science.

0:00:00.000

Best of my memories and my teachers have also talked about it. What I have been given to understand is that, this originally was set up as an institute for social work education and social science units were brought in to provide additional support services. In the sense that the issues that were emerging from social work that there would be inter disciplinary research around those areas. So almost with every department there was a connected research unit. At some point I think, again this is what I have been told that that connection just broke off and social science unit started



doing their own work which they thought was important.

0:00:49.918

The other thin about the tension has been about that academically social work is weak and we are good in the field, but we don't know how to do research and how to write. I again feel that these are all generalizations on both sides. There are enough social science faculties that engage in the field and there are social work faculties we write very well. I think the whole thing is that if you are able to understand and appreciate our strengths and work on the basis of that without creating these hierarchies, somewhere we have to create a structure within the institute where, both the people who are able to engage well in the field and those who are able to conceptualize and write and there are people who can do both.

0:01:54.439

If you are able to create spaces for all these different types of faculty and staff who are a part of the institute then we will really be able to say that it can work well. Currently what tends to happen is that at the end of the day....

0:00:00.000

Social work education has been able to negotiate with bodies like the UGC that the criteria for selection and promotion within academics in social work cannot be exactly the same as other disciplines. Unless that central issue is addressed we are going to be continuously struggling at this level where these comparisons would be made between social science and social work all the time and I don't think these barriers need be there. It is possible to find the way to bridge the gap.

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

All rights reserved



0:00:50.238

Q: would you like to give TISS a message for its 75 years?

VR: All I can say is that TISS remains relevant to the field and that we don't become very, sometimes I feel that we are a bit too insectos. If we can keep doing what we are doing looking outside the campus, we can remain grounded within the campus, but our faces are outside and as much as we move out we will remain relevant. I think we have essentially very good people here. We have an excellent work culture compared to many other places that one goes.

0:01:38.999

Trying to constantly perfectly ourselves when we know the world is full of imperfection, and then you tend to become an island of excellence which loses touch with reality. So if more and more of us engage outside we will maintain that balance. It's a very nice place to run back to. Every time you go to the field and you do something, you feel frustrated and you enter the campus and you feel OK you know you can collect yourself once again, but you have to make sure you don't remain inside you have to keep going out because when you go out the disturbance that gets created that is kind of very important for you to remain relevant. I think that is the only message. I think I am too small to give a message.