



## Mr. Samir Ghosh

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Camera/Sound: Ms. Divya Cowasji

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Mr. Samir Ghosh currently works as Director, Shodhana Consultancy, Pune. He is an International consultant with World Bank. He has also worked as a consultant to UNICEF, Aga Khan Foundation India, Govt. of India and various state Govts. He has also undertaken various projects and research studies for several national and international organizations both in India and abroad. He has written the Maharashtra State Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities and Chhattisgarh State Policy for Persons with Disabilities which received international acclaim. He graduated from Ravi Shankar University majoring in English with a gold medal. He did his Masters' in Social Welfare and Administration from TISS. He further did a degree in Social Planning from the London School of Economics, London and received a gold medal for being the London University topper.

In 1999, the Hon. President of India awarded him with a National Award for his outstanding contribution to the field of Disability Rehabilitation.



Q: We wanted to take you back and go down memory lane. We wanted to take you back to the 80's when you were a student in the institute. So, please tell us how you landed up at the institute and what were the expectations at that time when you had come?

SG: When I landed up, it was an interesting story that I come from very small town called Bilaspur in Chattisgarh and I was looking for soon after my graduation came up kind of a question that what next?

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(SG Continues): So I was looking for various kinds of options and of course social work had, never been, I had never heard really about social work or the institute or anything of that sort. But then it so happened that I met one of my friends in Bilaspur who was the friend in the sense, a senior, a very senior person who was working as a joint director in the veterinary department of that time it was Madhya Pradesh, the govt. of Madhya Pradesh, posted in Bilaspur. So I was sitting in his office and talking to him regarding what next and things and his daughter apparently happened to be a student from the Indore school of social work. So I was basically asking what this is all about?

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(SG Continues): So when he said well this is about helping people and things like that so I said can I apply? So there was an another gentleman who was sitting there and he said that if you want to apply, why don't you apply in TISS which is known to be the best social work institute in the country. So you have to go through a competitive examinations and I had never faced any competitive examinations as such because except for very few those days, I am talking of 1980's, you know like medical college, engineering college, and even within engineering college there used to be only say IIT's where you have to go for the competitive examination and IIM's you have to go for competitive examination, rest everything depend upon the kind of score of marks that you had.



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(SG Continues): So when I heard about competitive examination, I thought that let me face it. So I wrote, in fact it was very late when I wrote almost the dates were ending and so I wrote directly to the director. Sent him a postcard in fact and requested him that if I could be, I didn't even send money or anything and I said if I could be given the form and all and apparently they very promptly sent the form to me. And the last date was almost approaching so I didn't even know that whether once the form goes, will the last date be over with postal delays and things like that but I sent it.

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(SG Continues): And that's how I came. I was in the last batch in fact for, those days the interviews and things would go on from one month, for one month. Batch after batch would come and things. Tata institute in those days used to be a small group, very small. I would call it as a luxurious group. So I was in the last batch written and interviews. So that's how I landed up in TISS. And early days. I didn't know what was going on in the class because I had no background and no social science background as such. Although I was studying a little bit of psychology and things, philosophy and all but nothing to do with any kind of, anything to do with far from what I was studying.

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(SG Continues): And then I guess one gets used to it and perhaps the friends and the whole campus grows on you. So that's how I think I became slowly I became familiar with the, with friends, started making friends and, so and so.

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Q: Tell us some mischief that happened in the hostel. Or what was it like?



SG: Oh! Well lots of interesting things in the hostel. We had those days, in fact, we had only three hostels. Not even the Phd. hostel what we call. It was under construct those days. So there was a girls' hostel, there was hostel no. 1 and hostel no. 2. So, initially, in, I was given the hostel no. 2, with two seaters. The system used to be like if you have done well in your interviews and all, so you get a two-seater, otherwise a 4-seater in the junior batch. And if you have done well in your second year, then you get a single room.

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(SG Continues): So, I think I must have done well, so I got a 2 seater in the 1st year also. Hostel in the sense, I mean, specially the first year, it was a, lots of interesting, one of the interesting thing that happened was, we didn't have water in the hostel. So, and, in fact, there was no hot water, the geyser was not working. So, all of us were in a towel. Prof. Jacob Aikara used to be the hostel warden and went near his home, with everybody carrying one - one bucket to Prof. Aikara's house. This was all boys, I mean, the girls didn't do that. Hostel no.2 boys, since we didn't have hot water in hostel no. 2, so all the boys went to his house. So that was one and he was completely taken aback what has happened. And what's the problem kind of a thing.

