



Ms Gool Plumber

Interviewer: Ms Shilpi Gulati

Camera/Sound: Mr. Nikhil Titus

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Mrs. Gool Plumber did Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Sociology from St. Xavier's College in 1954 and followed it up with a 2 year- Post-graduate Diploma in Family & Child Welfare from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 1956. During her final year at TISS she opted for block placement in Sewri School, a Special School for the Mentally Retarded. In 1957, she completed a one-year Diploma in Special Education from this school. At the time, it was the only place in India that offered such training. In December 1959 Mrs. Plumber went on the Meherbai Tata Scholarship to U.S.A. and obtained a Master's Degree in Special Education (in Integrated Education for Mentally Retarded) from the San Francisco State University in June 1961.

Mrs. Plumber's experience has been varied. She began her professional life in 1956 after passing out from TISS. She was put in charge of developing a Pre-school at Sewri school, known as the School for Children in need of Special Care, where she worked part-time during the period 1956 – 1958. Simultaneously, she developed a Special Class for the Mentally Retarded under the aegis of the Maharashtra State Women's Council. In June 1965, she went to Ahmedabad to take charge of a Special

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School for the Mentally Retarded, called Sharada, run by the B.M. Institute. This school developed well and its programme became a pioneering programme in Gujarat, offering comprehensive training in services covering diagnostic, clinical, educational, pre-vocational & vocational areas and teacher training. In 1975, Mrs. Plumber initiated a Parent Counseling Programme in Hyderabad and she also got together a group of Parents and Professionals to establish the APAWMR, of which she has been the Honorary General Secretary from its inception. She has played a pioneering role in developing early intervention and other programmes for the mentally challenged. For more details: <http://www.apawmr.org/html/annexures.htm>



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Q: Thanks Mrs. Plumber for agreeing to meet us and share some of your experiences at the Tata Institute. When was the first time when you joined the Institute? What was the campus like at that time?

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After St. Xavier's college, it was quite overwhelming to be interviewed individually by a team of people and then there were other candidates also and the questions raised were something very different for us. It was such a beautiful campus that we remember that the students whom we met came from all over India. It was not just from Bombay but from every nook and corner from all over India. They were so keen to get admitted into Tata Institute. The more prominent group was the Labour and Management group.

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It was a very beautiful campus and the Trombay Hills were behind and we were surprised to learn that Raj Kapoor's residence was behind the dining hall of the Institute. He was so famous in those days with all the films like Awara and all that in those days that they were just too overwhelmed. Once I remember that he and his wife were invited for a function. His wife was a very lovely person. Everyone was trying to see who she was. We had a very nice dining room staff. They were... this was a different experience. Because I remember in our Xavier's campus we had a canteen. So our girls and boys, the students used to flock there and have a good time, chit chatting and have fun. For us in the dining room was a different experience...to sit and have fun and to eat leisurely and not be hurried.



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It was a very nice space. I was never a hostelite. I was a day student. It was an experience. Because you had to take a long journey to Grant road to be picked up. My parents used to be very worried about how I would reach such a long distance as a day student. But you know one gets used to it so there was no problem.

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We has very nice faculty, as I told you. Dr. Banerjee, Prof. Kaikobad. Manu Desai was my professor with Family and Child Welfare and we got along very well with them. Even our librarian was a very helpful good person. Because it was a big library because we had assignments and we had to finish them on time so he would help us look for them. I remember that some of my Xavier college friends had come into Labour Management. So it was so nice to have some people from Xavier's college along with us in Tata Institute.

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Prof Wadia was a very nice Director. He used to have one paper with... his command over English and his ability to cut across and reach out to students was very good. Then the practical experience that we had students in the Child Guidance clinic of Wadia hospital where Dr. Banerjee had started this clinic. It was a very different experience to have practical training to coming across children with behaviour problems and working with the parents. I was also placed for one term in liaison committee where I had to liaison with families with economic and social problems. It was an assignment where we had to write out case studies. So it was something which was a real training for us.



