



Prof. Anjali Monteiro

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Camera/Sound: Divya Cowasji

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Dr. Anjali Monteiro is Professor and Dean, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She is involved in documentary production, media teaching and research. Jointly with K.P. Jayasankar, she has made over 35 documentary films. Their work has been screened extensively at film festivals all over the world and they have won twenty-eight national and international awards. These include the Prix Futura Berlin 1995 Asia Prize for Identity- The Construction of Selfhood, Best Innovation, Astra Film Festival 1998, Sibiu, Romania for YCP 1997 and the Best documentary award at the IV Three Continents International Festival of Documentaries 2005, Venezuela, for SheWrite. She is a recipient of the Howard Thomas Memorial Fellowship in Media Studies, at the University of Western Sydney in 2000. She was a Fulbright visiting lecturer for 2006-07, at the University of California, Berkeley. Her areas of research interest include audience reception of the media, documentary film and censorship.

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Q: Thank you so much Anjali mam for agreeing to do this interview with us and for being with us today. As someone who's been doing all the documenting for the Platinum Jubilee India. How does it feel to be on the other side of the camera?

AM: Well, not so nice and also one feels that what will somebody looking at this interview 25 years down the line, think of it. So, you know you realise when you are doing something like this, it's also a some kind of record for posterity and people you know further down with very different perspectives are going to look at it and make a very different sense of it from what it means to us in this time and space here, but anyway, an interesting experience, I guess.

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Q: Should we start by you telling us how your association with TISS began?

AM: I joined the Institute in 1983 at the time when the, what it was then called, Unit for Audio Visual Records was being set up. It started as a project in 1978 under the aegis of the noted playwright Vijay Tendulkar and he was attached to the Institute as a visiting professor and he was, in fact, he had a Nehru fellowship where he was working on issues of violence and how does one understand violence and then, as a part of that he had a sort of on-going dialogue with Professor Gore and it was decided that Mr Tendulkar would be attached to the Institute and produce a series of documentations in slide sound and in Super 8 on various development projects across the country.

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AM: So between 1978 and about 82, beginning of 83, that's what Prof. Tendulkar did and then the Institute decided that this was an activity that they wanted to institutionalise and

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move from a project mode into a Unit. So under the Sixth Plan there were two positions that were advertised and I happen to know Vijay Tendulkar and so he spoke to me and at that time I was working in Xavier Institute of Communications on a adult education project where I was producing material with communities, slum communities in Mumbai on various issues including gender and health, issues of their rights. So Mr. Tendulkar knew of the kind of work I had been doing there since the 70's and so he asked me to apply for this position. I did, and I got it and, so there I was in the Centre.

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AM: It was sort of at its very inception. In addition to me of course Prof. Tendulkar was busy with his other works, so he was... Once I joined he was no longer very much available except that he was winding up the projects that he had taken up. Of course, he was always available in an advisory capacity and Mr. Mukund Sawant who had been with Tendulkar from 1978 continued. It was basically the two of us that constituted the Unit at that time and we had a little space on the other side of the quadrangle. It was just one room and a little passage and a little dark room and that was where, that was the Centre at that time.

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AM: We had very little equipment, I think, there were a couple of still cameras and there was a super eight camera and a super eight projector. And the slide projector and some system for audio recording and playback. So that was how we started out in 1983. It's been a long journey from 1983 to the present where we are now a Centre for Media and Cultural Studies with students, with lot of equipment, with a growing staff and faculty body and poised to become a School of Media and Cultural Studies. So this journey over the past 28 years has indeed been a very long and exciting, fulfilling, at times, with all its ups and downs but certainly not boring journey, a very interesting journey which has meant both personal growth for me, I think, as well as growth for the Centre as a whole and growth for the kinds of

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activities that we have been doing which have over the period of time developed, morphed and become much more significant in the scheme of things of the Institute itself.

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Q: How was the starting of this Centre envisioned keeping in mind the larger.. What TISS stands for, its affiliation with social work and social sciences?

