



Prof. Armaity S. Desai

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Prof. Armaity S. Desai is an eminent alumna of TISS, who graduated in 1956, specialising in Family and Child Welfare. She then worked as a faculty member at College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. She did her doctoral studies in the United States and returned in 1969. She later became Principal of the College of Social Work and then the Director of TISS in 1982. She played a key role in rethinking social work curricula, making the profession more community and rural oriented. During her tenure at TISS, she set up the Rural Campus at Tuljapur. She left TISS to become the Chairperson of the University Grants Commission in 1995 and retired from this position in 1999. Prof. A.S. Desai has presided over several important committees and has received many honours including the Katherine Kendall Award for distinguished service to social work education.



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Q: Good Morning Dr. Desai. We are very happy to have you here with us on this journey down memory lane that we are going to take together.

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AD: Thank you for inviting me.

Q: We would like to start right at the beginning of your association with TISS. Could you talk a little about how you joined here as a student, what went into that decision and what were your first experiences as a student at TISS?

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AD: I really didn't have any decision to make because right from my childhood my interest was in social work. I used to play with dolls and imagine it was an orphanage and look after them all, wanted to give them chicken soup, the best I can do for them, you know that was the kind of thing I grew up with. My parents were both in social work and my interest was very much in that field. The school I went to also nurtured a feeling for others. 'Others' was the motto of our school and it nurtured that attitude. So I was very much interested in doing things in the field of social work and then I had a role model, my aunt, my father's sister who was a graduate of Tata Institute.

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So I had very clear goals right from the days I was in school. When I finished school I was

almost ready to enter Tata Institute but unfortunately I was told 'You can't come till you finished your college'. So I felt like I was being forced to go to college for no reason what so ever. But I went to college and joined St. Xaviers. Took sociology as my major and fortunately for me right from the time I was in Inter Arts, the college principal Fr. Balaguer took leadership to start a Social Service League and that gave me the opportunity to get very thoroughly involved.

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We did a lot of work in a slum in Parel in Bombay and then went on to work even in a village in Karjat. So it gave me a grounding, a feel for people, a feel for what the realities were of living in a slum, so much so that Father insisted that we spent our vacation, ten days in the slum, living in the slum, so we put up a tent and stayed in the slum and we learnt how hard it was. How difficult it was to have water, to feel clean in a place like that, to wash our clothes and yet feel that we didn't look washed. So we began to feel with the people because we lived there and felt the whole situation as it was in the community.

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In fact we went there to build a water platform with water taps on it; you can understand how one experienced the whole thing. So this is how I got ready, in a sense, for coming into Tata Institute.

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And then my aunt at that time, in the 1940s, as you know, we had very big riots in Bombay, prior to the independence. The area around J J Hospital, Nagpada, was very badly affected. My aunt was then working in the J J Hospital as a social worker. And she had to walk all the way to J J

Hospital because even the tram lines, we just a tram line in those days from my house to there, they didn't work... she used to walk along the tram lines to get there. She was very devoted and in spite of the difficulties she went.

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The Superintendent of the Hospital heard about it and then he sent the ambulance to bring her. So I grew up with this environment and the environment nurtured in me the interest I had in social work, even further and it was almost a natural corollary that I should be in social work. I came for the interview, got selected and joined the Tata Institute. So that's my background preparation for coming into social work.

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Q: Can you talk about your experiences as a student, what was it like? You had a background in sociology and also social work...But coming to an Institution where you were looking at it like a profession, what was the difference, what were the changes, who were the people who inspired you? Could you tell us a little bit about what were the ideas that fascinated you?

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AD: I think what seemed to stimulate us more was the field work. The experience of being placed, being supervised, being guided and learning from the field seemed to be an experience which was different, whereas the classroom seemed only replicated from what we did in the college. So that classroom didn't have the same stimulation but the field work did have that. My first year field work was in the remand home in Dongri. It was quite an experience to be with children in an Institution where in many ways we felt appalled at the conditions of living. Where

children didn't have much activity. They were just milling around, there was not much schooling for them because they were short term.

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They tried to introduce some activities but weren't organized. So one learnt a great deal from these experiences on how we treat children. How the society looks for them, and cares for them. The very fact that it used to be a jail, earlier on, Tilak was in prison there, there was a room there still dedicated to him and then children are in that institution so it seemed to be not the most favorable way of looking after children. That was on experience and then of course afternoons we spent time in Antop Hill doing what was called group work. It was all very split in those days, not the way to do social work that I learnt over my experience.