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Q: Today there are more than 700 students per batch. In fact this time during the convocation the auditorium wasn't able to accommodate all of them. Could you talk a little about your student life and your peers and the interaction you used to have?

GP: As I told you the students came from all over India. As I was from Xavier's most of them were from Bombay. Here was something very different. Here they came from all across India, from all strata and this was a cross cultural community. Our annual day, we had a different experience to see items being performed by Assamese students, from Burma, from other places in India. It was a cross cultural venture or you could say experience for us to meet students from different parts of India and to know how they live and what their ways are. We would see them... most of them used to stay in the hostel... In the Tata Institute Hostel because most of them could not afford to stay outside.

Q: We are often told that what do in class is different from what you experience on the field. How much do you agree with it and how did you manage/ how different was your class and field work/

GP; it all depends on your supervisor. If you have a good supervisor she is the one who will guide you on how you can put what you learn in the institute in the practical work. So if the supervisor was good like Dr. Gandhi, Dr. Banerjee, and my friend Sheru Buhariwallah... so it depends on the supervisors. They make what you learn relevant in terms of what you do with the cases. The relevance will be there if you have a good supervisor. You also have to remember how you express yourself in terms of the case interviews because they sit and discuss with you and the others.

Q: Do you think there was a discrepancy between the two? How was your

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experience?

GP: Oh very good. Some students had but I had no difficulty with my professors. It depends on the students itself. You know what happens is that students have come from outside they have been cut off from family- they are lost in this very different atmosphere. They have not been exposed to people around in a very different campus life. For them it is not very easy to adjust. I am from Bombay and it was difficult to adjust in terms of the campus, professors and all. In Xavier's I was a student of sociology and was involved in the Social Service League. That gave me a very good experience, how to work with poor families. We used to go to GT hospital near Metro cinema. We were put in the pediatric ward and I came across for the first time children who were terminally ill or who had come for treatment and that was a very good experience for me from the Social Service League. We had a very nice social worker there. Mrs. Kelkar. she helped me understand how to deal with children with illness or those who are mentally disturbed with hospitalization. That is how I got interested in social work and I came to know about Tata institute during my final year in Xavier's. And I was determined to get into social work.

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I was a day student. So I used to come just in time the institute bus would pick up from Dadar and drop us at the Institute. I was not a hostelite. We knew all the students in our batch the junior year, the first year, the second year of course we were familiar with but they were busy with studies and swamped with work.

The first years were not so swamped with work of course we were also given assignments but it was not as much as senior years. The hostel students missed their parents that were evident. They had close bonds among themselves because they had very little time to move out of the campus except on weekends but otherwise they

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were in the institute itself. Those days there was not much opportunity for games or sports or things like that. The faculty members who stayed on the campus like Prof. Kaikobad... they were very warm families. Some of the faculty members really made the students feel at home, so they didn't miss their families. They did not have any social contact outside the campus and only on weekends they could venture out and they did not know Bombay at that time.

Q: Talking about student teacher relations, a lot of teachers also stayed on campus, so if you could talk about your professors and your experience with them, what classes did you enjoy the most and who do you remember fondly?

GP: I remember that Mrs. Kaikobad, our Prof. Kaikobad's wife was a very loving person. She was in charge of the women's hostel and we came to know her well and her children were so young at that time. She was a very warm person who used to reach out to us. We had Manuben my Professor in family and child welfare. She was another person you know who did not keep a barrier between student and teacher. We could talk to her about any problem we had and she would understand. Very understanding person. Manuben we used to call her. He husband gave us some lectures. I don't remember but it was in advertising or something like that. He was more into media and he himself was an artist so he would conduct classes for us in that area and we really enjoyed that. we did not come close to so many of the students except my group in the second year of family and child welfare and the psychiatric social work students and some of them I knew in my college days in Xavier's. Apart from that we could mix so much. There was no time either we were in the library or we were in lectures. Then we would go home. Except for dining table we would have some opportunity to mix with some others.