AM: Yes, I think, the idea of starting the Centre was to produce material that would, that could be used because at that point of time there was very little audio-visual documentation on innovative projects, on issues that were of relevance to social work. So, the idea was that this unit would produce, you know, go to the field, and produce material in collaboration with other, either teaching department or research units, that this material would be available for use within the Institute. So it started out with that kind of mandate and very soon the name was changed from Unit for Audio Visual records to Audio Visual Unit. That happened, maybe within a year of my joining around 1984 itself.

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AM: And it remained in this avatar of a resource unit that was mainly involved in production and then of course the production itself changed as the technology changed. The formats of production also kept on changing. But it remained in this kind of avatar till the early 90's. That point of time the Institute decided to involve us in a more sort of full fledged way in teaching. I mean, before that we did do some teaching in the form of classes with, occasional classes or short workshops with the social work students. The social work students were very interested and in fact there had been a continuous kind of feedback from the students that we need a programme that equips us with media skills that we can use for our work in the field. And, so based on that sort of continuous feedback, it was decided to start a basic course in communications from the year, I think it was 1991 that it started.

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AM: So, all social work students did this. It was called BC 12 Communications. All social work students did this course which had a component of looking critically at the media. It had a component of looking at the role of campaigns and participatory media and thirdly it had a skill component, which of course, at that time was non electronic media, so the skill components were street theatre and visual design. And at the end of the course the students did a campaign which was really a very exciting exercise because it was like working with about a group of, you know, it varied, initially it was closer to 85 but it grew to about 125 students. All of whom were divided into groups of about 8 or 10 and each of them took up a theme and did a participatory campaign, either, well, we changed it every year.

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AM: Some years it was on campus, some years it was off campus but you can imagine it was like a huge logistical exercise working with all these students and getting them to do things. For them it was a very energising experience and of course, sometimes people on campus would complain, "Why are your students putting in so much of energy into this campaign? It's not required by the curriculum. They shouldn't be spending so much of time on it." But it was just that, I think, students got so involved that they would do things like climb up the mango tree to put up banners. One day when I was working somewhere outside the Institute doing some production work, I get a phone call from the establishment section to say that, "O your students have climbed up the tree and if they fall off, we are not responsible for it." So, there was, and students would be sitting here till one and two in the morning which of course, at that time they were not supposed to be doing and they would say they were working on our campaign.

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AM: So, it generated a lot of energy and in fact students used those skills for all kinds of campaigns of their own, some of which were not always things that the Institute looked very kindly upon. Once they acquired those skills, they began using those skills in all kinds of contexts, in their field work, within the Institute and in campaigns that they participated beyond. So, I think it was a very interesting experience for us all those years through 90's and I think right until the restructuring took place we had this course that we were doing with the students of social work. So in 1996, in kind of recognition of the changed mandate of the Centre, that we were not doing just production but we were also doing teaching, we were also doing research, the nomenclature, the title of the Centre was changed from Audio Visual Unit to Unit for Media and Communications. So, that's what it was called from 1996 onwards. In 2006, the Institute underwent a major kind of restructuring which was sort of necessitated by the need for the Institute to respond more actively to the changed environment and of course the world outside had changed a lot and for many years the Institute had stayed with its flagship programmes which was the social work programme, the management programme, and then later the health and hospital administration programme. So, given the kind of way in which the whole field of the whole social sector itself had changed the emerging need for professionals, it was felt that the Institute needed to have a major rethink about the way it would offer both its education programmes as well as reformulate its research and outreach.

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AM: So from 2006, we had a series of meetings both, meetings of the faculty body as a whole as well as meetings within departments and units in order to think about where we were at, what were our strengths, what were our weaknesses, areas for improvement and given these, and given the changed external environment where do we want to go. Structurally as a part of that exercise, we came out with system where the Institute was restructured into schools and

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independent Centres which was quite a change from the earlier structure of departments and units because in this new structure you had a number of the research units coming together under the school of social sciences and then beginning to think about the teaching programmes that they would offer, whereas in the past they were only teaching in the social work programmes and not offering their own teaching programme.