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We did case work in one place, we did group work in another place, and it seemed to be detached. It didn't have the kind of integration that one looks for in social work practice. That's where the beginnings of my interest in integrating social work came into existence. I went to Antop Hill to do recreation work with children and I was very upset because I used to lead a girl guide team in the same school I went to in Bombay, the Queen Mary's and I was told I had to give that up and go to this place for my group work. I said "but that's what I do, I have started the thing, nurtured it for five years, why should I close it?" I was told I had to close it and with great sadness of heart I had to close it and then send these children off into other Girl Guide companies also in the same school.

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And then I went to Antop. Then they told me to start another girl guide group, I said 'Nothing doing. You made me close a group; I'm not starting any Group.' But I willingly took the recreation group and was quite okay with that. So we had first year experience. Then came my plans for second year. I was again deeply upset because I came with a desire to do the community organization specialization because we had specializations at the Institute but unfortunately in that year they decided to stop that programme altogether and redesign it. I think they were passing it out from one faculty Dr. Mehta to a different faculty Dr. Kaikobad. It was a change.

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In that process, we lost out. In that process I didn't know what to do. I was very unhappy and Professor Kaikobad counseled me. He said, 'You better go to family and child welfare because Prof. Desai is very flexible and you are the kind of person who needs a flexible teacher. If you go for medical and psychiatric social work, Dr. Bannerji is very strict and straight and you will have to follow the path.'

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So I went to Mrs. Desai and told her, "Look Mrs. Desai, I'm coming to family and child welfare because I can't get community organization. But I will come here only if you give me community organization. If you let me go for field work to a community." She said, "If you're going to bargain with me, then I will also bargain with you, then you will spend some time on casework and some time in community organization." I said "Okay. I'll settle for that." So I had my field work again split - case work in a small school in Dadar Parsi colony. It was a Parsi

organization; Mrs. Desai didn't know that actually that nursery was started with the help of my parents and specially my mother who had background in nursery school work. I went there and did some work with the disturbed children.

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In the afternoon I used to go to the Potters' colony. That also became a very unique experience because at that time the college of social work at Nirmala Niketan was just getting established and they were looking for faculty. When I was finishing my first year, the head of that order, the Sisters of the Heart of Mary asked me if I would join them as a faculty when I finished and I was still at the end of my first year. I said I'd be most happy to. Then they said, "We'd like you to take up a project in Kumbharwada because we have already started some health work there. The head of the home science college was actually a nurse by background and she had started some work in Kumbharwada and they requested me to start the social work part there.

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So I agreed. I started the social work aspects in Kumbharwada and had three students for field work supervision from the College of Social Work who were first year students. I supervised them and at the same time developed the programme in Kumbharwada. That was a very unique experience. Mrs. Desai put a lot of inputs in my supervision of the supervisors and also supervising students etc. I enjoyed that. I thoroughly enjoyed that experience. And I thought Tata Institute was worth it for that rounded experience for I could also pick up cases, I could do group work, I worked with the community, a very difficult community that didn't come forward in the initial stages. But finally came forward and gave me great cooperation when they found that all through the monsoon period when the place was flooded I came there regularly, twice a week. I

would walk through the muck, carrying my chappals in my hand and after getting to the Centre, wash my feet and wear my chappals. So they appreciated that.

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At the end of the period a lot of cooperation came from the community. Finally months later in about January when we had a very successful Republic Day programme in the community, I asked them, “How come you are now cooperating with me?” They said, “We watched you, all people come but they run away during monsoon, you're the only one who stayed with us. So we were particularly impressed and we felt you were truly interested in us and we are happy to cooperate.” So that’s how I worked there, I think I learnt so much there that the whole root of my interest in what I later did as integrated social work practice - really are born out of that experience that I had in Tata Institute. So that was my one area of interest.

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Coming here to Tata Institute, at the end of the day, very late was quite an experience and I told you a little earlier. I used to come home quite late. I used to live here on campus. It was too late in the night. The staff car would come and pick me up and bring me back and the driver became very fond of me. So one day he took me home to give me special rabri his wife had prepared. So it was a very nice family type of atmosphere which we had here. It was lovely.