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Q: Who was your favorite teacher, someone who really motivated you?

GP: You know I had worked in the Sewri School. In my first year in Tata institute I was placed in a school for mentally retarded children. I came across Mrs. Mani Gamat, she was a well known child psychiatrist. Then she became a very dear friend. After I finished my institute and got my diploma I was asked to start a special class for mentally retarded children by Maharashtra state women's council. When I started that they also had a child guidance clinic where Gamat was in charge and Manuben used to come there as a counsellor meeting with parents. It was a very close group. And I enjoyed it. They motivated me to continue in this field. They influenced me to go abroad and study. I worked in that special class for four years. Then I went abroad and did my masters in special education. I felt the need, if I do special education I can develop programmes for mentally retarded. It just happened that when I returned from San Francisco after my MA degree I was asked to start a special school in Ahmadabad under the BM institute. At that time Kamaliniben Sarabai was the director and she was known to both Mrs. Gamat and Dr. Manu Desai and they pushed me into this and my parents were not willing to let me out of their eye specially my father. He did not like me going to Ahmedabad. Finally succeeded and went and worked for eight years there for developing this school it was a wonderful experience for me.

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The whole team of clinical psychology social workers and me myself being a social worker. Having teachers in special education and training programmes in teacher training so it was multiple facet programmes that we developed. It was one of the best institutes at that time; the BM Institute was considered a very good institute. Our

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special institute became a modern school or a really special school in the western part of... there were many students from Baroda and other places coming to visit and see the school and BM institute. We helped start a parents association which still continues, they have started their own workshop for mentally retarded and gone into employment of adult boys and girls, it is very nice. I still have contact with the association. My teachers who worked are not there they have retired. The school was called Sharda and we had a school for normal children. When I had gone abroad I had studied integrated education. I told Kamaliniben our director we must integrate our children of pre school age into that which was the Pre School for normal children. she was so willing that we integrated four children and they really benefited so much that they were the best students in language development, socialization, personal skills that the parents were most happy that their children have come up so well and they moved on into vocational programmes at BM Institute for retarded children. It was a wonderful experience that they could proceed from one stage to another and got rehabilitated.

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Q: You spoke about field work, if you could talk about what was the pattern of field work when you were a student, where did you do your field work and how was it studying something in class and going and experiencing it on the field/ tell us something about that

GP: In liaison committee it was mainly in terms of family welfare, parents coming from very low socio economic background, education of course and those were all Parsi family. These children had difficulty in adjustment not only in school but also in the family. This was my first experience in terms of case work. Under Miss Freny Gandhi. That was my experience in my junior year. In Sewri school was school for



mentally retarded pioneer school in India started by a mother of a Down syndrome girl Mrs. Jai Waleel. Dr. Mani Gamat was there as a child psychiatrist. I was asked to start a preschool programmes for them .another experience was in the child guidance cell in the Wadia hospital and Dr Banerjee had started this clinic and this was something very unique because some of the senior students working in that clinic and one of my very dear friends Sheru Buhariwallah she was senior year in Tata institute. It was a very different kind of an experience. You came to understand how psychiatric social work, works in a child guidance centre.

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Dr. Banerjee was a wonderful professor, highly qualified so she tried to make the students tried to understand how important clinical work is terms of children with behavior problem with different problems like bed wetting and aggression and so many other behavioral problems that we came to understand because we worked with those children. That was a very different experience for me. That helped me when I was asked by Maharashtra state women's council to start a special class in Bombay and I came to understand how to handle retarded children who showed behavioral problems. How to deal with their mothers and how to reach out to them. It was a very good experience for me to work out how we could do this.

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But still we are doing, in a period of six months we have at least about 340 new cases and about 300 follow up cases. If there is no follow up there is no point in early intervention. If the developmental delay is severe, we have to give every fortnight. If it is not severe we can give monthly and that we have to follow up at least till they are three years old and are entered into a pre school. Then we can gradually withdraw.

