



Ms. Sindhu R. Panakal

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Camera/Sound: Ms Divya Cowasji

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Mrs. Sindhu R. Panakal is an alumna of TISS, graduating in 1958. She joined TISS as a faculty member in 1958 in the Department of Personnel Management and Industrial Relations. She retired as a Reader in 1989.



SG: Thank you Mrs. Panakal for agreeing to do this interview with us. We wanted to take you down memory lane and tell us a little bit about how you first came to the Tata Institute as a student in the 50s.

P: Well, you know, Tata Institute shifted here in 1954 to this campus, Deonar campus. In '55 they had advertised about a short term course in Juvenile Delinquency and I was connected with so many other social organizations and all, so I thought why not do this course. That's how I came and joined that short term course. It was about a 2-3 weeks course during summer vacation. And then I got to know about the Tata Institute specializations and things like that so I thought why not join. I applied, I got admission in 1955. That is how I came to Tata Institute.

SG: So, Mrs. Panakal, tell us a little bit about...that time the campus was very new, they had just shifted...what was the campus like at that time.

P: Well, campus was like a village rural area and all. We didn't have proper roads and there were no lights on the street. In fact Tata Institute boundary was till the divider which is there at present. That divider was in our compound. And the road was very nice. There was no bus service, nothing, and the campus was very peaceful, most of the staff was staying, I mean the service staff and all. Faculty, one or two-three people were here at that time. It was very quiet but the relationship between people was very close and very good. So the campus was all green,



nice. Some patches were barren because this was a new place. But it was very peaceful, very nice, though we used to feel we had come to some rural area. That was the atmosphere at that time. And later on of course, the campus was developed in the greenery and that was done by my husband, Prof. Panakal.

SG: Everyone tells us about how each and every tree on campus has been planted by him. He was a great lover of trees...?

P: Oh yes, in fact, now they have cut down all the trees you see. We had teak trees all over the place, and he wanted to develop it as wooded place, not just flower pot, flower vase and things like that, but nice greenery all around and all, so he started developing that.

SG: So Mrs. Panakal, please tell us a little bit about...what did the students do in their free time when you were a student, what were the places you used to hang out in, what did you do in the evenings...

P: Well, the thing is that students didn't really didn't have much time to hang around, because we used to have classes right up to 4 o'clock. From 9-9:30-10 o'clock to 4 o'clock. Afternoons were not free, continuous classes. The hostelites...day scholars had to go because the bus was there. Bus used to leave them up to Sion. So they had to leave. And hostelites, of course, there was



nothing here, it was like a jungle. Only that Vijay Punjab , that was the place where students used to go. Or they will walk down towards RK Studio. There was some small canteen there, they will go there. But there was this table tennis facility in our dining hall and students used to go for walking and all. Sometimes they used to go to this hill, Chembur hill. They will go that side. But at the same time this was not very safe to go about especially for girls and all. So students will be in the campus. The number of students was also very limited. There were about 60 students all together.

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..In all specializations together. And the library was there. People were more interested in reading. Some students were interested in music and things and they will have their own groups and sub groups and each one's reference group was different. So they used to go about here. But this whole place was very isolated. Where you see Deonar depot now, they were all paddy fields, I remember those. You see, there was nothing here, absolutely nothing. Even where you see that big tower, central bank and all, that area also, all paddy fields and things like that. There was nothing here. At the most students used to go to Chembur. We also sometimes used to go to Chembur..walk down. Even children used to go to school walking, because there were no buses and there was no so much of traffic on the road. Like a village you know, just like a village. And even to go to the only station in the evening it was very difficult. There was Cheeta camp which was located on the road to Shakti Nagar hospital and that colony is located on the plot where there was Cheeta Camp. So they were all migrants, neighbour and all that. And some criminal



activities also used to go on there, so students were told right in the beginning, first day, that they should be careful moving around the place.

SG: Any teacher, any professor of yours who influenced your ideas, who you used to really be fond of...