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(SG Continues): So that was one fun. And in addition to that, I think, what would happen typically in a boy's hostel. We hardly use to wear our dresses and walk around in the corridors and things except running inside the room when we use to see the girls coming to meet somebody. So that was another thing that we had. Other campus fun, I think the first year that we had was completely, no plans or anything of that sort. But gathered once in front of the ladies hostel. Particularly, that, lawn of the ladies hostel. It used to be nice and green in those days.

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(SG Continues): The hostel was not like a jail. It's now all put up, all walls and those things have been put up. So you could go and sit on the parapet of that place and all.



So once I remember having a big gathering of both boys and girls and as many people as possible normally would mimic the teachers and professors. So that was one very nice fun thing that we had. The dining hall, there used to be DH committee meeting, dining hall committee meeting and full of loud noise and the DH committee was also headed by Prof. Jacob Aikara who almost poor fellow almost used to cry during these DH committee meetings because he used to be so much troubled, so much of noise, so much of shouting.

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(SG Continues): All these things used to go on during DH committee meetings. I still don't remember a single issue why we used to make so much of noise? Not a single issue that I feel today was worth it to make so much of noise and to put him to so much of trouble. I can't. If you ask me, I can't remember even a single issue that really led us to the kind of trouble we used to give him. So these were some of the interesting times and things.

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Q: Who were the teachers who were more prone to be mimicked in the campus?

SG: Plenty of them. One definitely was Prof. Jacob Aikara because of his particularly, his, he was a hot topic for, because being the boy's hostel warden and also being the DH committee chairperson. So and he, those typical malyali accent in his English and things. He used to teach us Indian social problems so we used to call it Aikara's problem kind of a thing. So he was one person to be mimicked. Another person to be mimicked was my head of the department, that's Prof. Gopalan.

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(SG Continues): He had a very interesting way of teaching and his teaching would go, you know, examples would go from anything running up to Vietnam war and to coming to buying some vegetables in Bhendi bazaar. So that kind of a contrast of example, and we forgot actually what he was teaching or what topic he used to start



and what we ended. So he was another person and he had a lot of accent in terms of, and body language, lot of body language he used to teach. So he was another person to be mimicked.

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(SG Continues): Prof. Hebsur because of his examples in research methodology which most of the time, it always used to go above my head, maybe I was not one of the brightest people. But it always used to go above my head. So, Prof. Hebsur was another person to be mimicked. So these 2-3, yeah, yeah, another person was Prof. Grace Mathew. Prof Grace Mathew was mimicked and talked about a lot because of her strictness, extreme strictness of things, of her assignments, timely assignments and things.

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(SG Continues): Although second year, I was not under her because I was in the Social welfare administration department. So these were the professors normally who would be mimicked and things like that. Well, we had a very interesting time, otherwise also, campus life, very vibrant and interesting campus life. We used to have a wall called the Shodhana, no! There was a group called Shodhana in which different discussions and things would happen. It was a student's forum. And then we used to have a magazine, student's magazine called The Wall where people would write. Normally we didn't have that luxury of printing and all this kind of things. So, every week it would come out in a chart paper.

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(SG Continues): still remember, it was a yellow colour chart paper in which it would be tried to make it as nice as possible. Somebody would write with a sketch pen in green, somebody would write it in blue, in different kinds of colour but maximum of two sheets, maximum otherwise, mostly of one sheet. So a little bit of campus news,



little bit of some of the controversial topics, sometimes some newspaper cuttings would be pasted along with, but that was about it. Other thing would be two major trips that we used to have. One would always be a trip to Matheran, trekking of Matheran and second year mostly, for several years it used to be going to Gorai Beach.

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(SG Continues): So these two were we would have every year, two trips like that. I think Lonavala-Khandala. These three trips we would always have. Batches after batches used to do that. Yeah! Then sports days. Regular volley ball, basket ball, those things were always there, have always been there. And interesting place used to be our library. We still feel very strongly about our times library and now a days library. I think every student of those days would feel to say they loved that library.

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(SG Continues): For two reasons. One is, there was something different about it. The making, and I think we used to get some privacy. Some of us who had made, or get our life partners, or not the life partners, whatever it is, we had our privacy within the library to do a little bit of a small mischief things within that. So this was all, I think part of, very good and campus life. And only thing is that, first year I do remember, that I must have been, me and one more friend, must have been, as soon as we came, we went and booked our ticket to go back to our home.

