



Mr. Raja Ram

Interviewer: Prof. Anjali Monteiro

Camera/Sound : Prof. KP Jayasankar

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Mr. Rajaram did his Dip. SSA from TISS in 1953, specialising in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations. He has subsequently been a consultant on labour and industrial relations matters to a number of companies.



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Raja Ram: One of my friends joined Madras school of social work and he was like why don't you join this instead of going for a job, so I immediately agreed and I applied to Madras school of Social Work. And the same time I applied for TISS also. Then Dr Matthai, his Mrs., her brother, he was with Tata's and his brother is a close friend of my brother in law.

So he said I will put in word, that there is no problem at all if you want you can join Tata Institute. Immediately I got a letter from Madras School of Social work that I was selected.

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Raja Ram: Then I joined there for 15 days and I got a letter from Tata Institute. I preferred joining Tata Institute. That's how I joined Tata Institute in Bombay.

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Question: When you first came to TISS as a student what was your experience of TISS? What did you think about the place, what were your early student days?

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Raja Ram: Preliminarily it was at Andheri, it was a housing accommodation where we had canteens and this and that. I was feeling very comfortable and my hostel was at Nagpada. My roommate was Brijkishan Kothari. He is a Kashmiri and we were very



good friends. There were other friends Mr Mittal, Mr Pathak, Mr Goyal, Mr Bhagwan Das, Ms Anjali Dasgupta, Ms. Zaveri, we were all very close friends.

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Raja Ram: My studies were all diverse. The only thing I was thinking from start was to do their personnel management side. Later on, I learnt they started anthropology and all. Dr Wadia was there, he was from Mysore University, he was Vice Chancellor. So first year, this anthropology, statistics and all this was there. And I was wondering whether it will be useful to me or not. Then I thought it is alright, I have joined, I will complete. We were told that in the second year we will start personnel management and industrial relations also. Dr Prabhu was taking some of the classes. I don't know other Professors names immediately, it will take some time for me to remember.

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Raja Ram: So from 2nd year I really felt important. 1st year I was not sure what would be the type of job I will get. 2nd year I started feeling important. Industrial law and Personnel management was taught by Dr. Vasudev Murthy. Dr. Prabhu was teaching us psychology. I was enthusiastic for 2nd year. I learnt more on Personnel Management and Industrial Law. My specialization also became Industrial Law and Personnel Management

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Raja Ram: My 2nd year was at Chembur, it was a very friendly atmosphere out there. The boys hostel, ladies hostel, then the canteen, we also had one Anglo Indian lady. They were very courteous, the food was also very suitable for me. The meal was normally rice, chapati and sambhar. I was very happy.

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Question: What was your student life like?

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Raja Ram: The student life was like we all friends used to go to into the city Bombay. I used stay out on Saturdays and Sundays at my father in laws business house which was very close to Zaveri Bazaar. He was into Sari business I used to go and stay about 2 days and the 1st year I got my wife also there who stayed for a month. I took her to TISS also. She was worried whether I like this kind of education.

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Raja Ram: I was like let me see I have joined as it's very difficult to get a seat in TISS. I said I am happy in TISS.

With my friends I used to go out for movies. I was fond of music too. I used to attend concerts. I played badminton in the institute with my friends, as a student the life was very happy, there was no problem at all.

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Raja Ram: Hostel was also comfortable for me. It was like half the size, there were 2 beds and my friends liked me very much. We mixed Marathi, Konkani, Gujarati and had fun. There was no problem of language at all we spoke many languages. It was after I came to Karnataka I learned Kannada as my job required me to learn the language.

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Question: Do you remember your field work?

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Raja Ram: Yes for field work I was placed for about 6 months in one of the hospitals. In there I was undergoing the community development. Social work that is conversing with patients, comforting them, talking to them and understanding how they feel and making them comfortable.

Thereafter, I was also placed under one of the textile mills, Tata textiles. I had a textile background and they preferred me as my father in law had 800/900 looms. He was giving yarns and other things. So it helped to talk to the weavers, understand their problems, give them some advice. So from 2nd year I felt there was some kind of communication work .