P: In fact, I tell you, we were very fortunate to have very good teachers who had a very high stature, internationally known, highly qualified teachers. They were so good. Some were very strict but they were really good. And my head of the department Personnel Management was Dr. MV Murthy, you see. And he was a very different kind. Highly interested in literature, Sanskrit and Philosophy. And so while teaching he will bring you certain things which will influence us. There were other teachers also who were very good. Dr. Punekar was another teacher of mine. He was with the labour bureau in Shimla earlier, then he joined here. He was interested in trade unions and all that. Very jovial person, very much interested. He was another person. Then Dr. Banerjee. She was also my teacher in the first year and I learnt quite a lot from her. Discipline. Even otherwise I had different way of life...my parents and my childhood. In my childhood, I was in girl guides and things like that. So there was a definite discipline which we had to follow. And Dr. Banerjee and all that were disciplined teachers. I had great regard about all my teachers. We were very lucky to have very good teachers. Dr. Mehta was another one. Dr. BH Mehta. He would outright criticize students like anything but at the same time very nice. There was Dr. Lorenzo, he was another teacher. So we were very lucky to have very good teachers who were



interested in us, who wanted to see that we develop and so on. Dr. Murthy was a very, very good teacher, human being, very friendly with students. We used to go to his house. His wife will prepare so many things for us. The relationship was very close between teachers and students at that time. So...we had very good teachers.

SG: So Mrs. Panakal, when did you return to the institute after graduating?

P: Well, I graduated in '57. '57-'58, that one year I worked in Labour Welfare Board. And then there was a vacancy in the institute for Field Work Supervisor. So, I applied and I got the job. So in '58 I joined the institute, and then I continued. Only the break was when I went to the States for my further studies in Columbia University. So that was the break. Otherwise I continued with the Institute.

SG: Mrs. Panakal, we want you to talk a little bit about the Dept. of Personnel Management and Labour Relation...you have seen it grow...if you could just trace the changes...

P: In the dept., dept. staff as such, we were Dr. Murthy and myself. And then other teachers, but they were also teaching in other departments and all that. So, Dr. Murthy and myself, we were the two people in the dept. itself. Dr. Punekar was with the research dept. Dr. Lorenzo earlier



with the research dept. Then other teachers used to teach and all that. In 1964, our institute got the status of Deemed University. At that time, things changed quite a bit. And before that some time, Mr. Kurchetkar, he was earlier Registrar, he also joined the dept., our dept. So we were three. Then, we had a Psychology teacher, Dr. Paro, but he was not attached to our department, so like that other teachers. But in the dept. Dr. Murthy and myself, we used to carry out all field work and teaching and our own subject. Other teachers used to teach their own subjects, then Mr. Kurchetkar came, so we were three people. We were 26 students, you see, my batch. My batch was the first batch where there were 5 girls. Otherwise generally the girls were not taking up..because job, there was lot of bias about women working in industry and so on. So that was the first time we were 5 girls in the class. And all together our class was 26 students. Then the dept. increased, developed after that. Earlier the dept. was known as Dept of Labour Welfare and Industrial Relations. After '64, the Dept. name was changed. It became Dept. of Personnel Management, Industrial Relations and Labour Welfare. And then later on it changed to Personnel Management and Industrial Relations. So like that the changes took place. We started developing more contacts with industries and their suggestions also used to...we used to get some people from industry to teach certain courses. Y. D. Joshi who was with Tatas as their legal consultant and all that, he used to teach Labour in the institute. And with the help of so many people, then the dept developed. And after I retired it developed further, nomenclature and everything.