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Q: You were probably the second batch to come to this campus. Could you talk a little about what the campus was like at that time? What was student life like? Any other memorable anecdotes that you might have about being a student that you would like to share?

AD: At that time we were just the second batch. So the campus was very raw. It was overgrown with huge grass. The back side of the building had very tall grass and a lot of snakes, scorpions, it was full of creepy crawly creatures and also at night the jackals used to bark and wail at us. It was really like living out in the country. It wasn't like living in the city. Look at Chembur today. It's a gas chamber. At that time it was pure clean air. When you got out from the slums of Kumbharwada and came here to the campus, you came to a different country. It was clean and beautiful and your tiredness just evaporated. It was a lovely place to be. Also it was very small. Few faculty. Everyone knew everyone. Students were very few- we were forty in each class. So we were 80 students and a lot of interaction between first year students, second year students. A lot of romancing going on between the students. Quite a few couples as a result of all that. The atmosphere was such; it was hard to not be romantic on the campus.

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It was so rustic, that even our hot water was made in a boiler. In those days you had that tall water filling equipment and in between was empty space for the coal to be put in and the water would be boiled and we would all shout "Kalidas, Kalidas! Bring me the water!" We were really living in a rural kind of environment in those days and it was so charming to be in that environment. Only the connection between the institute and the city was very hard in those days, the Sindhis who had left Pakistan were being settled in Chembur. So the only population we had was the Sindhi camps that had been set up and on the other side we had the camps for the people who had been thrown out of the city. People who were criminals and told to stay out of the city. Many of them used to stay here in this area. On one side we had the criminals; on the other we had the camps. And then here we were sitting in the middle and all around us were the fields and

lovely orchards. Chiku orchards. The Chikuwadi was really a wadi not what it is today.

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So these were the ways in which we lived in those days and we had this rattle truck bus to go to Sion. This was run by a private individual. The footboard was so weak that we afraid that we would fall. We had to climb in somehow and get to Sion if we couldn't get the Institute bus to go. We had to walk to Govandi station. Nothing like three wheeler or any other facility. And the train also had an engine. It was not electricity powered one. It was only once in an hour or so. If we missed one we had to wait another hour.

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We had lot of hardships in that sense but it was a lovely existence. I really feel so charmed that I had those two years at the Institute.

Q: Could you talk a little about your relationship with your teachers.

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The teachers were very friendly because of the closeness that we all had. Professor Wadia was our Director and he was the old stiff upper lipped British type. But he was a very kind person when you came closer to him. He would invite us for tea - the student union group executive members to come and have tea with him in the Director's room. It would be very friendly in that sense. He used to come for lunch to the canteen wearing the solar hat because he didn't like the sun between the Director's office and the canteen. So we had the kind of relationship which was very close. I remember Dr. Bannerji, she used to be a little distant. We teased her one day and

said, “We have never come to your house, you have never invited us”. So she one day invited us to her house and gave us all the Bengali sweets - gulab jamuns and rasgullas and what not and even took us up to her bedrooms in one of those row houses. We sat on her bed and chatted with her. It became a very friendly environment. Prof. Panakkal was then the Registrar and he used to wear these orange robes and had shaved off his head also.

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When we went to his house, he would say, “Don’t make noise, my wife won’t like it.” There was no wife there but he would say that. So we were like that - in a very different friendly kind of environment on the campus. Even other professors who didn’t live on campus— everyone. Professor Lorenzo was our statistics professor and I disliked statistics and I didn’t really work at it I must say. I never liked maths so statistics was equally abominable for me. So just before the exam I went to him and said, “Tell me what books to read.” In those days one could do that. He said, “Now you’re coming to me!” I said, “Of course now I’m coming to you because I have to study!” It was like that. Then later on he told me before the results were out. He said, “You know, you just made it.” I said, “what? Did I get some good grade?”