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AM: And similarly this restructuring gave an opportunity to the Centre to think beyond its mandate as a resource unit and to think of how it could more fully actualise its potential to work towards the use of media for social justice, for issues of the marginalized in a more effective way. Not just through production but also through teaching, research and dissemination. So, we in fact proposed that we shift our status from a resource unit to an independent Centre, a Centre for Media and Cultural Studies with of course the potential to grown into a school at a later stage and we decided to start our own teaching programme.

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AM: At this point of time, we realised that starting a new teaching programme would require a substantial infusion of resources both in terms of new faculty to teach as well as in terms of equipment and infrastructure. And so we were fortunate to be able to apply and get a grant for a five year period from the Jamsetji Tata Trust which really helped us set up this programme and the M.A., well at that point it was meant to be a diploma programme as well as several other ideas we had to sort of enhance the intellectual and cultural climate of the Institute. Things like the Artist/Scholar in Residence programme, things like the fellowship for young film makers, these were initiatives we thought that were not really being done within the Institute or even beyond the Institute in many cases and we felt that through these initiatives we could contribute to creating a larger environment that was in a sense out of the

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commercialised media framework, yet may be contributing to it, and contributing certainly to the growth of community and alternative media.

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AM: So, that was the way we saw our mandate. So we started with a diploma programme in media and cultural studies which again was based on our experience of teaching both within the Institute, the social work programme as well as a lot of outreach teaching that we did in various other media and design Institutes across the country. So, we designed a programme that was a blend of theory and practice because this we saw as a major lacuna in the media education in the country. I mean we had programmes that were film studies programmes or mass communication programmes and then you had programmes that were more focussed on media skills whether they were within schools of journalism or within film schools and we felt there was a need to bring these two together, particularly if one wanted to create practitioners with critical faculties, practitioners who could respond to the changing media environment in innovative and out of the box ways.

AM: And hence we felt that this blend of theory and practice would be able to facilitate the creation of practitioners who could respond to the very complex media and cultural environment that was emerging in the post globalisation period. In the first year itself, after starting the programme we felt a need to upgrade the programme from a diploma programme to a Masters programme because partly we realised we have the wherewithall to deliver a Masters programme. Secondly, there was a new plan coming in and if we were offering a Masters programme, we could also ask for resources in terms of positions for that programme. So that is what we did.

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AM: And in fact, in the first batch itself we gave the students the option of continuing for a masters or exiting with a diploma and so just one student chose to go out with a diploma and we had a Masters programme. It's been a very challenging and busy 4 years, 5 years, from 2007 to 2012 crafting this new programme, maintaining it, constantly improvising on it, bringing about changes based on student feedback and also running a whole lot of other programmes that we feel have contributed very positively to the media and cultural environment both within the Institute and beyond. I think, though we are small, we have managed to make some kind of a difference, we have managed to put on board within the Institute as well as outside, critical issues of power and resistance when it comes to understanding our contemporary media and culture scapes.

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Q: Being documentary film practitioners yourselves and now training people within this course to enter such fields, why do feel this is important to first training in documenting films and also what avenues do you see for people coming out of this course?

AM: Yes, well we are documentary film makers and we feel in a sense, whether one becomes a documentary film maker or not, but the training in documentary film gives you an exposure to a range of different kinds of skills from researching to establishing rapport with subjects to producing various kinds of non-fictional outputs that can be used in the field, to aspects of visual design which are also involved and of course today with the way in which the internet has grown also web delivery and integrating web design with all of this.

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AM: So we feel in a sense documentary film is that site which permits students to apply and to hone a range of different kind of skills that are important in production and it creates a kind

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of a rounded and multi skilled professional who could enter into a range of fields whether it is from web journalism to print journalism to documentary film making to working within the mainstream television industry whether in news or elsewhere. We feel that, or as also students, going into further research at the M.Phil or Phd Level or joining other kinds of groups that are doing media and cultural studies research.

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AM: We feel that the programme offers this entire realm of possibilities and it is up to the student to decide what he or she wants to do and to choose the kinds of optional courses that would take them where they want to go or the kinds of projects and internships that would help them actualise their desires and dreams. I think it is a very flexible and open-ended programme that allows for a range of different possibilities that build on the strengths that students already have and their motivations and inclinations. As a practising documentary film maker, I think it becomes interesting to work with students because one could give experience, kind of examples from one's own experience and work as well as one is in touch with an entire community of documentary practitioners whom one can involve in the programme who come in whenever they are in town and speak to the students and give the kinds of inputs that are so essential for any practitioner to develop their own potential.