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And the student strength also increased later on. I don't know what it is at present, but slowly. And we were emphasizing more on field work because through practical training it is what you gain especially about industry. And we used to place students in textile mills for their first semester. Because that was the main industry in Bombay at that time. So, we thought that they must know. Other industries developed later, but that was the main industry in Bombay. So we used to place students in textile industry, and then in the second semester we would place them in other manufacturing, pharmaceutical or whatever it might be. In summer vacation they used to have summer placement and field work developed. In fact I was very interested in fieldwork. And in 1960, in order to get real experience of the...of course when I was student, I also had experience of the fieldwork and all that, but then in 1916, I thought it is better to spend some time with industry to get to know really what is the culture and so on. So I requested the institute whether they can send me to some organization for say 3-4 months so that will help me in my teaching, organizing fieldwork, and it becomes more authentic, what you talk in the class about industry, instead of reading books and talking to students. So, I went to Tata Steel and spent 4 months there and went around all the departments of Tata Steel.

When I was a student, a study tour organised and that study tour was in a coal field in Vilaspur, near Jabalpur. So we went for study tour and we wanted to visit coal mine. At that time, rule was women were not allowed underground. We, because one of the person connected with that coal mine, he had come for a short term course, through him we got permission and the management allowed us to go in a mine. However, all other girls, they didn't want to go there. I said, I will go. Of course they had their lifts and all that. I went down, it was about 1000 feet, and I tell you, what life it was. I was really...I became very sensitive to all these things, workers life and all that,



and what type of life these miners live. That enriched my life quite a lot. And before my marriage, before joining Tata Institute also, I was connected with certain institutions, certain people, trade unionists and all that, Maniben Cara, , Peter Alvares and all these people. I worked with them as a volunteer. I had a detailed background of this type of activities in the city. And in my college we had a parliament. I was in Siddharth. At that time Siddharth was very well known. And Samajwadi Party, lot of people from the party were also students in the college. And we had very good teachers again in my college. Ashok Mehta used to come, we used to discuss certain things and all that. So we had a certain background of labour and with Peter Alvares and all that. Peter Alvares had married one of our students, Leela Alvares. And she was also in this trade union movement. So that was little background. So I was interested in trying to get...that's how I opted for Labour Welfare and Industrial Relations course.

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So, that experience in the mines was very eye opening experience. How people work, how much danger is there, and what are the working conditions. You must know what are the working conditions in factories, in mines, in steel plant and so on. We are using steel for our houses, for this, that, how steel is made? Life is difficult, very difficult. And I made it a point to see each and every dept. I said I want to know, I want to have first- hand experience of all these things. So we saw all those things and my placement in steel plant also helped me to understand. Because then what you teach becomes more realistic. Not just read from books and tell. So that was the thing. And then I would recall working conditions to the students. One of the topics in Labour Welfare,



what are the facilities given by management to workers, and you can bring in those experiences, it becomes more realistic.

SG: Mrs. Panakal, like you're saying, Labour Industries at that time was the focus, it was also the need to know about it, but over the years it's become Personnel Management, so what is this transition, and why do you think this transition has come

P: You know, the thing is that...trade unions were also, at that time trade unions were very strong. So, Industrial Relations were very important. There used to be strikes and lockouts and so on, so the students who were graduating from the institute had to have a knowledge of these things. They had to go as labour officers or labour welfare officer. Afterwards we had little influence of American or Western atmosphere. These multinationals started coming. Multinationals had different type of atmosphere in the organizations compared to our textile industries which employed all our labour, mostly uneducated, illiterate, unskilled many times. Women used to work in textile industries. Later on when these organizations started developing, the workforce was also of a different type - educated and so on. And then there was influence of those cultures. So people started thinking labour welfare means only labour welfare, we are not doing anything else. You are concentrating only on factories act, limitations of other acts and so on and so forth. However, changed started taking place. Instead of labour, they thought personnel was a proper word because personnel includes top to bottom. When we said Labour Welfare it was felt that we are there only for labour and not for anything. Then the training programmes



also changed. There were other two institutions which came into existence. One was the Indian Institute of Personnel Management and National Institute of Labour Welfare. So afterwards they merged and then more and more people thought Personell is a broader term instead of saying labour welfare. When you say Labour Welfare, you are concerned with labour only..and not other people, so the change took place. Now it has become HR, so this is how the change took place.