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He said, “I gave you a C. You could have got a D.” So you know, this kind of a relationship, very open, very forthright and at the same time friendly. So we students also had good friendships here. Some of us took off on a rattletrap station wagon, went to Pune and saw the Khadakhwasla Academy. Then it broke down because there was no petrol and there was not gauge to find how much petrol it had. So we had great fun doing all sorts of things as a group and I must say I enjoyed thoroughly those two years. I was happy I was on the campus. I stayed

in a room with two Burmese girls. They were sent by the Burmese government. We used to have Burmese students a lot in those days deputed by the government. They used to stay up all the night and used to talk a lot but since they used to talk Burmese I had no idea what they spoke so I fell asleep. I had no problem. Fast asleep. We played little jokes on each other. Once we tried to make a ghost with a white sari and all that. I lost my sari in the bargain. But we tried to frighten some second year students. Because after dinner we sometimes had fun among ourselves. We had a good time. It was a friendly atmosphere. I don't think we had groups or anything of that kind. Not that I remember. Even personnel management students, social work were all mixed up. First year was common to all of us so we were friends from the beginning. Then we got divided. Then in Family and Child Welfare we were only eight of us. There weren't that many. Because out of 40 almost 20 went to personnel management; the rest went to social work. It was great I must say.

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One of the things I can talk about is going to a camp. We went to Gujarat. Mrs. Desai arranged for us to go and see sights and places related to social work in Gujarat which was a rather interesting experience that we had. We went to places like Marole where they had a place for mental patients' treatment. It was very interesting. The hospital was there where the treatment took place. But the patients stayed in little huts with their own families. It was very rural community and was built in that style. It was most interesting and then we went to one Gandhian ashram and met a lady called Petit. She was from the Petit family who had given herself up to the Gandhian work. I don't remember the connections with the Petit family. She was a Petit family person and she was there. She was quite old and bedridden by the time we were there.

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But she was well spoken of and I'm happy that I had an experience of meeting her. I thought that this was something that needed replication by schools of social work because this wasn't being done mostly. So when I joined Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work I introduced it there and made sure that we had proper rural experience for the students and then when I came to Tata Institute there again I made it very clear that we have a rural or a tribal exposure for our students.

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Our students come from urban areas. I was an urban person. I had a rural experience because as I told you our social league had a project in a place called Gotmal, a small village called Karjat where our students used to go. That itself was a very useful thing because Father Balaguer used to take only male students. Then one day I got upset and told the other girls, "What is this? Only they go? We don't go?" So in the meeting I told Father Balaguer take us girls, he said, "I don't have an escort for girls." He said he didn't have any female escorts for girls. In those days there were only men.

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So finally he said "Okay, I'll take you." Only in my BA final year I could go. And we did go to this village. Our work was in two things. One was we went to the women in the villages and we talked to them and taught them how to sew their blouses in a very simple manner. Someone had taught us how to make a *choli* very simply. They were very interested. So we taught them with these typical Maharashtra *khands* and they enjoyed it. Then one day when they went to the village. We had two experiences. One was when we went to a woman's house and she said, "I saw you drink water in that house yesterday". So I said, "Yeah, I was thirsty so I drank water."

She said, 'If you want water, drink in my house.' I said, "Why shouldn't I drink there?" It was totally unknown to me, any caste barriers in villages; I was not exposed to it in my life growing up in Bombay. I said, "No no, I don't believe in any caste. I take water everywhere." She was really unhappy with me. This was my first experience with the caste system.

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Then one day when we were in the village, the women said "You run back to the camps because there is going to be a storm and we can see it coming up." So we ran back and interestingly, they had built a big tent for us girls and the boys didn't have a tent, they had four poles and a cloth on top. For us, for privacy they had a tent and the whole tent started rocking when we had come in to put the sewing material inside. I realized it was going to fall so I said, "Quick! Everyone get out!" I shouted and we all tried to get out but by the time we reached the edge of the tent, the whole tent collapsed. Fortunately the iron pole fell in the middle and nobody was hurt.

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But the boys had to actually drag us out, it was pouring, all our clothes were inside. We were wet and we had to wear their shirts and bush shirts and everybody's clothes and then we had to hang on to the boys' roof because that was getting blown off because then we would really be nowhere. We really had an exciting time and then finally we got back into shape. Then one night I wanted to go to the toilet so I told my friend, Roshan Dastoor, who was also a Tata Institute graduate later on, she said, "Come, we'll go together." So she got up with my torch, I gave it to her and then I was wearing my house coat when I suddenly got a piercing pain in my toe. It was a scorpion, it had bitten my toe and I was in real pain.