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AM: Production, of course, the Centre has been a space for media production right from the time it was a project from 1978, of course, the media that we've used have changed over a period of time and of course for the last few decades we have been working with video and we hope to continue working with that medium so long as it is there. I think the Centre has produced significant body of work that deals with issues of social change, of marginalisation, of giving voice and giving dignity to groups that otherwise are not represented in that way in the media whether it is prisoners, or slum dwellers or indigenous people.

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AM: I think the Centre's perspective and also the perspective of students now who work within the Centre have always been to celebrate resistance, creativity, dignity, and the struggle for survival that brings with it wisdom that we very often are not open to. So that has been an important strength of the Centre as far as the kind of productions it has done and it continues to make now with a lot more production happening with students being on board. As far as the research of the Centre is concerned, I mean, broadly our field is media and cultural studies research and each faculty member has their own areas of work and also we in a sense see our films also as a part of research. So it's not research and production separated but research and production.

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AM: And sometimes the output could be in film form. It could be film and written form or combination of these. For instance, the documentation project that we are doing for the Platinum Jubilee has a whole lot of different kinds of outputs whether it is in the form of posters, whether it is in the form of series of films or a web interface. If somebody at a later point, somebody wants they could also use all that material in order to do some research on trying to understand the intellectual history of the Institute. So, we see research as a kind of a broad based category that could use several different media for presentation.

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AM: And we feel increasingly this is going to be the shape of things to come. In fact, we have an idea, once we become a school to also work towards allowing media products as a part of the PhD programme. So you get a PhD not just based on a written dissertation but also a media project that you do alongside. And this is possible in several other universities across

the country but not so in India. So we would like to introduce that in the next phase of the project.

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AM: As far as outreach and creating a climate within and outside the Institute for critical media and cultural engagement is concerned, we've been having through the Artist/Scholar in Residence programme, through the fellowship programme for young film makers, through various other events and workshops and seminars that we organise and through the networks that we have with movements and campaigns and organisations. We have been working to deepen the use of media for social justice, for human rights and we feel that this is a very important mandate of the Centre that would continue to deepen and broaden as we explore the possibility of moving towards a school for media and cultural studies.

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AM: Another thing I would like say, which I don't know whether you want to ask me but I think I would like to talk about is that I think as someone who's been engaged with documenting in audio-visual form the Institute right from 1983, so in a sense, an audio visual chronicler of the Institute for the last 28 years, I think it's been a very interesting experience to also see the shifts within the institution itself. There have been several shifts in the way the Institute sees itself and its mandate in the way the Institute itself has been structured, in the way faculty body relates to each other as well as in the way the Institute itself sees the audio visual medium.

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AM: I remember when I joined the Institute, there were some people who said, "What? Audio visual within social work? I mean what is audio visual? It's all frivolous. It's song and dance and it's not something that is very significant. What place does it have within education?" I

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mean that the audio-visual medium is all commercial and it's to do with films and that has no place within serious business like social work education. And I think that attitude has changed significantly over the years to a point where I think, I mean there is an openness to the use of media among faculty, among students, there is a realisation that with media and given the kind of ubiquitous media environment in which we are situated, that media can become a very powerful and effective means of reaching out of advocacy, of use within movements and campaigns for social justice.

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AM: So that's been kind of a change so much so that I think in the Platinum Jubilee year, the entire aspect of audio visual documentation has really played a very important role and has been one of the very sort of major activities that the Institute has undertaken. Right from redesigning its logo and thinking about its identity in visual terms, I think the Institute realizes the importance of how it is seen, I mean the realm of the visible has become so important to any institution today that TISS also has to take it on board and to think about how it presents itself in visual terms.