SG: Mrs. Panakal, in your teaching life, is there any student who played mischief with you, or somebody you remember...how was your relationship with your students

P: My relations with students were very good, though I was considered a very strict teacher. Yes, I was a strict teacher because I wouldn't like students coming late to the class. Generally hostelites used to come late. And I told them that if you don't come before the second bell goes, you need not enter the class, I am not going to mark you present. And even in the class, sometimes students have different habits, they talk at the back, they read and things like that. And I said if you want to read anything, don't waste your valuable time in my class. You can go out, I give you permission to go, and so on. But my relations were very good with the students in the sense that...you know, at that time the atmosphere was very different. Students were also a little different. They were more concerned about their studies. I'm not saying that now they are not concerned, but at that time it was a different situation. Now you have all types of gadgets available, all types of facilities available. At that time it was not there. So students were of a



different time, and..because we were in the campus and the whole atmosphere was very friendly with the students and faculty. When I joined faculty, we were only 10 faculty members, and women were only 3, Dr. Banerjee, Mrs. Desai and myself. We were only three women, others were men. But the relationship with the students of all these people was very good. Because students used to come from all over India. We also had students from abroad. In my class there were two girls from Burma. We used to get students from Africa and so on. Different places. So there had to be some relationship with the foreign students and all that. So relationship with the students was very good. They used to come to my place at any time. Even at 10 o'clock if they wanted to have any help and all. And you need to be sensitive to students needs also at that time.

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Some students used to come from rural areas. It was a shock for them to be in a city like Bombay at that time. And I know some of the students I have...I'm not saying many things, but I could help in my own way to some of the students. Right from their personal problems. Stopping students from leaving the students half way. Helping them, getting the help from the institute for these students and so on. That time this feeling of untouchables, touchables, that was also there little bit. And these students coming from rural areas, they used to feel very scared. They needed lot of moral support. And it was the faculty which used to give them that. And at that time we had another system that each faculty had certain students. And that was the faculty adviser for that group, and the students were from different specializations, not from particular specializations. So we used to have good exchange of views, talks and so on, amongst the



students as well as teachers. Teachers were very sensitive. I'm not saying they are not, but that time we felt that, because some of the students needed a lot, and as a faculty member, I thought it was my duty to help such students in different ways, in their personal life, and we were surprised to hear, you know, regarding their marriage, regarding their financial problems, I could help in whatever way I could, and my husband also used to help them. So relationship was very good. I still like my students. I have lot of contact with my students. Many of them, they are abroad. This time I could not come for that alumni meet because I was not well and it was very cold, and I said I cannot bear all that and I couldn't come.

And I can tell you one more instance...you asked about relationships...one of my students, he used to bunk field work. And I was very strict about field work. I said no, students must learn and all that. So I used to reach the factory before he reaches so the factory people used to tell me, well he has not come yet. Then they started telling him that Madam comes early and you are not here, what is all this. I talked to him... individual conference, we used to talk to students. I told him, see, if you don't improve, I won't be able to help you. I'm telling you, don't do such things and all that, and I can't pass you just like that. That's not my value and my principle. If you're not up to the mark, you will fail. I'm telling you, improve yourself. So I had to give the report about the student, and then he failed, so what to do. He was very angry with me and then once he said he will go to the court. I said fine, go to the court, no problem, go to the court. And of course, after he lost one year, we couldn't help him. We warned him so many times, I said I'm prepared to help you, but you're not allowing me to help you, what can I do, I can't do anything. And blindly I'm not going to pass you, I won't do that because that is against my principle, I won't do that. That student, later on, when he joined, he understood things. He would come to my room,



discuss with me...and other students used to wonder how this fellow goes to me...why, and so on. And then he said, no, though you were strict with me, I have learnt a lesson, I will do the work, whatever you tell me to. And once he had little problem, his mother was very sick and all that. He didn't have money to go home. He came at 10 o'clock to my house, and he said this is...I said don't worry, I'm giving you money, you fly, because mother is serious and all that. My husband and myself we will give you, I said you don't worry about anything. I said okay, you can return whenever you want you can return. And he went and came back and all that. But that boy, though I was so strict with him, later on he understood and everyone started..Madam used to be so strict with him and she failed him and still he goes to her and all that, what is happening. I said I do not do any harm to any body but at the same time your life must be disciplined. You can't bunk field work, and I don't like factory to tell me your students do this, do that and so on.