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Raja Ram: In Personnel Management since for months I was at Tata mills and months at J.J Hospital in the mills, I learnt the recruitment and appraisal procedure. I was placed



under a personnel manager where I learnt something and also discussed some of my problems like how to talk to workers as I wasn't allowed to talk to them immediately. We were not allowed to talk much as the workers felt we were investigating too much from them. I used to hear and give them comforting words like just to be happy with your work and if you have any issues you can come and talk to me so that I can go and directly talk to your personnel manager and put it across to him. I did some departmental discussions, recruitment, appraisal procedure for 6 months.

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Raja Ram: Once, for a while I was allowed to participate in some discussion whenever there was any kind of misconduct conducted by any worker I used to come for enquiry. After the enquiry was over I used to discuss with them in detail and check up with them. They were not comfortable, reacted much in hostile way and I used to find out the reason they reacted this way.

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Raja Ram: They investigated about absenteeism, whether it is alcoholism, whether they were unhappy in the family, etc. These were things that really interested me in Personnel side. So I took up the job in this kind.

But somehow 1st year did not seem to be that interesting to me. 2nd year it was very useful. I was learning more and more as that would be more useful. I also learnt from my seniors as they too were opting for Personnel Management. Some of my friends got their jobs there itself.



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Question: Since you shifted from Andheri to Chembur what was the place like ? Was it too deserted or how did you all find the shift?

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Raja Ram: Chembur was not deserted because within one or two kilometers there was R.K.Studio, along with my friends I used to go and see Raj Kapoor shooting.

The place where I stayed in campus we used to see Nargis, she used to come for a walk. We always wanted to see whether she will look at us or not. She used to just smile and leave. It never felt deserted. There was a Parsi professor, he stayed in Andheri and I did my thesis under him and Vasudev's guidance.

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Raja Ram: They used to give us community work so all the students gathered there itself. I was participating along with my friends so those days were very comfortable for me. My friends as well I were happy. There were no restrictions for ladies, they were jollier and being a married man they used to be more free to me rather than bachelor boys as I had introduced them to my wife. Some of them did ask us out for lunch and we used to go. One Ms Zaveri, she had asked us out for lunch once or twice and I had gone for lunch at her place.

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Question: How did you feel when you met so many people from different places?

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Raja Ram: We had many people from different parts, from Assam there were 3 candidates, from Burma her name was Tim Tim Su, I remember her as she was very friendly to me. She was from a very Royal family I was told, we had one from Africa and some one from Northern side. Mr Kumar from Andhra, and Mr Ranjan from Coorg, so we were South Indian friends. I was friendly to all of them. As my language was much or little bit similar to North Indians they were very close to me. I was looking like a Sindhi to them. So there was a very happy life here.

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Question: You studied in 1953. What kind of Personnel Management had you studied and what kind of changes have taken place?

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Raja Ram: When I had joined the textile mills I had to forget all that I had learnt. Observe what was going on in the mill. There was no recruitment procedure going on. They just called who was physically fit and just took them if they were suitable and there was no procedural aspect, then there was no systematic maintenance of records like Personnel files, absenteeism, etc. The Director was very much happy that there were 300 workers. I told them we need to maintain a Personnel office and cabinets and for each worker a file was to be maintained.



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Raja Ram: For each worker I had maintained records their background, qualification etc. I used to ask the time office clerk to get their attendance records and whether they maintained any kind of records on misconduct etc. They just had some scribbling papers where all the papers were maintained in one file only so we had to search, so I suggested maintaining individual files which would be maintained in a much more disciplined manner.

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Raja Ram: The Managing Director agreed and right from recruitment to retirement I used to record. So that went on for 3 years. Still I could not educate the workmen as they had old fashioned notions of how to manage their work force. My education taught me in a different manner, talk to them in a friendly and polite manner so that they would be comfortable and they would come forward with their problems.

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Raja Ram: And then I used to give them suggestions. Sometimes the managers and spinning masters didn't get much in details with the people. But somewhere I felt in textile mills I would not have much scope. But I tried, of course I did not get a job somewhere else as textile experience wasn't enough to have systematic and scientific way of recruitment, maintenance of records, appraisals etc.