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AM: As far as the Institute itself is concerned, I mean I would, could look at it in terms of a series of different phases where probably different areas of growth have been emphasised, partly in response to the changing world outside and a process of introspection that the Institute has done from time to time. For instance in the early 80's when I joined, that was the time when Prof. Desai joined the Institute and there was a lot of, she was able to enable a lot of re-thinking on the social work profession itself and help to facilitate a change from a more, what shall I say, institution based, service based, kind of a profession to a profession that was more involved with community work, with advocacy, with outreach not of course

forgetting its institutional responsibilities also but a professional social work that was more responsive to problems of rural India.

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AM: So, One saw that kind of shift taking place and that kind of shift getting mirrored and kind of worked out through the changes that took place within the teaching programmes, through the initiation of the rural campus, through the kinds of research projects the Institute got involved in. I think another major shift which took place was in 2006, where again it was realized that the areas of intervention of social intervention have become so large and complex that there is a need for a more nuanced professional human service professional and there is a need for specialisation and for having people to respond to various new emerging challenges, whether it is disaster management or whether it is something like issues of labour, globalisation and labour, or whether it is social entrepreneurship or for that matter media and cultural studies or development studies.

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AM: So this responsiveness of the Institute to the changing world outside, I think is a very important strength of the Institute and this kind of collective process of rethinking oneself and reinventing oneself I think is quite unique. I don't know how much it happens in other universities which are very large and entities that probably don't come together the way we do. Of course, certainly the Institute has grown tremendously in size. When I joined I think there must have been about 25 faculty members and now we are, I don't know, more than, probably, I don't know 150-200, 300. There are lot of people here on projects.

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AM: But certainly, I mean, at that time, I remember, when I joined, I was taken around personally to meet each faculty member and each person within the administration and we

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knew everybody by name and in fact when new faculty joined the Centre till about quite, I think till the 2000's, I mean we would take them around and introduce them to each one. So it was really like a little family and now it's grown into a maybe a big joint family, or may be the family no longer applies. It's grown into a much larger entity where sometimes one doesn't know...

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AM: And even the students, I mean, one knew each student particularly after one started teaching the programme, one knew each student by name and face. That is no longer possible because our student body has gone so large and I don't even know if students sometime know who are faculty members. So its a different kind of a space from what it was in the 80's and sometimes one can look back with nostalgia those times and say well it was a much more personal space. But I think what the Institute has done is very important and perhaps it just had to grow and one can't just be nostalgic about what was but I think one needs to think about what can be and how one takes things beyond and how one never stops looking critically at oneself and where one is going.

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AM: I think that's one thing if there is one thing that has been fostered in the Institute across the board in every School and Centre. It is this constant process of responding to the external environment, constant process of looking critically at what one does and thinking of how one can respond more effectively through one's programmes of teaching, research, field action and dissemination.

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Q: Now on like on a personal note, you and sir, are known to be the couple who teach together in class and perhaps probably the only ones ever in the history of TISS who've done

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that. So just want to know a little bit about your interaction with students, their response to both of you working together and any anecdotes and stories in the classroom and all. Experiences that you can remember? Something that stood out?

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AM: Well, we first started teaching together when this basic course in media and communication was introduced. I remember the first year we were teaching together and we asked the students to give us feedback after the course and one of them, few of them had wrote "please don't both talk at the same time", because I think we had also not really taught that much together at that point of time and maybe we tended to... in our enthusiasm to get the point across... to both speak in stereoscopic way which became a little difficult for the students to follow. But I think within a year's time we kind of got our act together and we worked out who says what, who, who can best speak about certain areas and I think it's been a very enjoyable and interesting experience for us.

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AM: I am not sure if all students like it or not but certainly I think some of them do. And I think what makes it interesting for students is that we are also practitioners and we have a very intense engagement with the field that continues. So I think that helps us to bring into class live experiences, examples, anecdotes and a kind of engagement with the field that helps students when they themselves have to go into the field.