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Speech therapy is also an important component of early intervention. If the child has language basic first understanding, if the child understands what is being spoken then he differentiates objects, persons and then comes the first words and naming objects and family members and gradually language develops.

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That was a wonderful experience. The director [of National Institute of Mentally Handicapped] Dr. D K Menon, we came to know him very well he and his wife. what I am saying is that it is something to be very thankful to have so many institutions and special schools which have come up vocational training centres, teacher training centres which NIMS [Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences] does and all over the state we have special schools. I feel that early detection and early intervention is the first step in the rehabilitation of a child with developmental delay. It can be a mentally retarded child; it can be a child with cerebral palsy, a child with hearing loss, a child with visual loss or a child with multiple handicaps. If that child gets early intervention, the result will be tremendous. You will be reducing the handicapping condition. You are teaching the parents how to train the child at home and the child can be integrated in a regular school. That is the endeavour of early intervention.

Q: What would like to say to young social workers?

GP: I would like to say that it is a very challenging profession and you must try and understand the plight of mothers and families of children who have developmental delays... who are going from doctor to doctor trying to see if medicines can cure their child? Which is not the case. If any doctor says your child will be ok when it is three years old that is a wrong story. That is not true. It all depends on how you guide the parents train the parents how to deal with the babies in terms of developing the skills.

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Unless you intervene and demonstrate the skills with the baby present the mother being guided then only you can enable the parents to do what they have been trained and guided to do.

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We used to have a home based early intervention programme which because of lack of funds we are not able to do now. Now it is entirely hospital based. Our home visitors would go into the child's homes and would see and understand the environmental impact on the baby. lack of stimulation, poverty, lack of nutrition of the mother, the plight of the mother in a joint family all these factors have an impact not only on the mother but also on the development of the child. It is very good to have a home based early intervention along with centre based. Due to lack of funds we have stopped this, which I would have loved to continue. If we had funds we would have continued that programme. We had ten home visitors whom we had trained in early intervention. Now we are having only one. One other senior person in early intervention. So we have only two staff members in early intervention. So from twelve we were down to two because of lack of funds, you can imagine the gap.

Q: What message would you like to give Tata institute?

GP: It is a great achievement for Tata institute to have continued for 75 years and those Tata families that has been profoundly developing so many beautiful institutions in India like the Institute of Science in Bangalore and the Bhabha Atomic Research and all these great institutions... Tata institute is one of them and I am really proud that the Tata family has contributed so much to our country in terms of not only unique services but unique programmes all over India. In social work in science, in research you name it they have done it. We are really proud that we have such people

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and such families in our country. Jamshetj's soul will be greatly impressed with what has family has done after him.

Q: You recently visited Tata institute after many years. If you can tell what difference did you find today...

GP: Tremendous difference- we were awed with the expansion of the Tata institute. We never imagined that how Tata institute would have another campus. We knew there were expansion programmes, but we thought it must be within the campus which was of course not possible. Having another adjacent campus was very new to us. Dr. Mullah, he was good enough to show us around and what is where and what he is doing and what are the programmes which have come around now. It almost looked like a management institute. We were surprised at the specializations being offered which we never conceived when we were students that this would happen.

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The founders, the Tatas did this I'm sure Mr. JRD had come to one of our convocations with his wife Thelma. So when the senior group graduated he had come for the convocation. He was himself awed you know at the lovely campus. We were doubly awed when we saw the expansion in the Tata institute adjacent campus and the other specializations are being offered, we never imagined this. We were really happy.

Q: What message would you like to give Tata institute?

GP: It is a great achievement for Tata institute to have continued for 75 years and those Tata families that has been profoundly developing so many beautiful institutions in India like the institute of science in Bangalore and the Bhabha atomic research and all these great institutions... Tata institute is one of them and I am really proud that the



Tata family has contributed so much to our country in terms of not only unique services but unique programmes all over India. In social work, in science, in research you name it they have done it. We are really proud that we have such people and such families in our country. Jamsetji's soul will be greatly impressed with what his family has done after him.