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(SG Continues): So every day we would see the ticket and feel very nice about it. But then later on, the whole campus grows so much on you that the second vacation, by the time you would, by the summer vacation that you go, you really start feeling hostel sickness then the home sickness. So that's completely reverse. At least it



happened with me and so did I hear from many of my other friends who in fact were in our batch.

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Q: Anybody, amongst your teachers, anybody, you think influenced you particularly, somebody who you feel informed your choices in life or your career, or your ideas?

SG: See, I will give you, influence in your life was many, quite a number of them. But I think I keep repeating this many of my friends and many of our.. this thing, regarding Prof. Gopalan. We had a, we used to have an assignment based exam kind of a thing, which was only assignment, no written exam or anything. It used to be called as budgeting and something called budgeting, and something for social welfare agencies.

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(SG Continues): Where we actually had to conceive and think about an organisation, conceive an organisation. Make everything to do with an organisation including budgeting and showing that it is sustainable by showing profit along that its running, that itself sustains, a social welfare organisation. A very tough assignment, very tough assignment and we would always do it in groups. And this was particularly for people who had not taken the research paper, dissertation paper. So there were only two persons who had taken dissertation in our, this is for the second year I am talking, who had taken the dissertation.

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(SG Continues): Rest all, we were a batch of 15. Rest all thirteen of us, had opted for this particular course and later on, believe me, while doing the assignment, we were really regretting that why did we do this, because, we, it was so tough, and by the end of, and the assignment as and on, you keep doing. First thing is you can't do without a group. It demands that kind of a thing. And then, as and on you keep on doing the

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assignment was becoming more tough and more tough and more tough. So for 6-7 days we were working on an average about 18 hours a day to do that assignment.

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(SG Continues): So, Prof. Gopalan used to tell us all the time, you see when you are doing this assignment; you will not be able to sleep. So remember what, you are the kind of subject you are choosing. So even at a middle of a night, 1 O clock, 2 O clock, Prof. Gopalan would come to the hostel and then he would carry all of our flasks. He would go home, bring tea for us. So, this is one thing and then by end of the day, we couldn't submit finally in our batch, we couldn't submit on the day that we were supposed to submit.

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(SG Continues): And, So all of us were given supplementary.

SG: Yeah, so all of us got supplementary and this one was Krishnamoorthy was our registrar that time. He actually went and fought with Krishnamoorthy and said every day I go and I see in the hostel what they do. They couldn't have done it earlier then the time that you have given. So he fought for us. So we were waived from that. And then the date of that assignment was then further changed to two more days. We submitted it two more days, two days later than the date of the submission.

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(SG Continues): And the last day, he went and bought film tickets for us and gave and said that, each day he used to say, you don't do this, you all are going to get mad, you all are going to get mad, (hindi: Sab pagalhojaoge tum log), Jao, go to the garden, go to the movies. And anytime, its not that he used to come only once to see and give us tea. He used to come definitely by 12'O clock once he would come and again he would come in somewhere early morning hostel to see whether we are still doing what we are doing. He was very concerned about our health and things like that. Such



a touching kind of a memory that we have all of us of Prof. Gopalan on that occasion that it's a human being par excellence.

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(SG Continues): Then, I also have some good memories of another teacher called Prof. G Pandey. He later on left TISS and had joined ASCI, Administrative Staff college of India in Hyderabad. He used to teach us organisational behaviour. Mostly the management oriented topics in the social welfare administration course. We were the first batch of disaster management studies those days. Then I think he went there was nothing. Later on it became, now it is today, it is a Center for Disaster Management now. But he was the one who started us as the first batch.

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(SG Continues): He was another professor who was very very good. I think his basic style was that you do the assignment, give it to him back but he would keep on repeating and telling that what better you could do before you do assignment submission. So, it was more like a growth that happened within you in terms of not only for examination purpose. That I think by and large the overall TISS philosophy has been that to see that how you grow rather than only study mug up and things like that.

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(SG Continues): For me it also happened, that it was a sea-change from a particular method of studies which upto graduation what I did. Lecturers would come, talk, and give you a lecture. Something like I lecture, you listen and go out. But so much of interaction and so much of importance given on understanding analytical, creating analytical ability and I think the whole philosophy that a student can dissent, disagree with the teachers, disagree, bringing arguments, and the teachers were ready to listen to your point of view, was definitely something new for me.