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AM: Other than that in terms of anecdotes, as I mentioned earlier, in the earlier times, working with social work students and doing these campaigns was always a very exciting experience and students came up with all kinds of things. I remember one year the students had a high level of dissatisfaction with the Institute and they chose to turn the lens upon the

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Institute itself and the campaigns they came up with were all to do with changes in governance, with facilities that they wanted. And of course, that was a little bit difficult for us to kind of support because from the Institute itself, they were not very sure whether they wanted students to do this as a part of a course. But we felt that when we say that a campaign is participatory, when we say that students have the freedom to say what they want within the campaign, as long as they are not crossing certain boundaries of affecting somebody's dignity or not attacking anybody individually, they should have the right to choose their campaign topics and to treat it the way they want. And as teachers we stood by that and I mean, I feel happy that we did that, and I think the students also respected the fact that we stood up for them.

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AM: Of course, at that point of time it was not an easy thing to do. I have also been warden of the women's hostel and I have had a whole lot of experiences that are related to that. You want me to talk about it? So, being a warden is a I must say an absolutely thankless job because you get it from both sides. The administration thinks you are too lax with the students and the students thinks you are a representative of the administration and hence have to be attacked at every point of time whenever anything goes wrong, whether it is from water shortage on campus to timings that they come back.

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AM: So, given that kind of tight rope walk that one is doing, I think I tried to be as facilitative as possible during the three years that I was warden. When I joined as warden, I was handed this big torch and I was told I have to go for rounds every night in order to see what students are upto and I said, "I am certainly not... the Institute security can do that. I am sure I am not been paid to take rounds to and look into bushes but I will do is go to the hostel and to speak to students and find out particularly at the beginning of the year, students are home-sick, they

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might need certain things or you know the facilities are not what they are, what they should be, or repairs that are needed.”

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AM: Any other problems, health issues and so and so. I would go to the hostel to chat with the students and of course at that time I had a little daughter who was just 4 or 5 years old and she would come along with me holding this big torch and of course the girls all loved her, and they would catch hold of her and plait her hair, decorate her, in ways that she felt very happy about because I could never do that with her at home.

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AM: So she at one point she told me in fact, "I think I want to live in the hostel". She was quite happy to abandon us at home and shift into the hostel. So, it was actually good fun in a way. I mean one grew very close to the students during that period of time when one was warden because one was not just seeing them as within the classroom but also responding to various other needs and requirements and demands that they had. But of course I was quite happy when the three years were over.

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Q: *On a more emotional note, like this Centre for Media and Cultural Studies is always like your baby, you've seen it in all its avatars, you've seen it grow. You've envisioned a future for it, you are in the process of making it happen, I mean, how do you connect with the Centre?*

AM: I think certainly I see it as my baby, but then a baby grows and one has to let go too. And you realise that and today I think the Centre is much more than me the Centre is very many people, the Centre is also the students, the Centre is also alumni, the Centre is also people who are associated with it, other stakeholders with whom we have collaborations, so I

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think it's very important to not to cling on to something but to see it grow and let it go and see where it will go and may be it might go in directions that one never anticipated. I think that's a part of, and I think even TISS itself, I mean, has gone in that direction.

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AM: I am sure when Prof. Desai came in and she didn't know where it is going to go during the time that she was there. She did her best and gave it a strong basis which was based on her convictions and what she thought was good for the profession and I think she was able to take everybody on board on that journey. And similarly I think, of course, not everybody will be on that journey. There will be people who, there will be dissenters in every system and we got to make space for that dissent.

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AM: But certainly I think today the Centre as well as TISS on a whole is on a roll in many ways, on a very exciting journey and maybe sometimes I get this feeling that we are growing too fast and I am breathless a lot of the time, metaphorically if not literally. But I think it's a journey and I am sure the faculty... Once I am no longer here- which is not that far down the line- I have another 9 years to retire, but I mean I am sure it will continue to do great things. And may be not the things it is doing today, may be something else all together. May be technology will change, maybe there will be no more documentary film making anymore, who knows? I mean it's a very volatile and changing world that we are in and I think at every point of time we need to respond to it as best we can with all our commitment and enthusiasm.

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Q: *Towards the end, one message you would have to TISS?*

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AM: I think and maintain that, it's very important that TISS continues to be an open ended, flexible, space that is critical of itself that allows diversity, that allows for both individual and collective development. I think it's very important that it continues to be a space where free thinking and free speech is possible. For me I have seen it as that kind of space. It has allowed me to do many things that I wanted to do and I hope it always continues to remain thus.