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Raja Ram: Mr Narayan Rao was a Personnel manager at Binny Textile mills at Bangalore. Mr Dattatraya Kale was a Personnel Manager in Mysore spinning mills which was also called Raja mills. He preferred me as I was a Maharashtrian and my language was almost kind of Gujarati also. So I was recruited as labour officer. There I was given more scope like learning Kannada language within a year. Domestic Inquiry I used to sit with Personnel manager and gradually, I took up this challenge and I used to record in the language understood by the workers.

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Raja Ram: Though I did not know how to write Kannada language my job helped me to learn. So this way I learnt domestic procedures much in detail. When I joined Brakes India, there was a systematic way of handling procedures and handling personnel matters too. I was asked to go and check whether any worker wants to talk to you, then call them to your office and discuss his problems and give them your suggestion. The other part was counseling but some of the management people did not like this as they felt I was getting closer to the workmen.

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Raja Ram: Unionism started there. I said there is no harm having a union as you can discuss with them the labour problems and discuss any other problems. Some said do not get much into all this, the personnel manager himself was handling this and he did not



allow me to get in deep into that. Though he asked me to take the concern of the canteen side of it. The food part, some counseling part of it.

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Question: So do you think what you had learnt in TISS you were able to put into practice?

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Raja Ram: I was not able to use much of it. So I thought of starting my own Personnel Management consultancy firm. Then I studied law in Bangalore. Gradually my friend Ambarish Raja, son of Vasudev Murthy, professor at TISS we started a partnership firm. He took up the recruitment side and I took up the Inquiry side and appeared in courts as I was qualified in law also. This is where Domestic inquiry helped me to some extent. Later on I asked my assistants to conduct the inquiry and I would guide them. Write the reports and based on that I gave them the feedback what type of advice to be given to them. My aim was not to dismiss any workman but give them opportunities and start with warning and then 2nd warning-3rd warning suspend them and follow up whatever there was in standing orders. I was given that aspect of the work also.

Framing the rules and regulations was also what I had to work on. This made me more acquainted to many factories in Bangalore. Factories in Bangalore required framing of Policies.

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Question: So as you know it's going to be 75 yrs for TISS so would you like to say some thing, any feelings about the Institute?

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Raja Ram: With regards to TISS I have a lot of appreciation as my 2nd year was very helpful to me which helped me to become a consultant on personnel matters.

Also framing rules and regulations, mostly negotiations. I was in the counsel of negotiators and had to frame the agreement on wages so these things on the side of personnel management were helpful to me.

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Raja Ram: This was an important aspect even appreciated by my friends. Later I compelled my clients also not to avoid social benefits. Like ESIC,PF most of my friends were not having this. I used to ask them to give this benefit to the workers. Ask them for some percent increase in the production and productivity and then they will improve in return. You give them the increase in DA and basic wages, those things were lessons I have learnt from TISS.

Unless you give something you can't take anything from them. Some of the IAS officers were impressed from my negotiations.

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Raja Ram: Strikes, Lock outs, when to stop for the strike and when it becomes necessary to declare a lock out. Myself and other persons would conduct cases at the court.



Arbitration was also a part of it. I will be always on the negotiation committee on the management. Most of the cases we used to succeed. We even briefed the senior advocates there. Mr Verma, Gopal Subramaniam was also a senior advocate and they were really cooperative and helped me by understanding the case and to get a stay order immediately.

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Raja Ram: This is how I built up my organization. Five years back I have just retired as I was fed up with a lot of problems, it really affected me mentally. My son in law has taken up everything. My clients were happy as my approach was good to them. My approach to hospital, industry was different. Hospital negotiations, talking and all was important instead of taking actions.

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Raja Ram: In Industries right from beginning to end dismissal was the straw I used to get, the compromise and get the settlements with the workmen. Because of my negotiation talents, the unions too were very friendly with me. The unions were not happy with other consultancies with CPI, Congress, CPM, BJP. People would say if Raja Ram is there we will surely get the settlements in some or the other way even though it may take some more time.