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(SG Continues): I was not from that particular background. May be coming from a small town or I don't know. In most of the academic institutes that still continues. Even today it continues barring a few institutes or good universities like JNU and all. So, that was a very big change.

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Q: Why don't you tell a little bit about the kind of work you engaged in after you graduated? I know we are talking about many years now, but if in a nut shell you could sort of tell us the transition how your work has spread?

SG: My work has been in different ways because soon after TISS I went for my higher studies at the London school of Economics for particularly doing policy and planning studies. So, after that for a short stint I was with UNDP looking after Polio free campaign but then that was short lived. After that, my contract ended and I joined a corporate sector, the Tata Steel where I worked for several years about 14.5 years I worked there.

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(SG Continues): Initially, to start with I went in their rural development department but was pretty disillusioned with the kind of work that they were doing, the philosophy that they were thinking and all. So from there then I went to head the management, in fact, start and head the management research unit in the industrial relations department which I was there for about next four years or so. After that, then rest of my time, I was dealing with occupation health services inside the plant.

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(SG Continues): So, all together that was my first major area. Then 1999, I took a voluntary retirement and came to the core sector that I was specialized in. I started



consulting with Aga Khan Foundation and worked there for one and a half years as their consultant particularly in the area of rural development. Subsequently, I was a consultant with UNICEF for next six years after that in which I worked in the UNICEF six different sectors which UNICEF works, water and sanitation, reproductive child health, primary education, HIV/AIDS, and nutrition. So these were the six sectors that they are working. But my job mainly was in the area of how you can bring participatory planning into district planning. How can we do that? So that was my major work with UNICEF.

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(SG Continues): It was very good and very challenging kind of work where I had the opportunity to go really into the deep and grass root level work in the Vidarbha districts and Marathwada districts of Maharashtra. Then subsequently after that, so that work continued and simultaneously I started working also, in fact, that was always there. My work with the people with disabilities because I have never gone out of that. I was working voluntarily even when I was in TISCO. Then later it gave me more opportunities to directly work and see how things can be.

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(SG Continues): My major work happens on disability front was first that I made the Maharashtra state action plan for persons with disabilities on the invitation of government of Maharashtra which was accepted by the government of Maharashtra. Then subsequently I wrote three state policies, i.e., the government of Chattisgarh, Govt. of Bihar, and more recently Govt. of Rajasthan. These three state policies on disability have been written. And then I have been working with very closely advising the govt. of Rajasthan, The Rajasthan Mission on Skills and Livelihood.

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(SG Continues): So, But all these places, except from the govt. of Chattisgarh, where it was a directly, and the govt. of Maharashtra which directly the govt, commissioned the work to with me. Otherwise, I was on behalf of, with Bihar I was on behalf of the



World Bank, and in Rajasthan I was on behalf of, as a consultant with the UNDP. Yeah! I think Rajasthan, out of all these, Rajasthan has picked up the best as far as this sector of work is concerned on a big way because the state policy announced in the budget by the Chief Minister and then subsequently there is now, we are still working on it, i.e., the comprehensively to bring the livelihood issues as a important inclusion component with Rajasthan Grameen Aajivika Vikas Parishad, i.e., the rural livelihood of people with disabilities.

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(SG Continues): In addition to that, I am advising the national rural employment, national rural livelihood mission on the inclusion issue. We will be taking up altogether six districts on a pilot project basis, three in Rajasthan, and three in Bihar. The three in Rajasthan has been by and large, it is going to be finalised most probably the work will start in March or April. But Bihar we are still to start the discussion part which three districts to be taken.

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(SG Continues): These are now my things that I am currently deeply involved into.

Q: ... On various fronts but first as a student and then over the years now with the work you have been doing. Do you think it has become, How conducive, and how inclusive is the environment that TISS (?)

SG: I would say conducive yes! But inclusive, not yet, no. There is a long way to go and I think they keep forgetting that they have to be more inclusive. The building is still not as far as accessibility is concerned; the teaching building is still not, specially the old campus.

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(SG Continues): I haven't been so much into the new campus because the new campus, the academic building may be having lifts and all. So, that would become accessible. But definitely old campus they need to make accessible and there is a possibility of making it accessible, because, you see the new library building coming in, they could just, and since lift is there, what they could simply do, draw a kind of a corridor between each of the building, between the two buildings, from each floor draw up a corridor so that wheel chairs and things can go.