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Another instance I would like to tell you that I used to supervise students placed in Tata Mills. I used to go regularly and I would like to develop contact with people in the factory and all. So, labour dept. That time it was not Personnel Dept. it was Labour Dept. So there was a peon in the labour dept. And whenever..field work used to be on two days at that time. So he will tell the students sometimes, today your madam is going to come, and somehow it used to happen madam will go there. And they all used to say madam is going to come. He will say today your madam will come. This was the situation, but I had a relationship even with the peons and staff of the factory and so on. And when I retired, many factory people started asking me, what will happen



to the field work today. I said what will happen, nothing will happen, it will go on. Somebody else will carry on the work. I also want to tell you of one thing about...earlier the course was social work course, you see. So we all had to do field work in social work and all that. Then when I joined as fieldwork supervisor, I had to also supervise group work students. And I was placed in Antop. Antop Hill which you see now, Vadala. That was the most dangerous place at that time. And I was placed there and I went. I went to see how the Port Trust was running a welfare center. And we used to place students there for fieldwork. And there most of the criminal activities would go on though the Port Trust colony was there and I went there to see and people started looking, who is here and what. Some of them tried to tell me you shouldn't come to this side. I said what will happen, no no this is a bad place. I said okay, let us see what happens and all that. And we started group work activity. That was another rich experience in my life.

Working with delinquent children, working with labour class, and a very different area known for criminal activities. And we started activities there. And you know Dr. Narendra Jadav? He was one of our good members. He has written his book and he has mentioned our work and in Marathi, that book has been published in different languages. So we had all these students coming for our activities and all that. And I worked with a delinquent gang there. that was another experience. Children who were not allowed to come in the compound of the office. I was told that they are very nasty children, they can't do things. But we tried to work with...and I had very good students who worked with them. So that was another experience. It made me very sensitive. And later on the community used to tell me, nobody will teach you. Even if at 12 o'clock at night if you go there nothing will happen to you. People were so good. People are basically good. Even these children who were delinquents, they had such circumstances that made them. But there are lot of experiences of that I can't telling you and taking your time...these



were the experiences. How you deal with people, how you accept them, some of the things which we were taught in our training program.

SG: Mrs. Panakal towards the end, I'd like to ask you..you spent more than 30 years on campus. You have seen TISS grow, expand, become big with more students and more campuses. If I ask you what has been your personal relationship with the institute, what would you say?

P: I will say we are so closely related to the institute, we can't separate ourselves from the institute. Though, because of our age, we don't have so much contact with the institute now, but still the institute has made us...institute developed us...what we are, what we achieved and all. I studied in Columbia University, had a fellowship there, there also relationship was very close. But Tata Institute moulded us, it developed us and it gave us a wide field to practice our values, our principles which were taught by our teachers to us. So it has a very definite, important place in our life, Tata Institute.

SG: Mrs. Panakal, anything you would like to say to the Institute, any feedback, any message, would you like to say in 75 years...



P: What message can we give, we always wish well of the institute. And I always feel that the status we had at that time, the international status we had, that should continue. Now also, it has expanded and so on, we are happy about it. But that should be there, and that will be achieved through the students, their performance in the field, whichever field they are, that time...when we were students, Tata Institute was on the top, and we were so proud and we are still proud that we were students of the Tata Institute and we were on the staff of the Institute, so it was very different. And I would say, the institute being small at that time, the atmosphere was different. There was close relationship. We didn't have any feeling that these people are staff people, these people are service staff, these people are faculty...we all were together, so that was a different thing. We always wish the institute should grow and should maintain that reputation. That reputation would have to be maintained by the faculty as well as the students, by their performance. This is what I feel.