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(SG Continues): And, yes it is pretty inaccessible for that matter. I don't know to what extent the library is accessible particularly in terms of braille and all. I don't think they still have much to do with braille. I don't to what extent, I don't know whether they have a talking library. Do they have?

SG: Small unit of talking library they have. Okay. So that needs to develop little more. But I think one of the things is that, sensitivity wise, yeah, there are good amount of sensitivity, although it still needs to be better. So, I think some kind of a complete sensitisation needs to be worked out or some kind of a program needs to be given to the staff members.

Q: You would have some feedback for it or some, I mean comments on it or the kind of work they are doing, the kind of work they can possibly do...

SG: Well, as far as disability studies are concerned, I am fairly in interaction with them, quite often. In fact, I have also interacted with students, I have gone and lectured and things like that. It's a very welcome thing that disability study has come up.

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(SG Continues): There needs to be a lot of reverse learning as far as this group is concerned. They need to be more field based, learning coming from the field and feeding into the academic. It's a new course, not a very old course, that's one. But I



think also they need to engage in more amount of action oriented work. They need to definitely engage into action research oriented works so that, that gives them a better chance for the students to become even better. What is happening with disability studies, throughout India, I am not only talking of here, there are only 2-3 universities that are offering disability studies.

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(SG Continues): Why do the organisations ask, why do we need to engage a rehabilitation expert? We have a special educator, we have a vocational training instructor kind of a thing, then what is the need for a rehabilitation manager? And this will continue to happen unless you do demonstrate the usefulness of rehabilitation, a comprehensive rehabilitation expert in an organisation. So, that is something that is very important. And this is something that you can demonstrate only through action oriented work.

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(SG Continues): So there need to be more action oriented work happening in the disability studies. We were trying to engage with them on an action oriented work but unfortunately it fizzled out. It fizzled out, I would say, for stupid reasons, absolutely stupid reasons. The Platinum Jubilee and all such kinds of things, excuses were given which I don't think. I mean Platinum Jubilee comes and goes, it is something, it's an event. But this is something if you engage, then it is for a long term of an organisation for a course, and for an organisation, it's like yes.

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(SG Continues): Whatever was the event, and whatever was the engagement that should have been, this should have been equally given because I was trying to get them to attach the disability studies group and TISS with the national rural livelihood mission. So, it was a kind of a tripartite engagement between our organisation i.e.,



Shodhana consultancy, TISS and National Rural Employment Mission. I feel it's an opportunity lost. It's an opportunity lost. So, that would be my reaction.

Q: I just wanted you to sort of say a few words about your association with TISS and then its 75 years, say some feedback, some message. Something you would like to say to your Alma Mater.

SG: yeah, so what I wanted to say is whenever, during the admission time, whenever a person with disability is applying, who so ever has been selected, one sort of a check list needs to be drawn out in terms of what are his or her requirements.

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(SG Continues): Okay? There could be an exhaustive checklist, in terms of, particularly, the study portion, what exactly he or she requires. Then, the communication pattern, the moving around, if anything, if any adaptation needs to be done in the bathroom, in his room or her room. Any of those kinds of things, if that kind of a check list can be drawn, that would be good with every student because you are not going to get too many students as such. So, that would help plan well in the initial stage if you do that then that would help plan well. Because now we have from my time to today's time it's a long time okay? Lots of progress has been done and there is no reason why particularly when everybody looks up to an organisation like TISS for being more sensitive to these kinds of social issues, then it's important that you have a look at it, at these particular things.

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(SG Continues): So, this would be my definitely one of my basic suggestions. In the form, I don't know if it is mentioned. If it is mentioned then it is fine. If it is just mentioned that people with disabilities are also encouraged to apply... In many places, you will find as an inclusive statement used, that people with disabilities, women and all are encouraged to apply. So even if that one sentence makes a lot of things. One sentence. Two, the whole world, that yes you are aware of it. Okay? And



some of things like we believe in reasonable accommodation. These are sentences. These are particular policies that we do

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(SG Continues): And those kind of the equal opportunity policy what we call, if TISS could draft something like called equal opportunity policy which include not only people with disabilities but all different kinds of vulnerable sections. It could have third gender; it could have very very vulnerable, poorest of the poor section, and things like that. Whatever, it is, there needs to be something called equal opportunity policy of TISS and one would expect that the time passing, that this should be in place. So, that's definitely, I think, it should come loud and clear in the as a message from Platinum Jubilee.