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They didn't know what to do so they took me to the primary health centre, the doctor there was more interested that the fact that I was from Xaviers' because he did his inter from Xaviers and all that. I told him, "I'm in pain, please do something." He says "Well I don't know, I'll burn it." I said "You'll burn it with what?" He said "With matches." I said "Now I'll have a burn on top of the scorpion bite!" It was quite bad. Anyway he did it and it was pretty bad and it became worse. So finally Father Fuster was there, he said, "I'll take you back to Bombay." So in the middle of the night we got into a jeep. Roshan also and Father Fuster and we drove back to Bombay and believe it or not, all through the night, that Scorpio constellation was right in front of us as we were driving down. Anyway, we phoned my parents when we came near Arora Cinema at Matunga and my mother was very frightened. My father called the doctor. My family doctor called another doctor.

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Finally they decided very interestingly, they said they had to put my foot into an opium lotion, I mean water with opium in it or some related thing like that and kept my feet in it for 24 hours and they knocked me out, I slept through it. When I got up it was fine, I didn't have any pain. Then I told my parents, "I'm going back." They weren't very keen. My father was always supportive in these things, my mother was scared. I went back. Father Balaguer was so delighted because he said, "You know you reaffirmed my faith in people, you have come back to the camp for this." So these were all learning and growth experiences throughout our lives, student days, college days. Tata Institute- I didn't have excitement in Tata Institute of that kind but we experienced these things and we learnt a lot from them but we did have a scorpion bite during my time. Our hostel person, Kalidas, he was bitten by a scorpion. We had a classmate from

Hyderabad and she knew some kind of method of bringing the poison down with a mantra. She did something with her finger and pencil and the fellow wasn't in pain after that. She had learnt some methodology for bringing that poison out, what it was I don't know. Anyway we had that experience here.

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A year after I left, one of my juniors died with a snake bite here. We were told not to walk at the back of the building because... now days we use that short cut to go to the dining hall. We were not allowed to use that spot because there was very tall grass in that area, it was very dangerous, but she used that and it was late evening and she died of a snake bite. The institute in those days was quite a place to live in. Now of course now you don't see any of that. There were still some snakes, because when I was living in the Director's bungalow, I was sitting in the back room which faces the back garden and I was reading and suddenly I saw some movement, and I thought it was a stick, and it wasn't. It was a snake and it was right outside my door. I called the watchmen, he called some others and they were trying to get the snake out when the rains came. The snake was in the gutter, the water washed him out, and then I think they took him out and away. So snakes are what they are in our environment, very natural environment I would say.

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Q: Being a woman and having to go into new spaces to work with people, did you think you faced any special challenges or did it help you? How did your gender play a role in the kind of work you did in the field?

AD: You know, till I came to Tata Institute I took my being a woman quite naturally. It didn't

seem to make a difference whether I was a woman or not a woman. I was a woman and that was it. After I came here, yes, I realized to some extent that being a woman Director had certain meanings to people and that it would have an effect. But that I had to learn to experience. One thing I learnt was, for example with union and all the staff, the staff of the union. They were very respectful. No matter what happened, I wouldn't feel danger of any kind. Any physical danger of any kind, so I think the men in key positions used to feel that.

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But I did not feel it because they were that, the limit they knew, as I was a woman and that distance helped in dealing with them. Whereas they couldn't deal with them, I could deal with them in certain situations, so that helped to a certain extent. But some of the male faculty as you recall, did think that they could take charge of me and run the Institute and they had to learn the hard way, because that's not how I functioned. Because I had open communication with everyone and I think I had credibility with the faculty with whom I worked. In some way I was able to deal with that situation and limit their activities finally. It took a lot of effort and a lot of pain to do that and that's when I learnt that being a woman head can have negative reactions, not all men, only 2 or 3 of them, but it can be because of power... it had something to do with power and control and I was quite knowledgeable dynamics wise. That's what it is and one has to deal with that and to do that one has to gather sufficient support - which I did work on and that support helped me then to limit those who were trying to teeter totter the power balance within the Institution. So you learn by doing these things.

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Same thing when I went to the UGC. The union there thought that because I was a woman they

could get more out of me. They learnt the hard way that that wasn't so. That they will get what they deserve and they won't get what they don't. And they learnt it. To the extent that when I terminated three men for corruption, not a single union member ever raised their voice. Because they realized that I was fair. That I didn't have any special favorites or anything and that what I did, I did after I had enough evidence to do something. I wasn't doing it out of any other thing. So people learn in the end. You have to do it. As a woman... people are not used to seeing women as heads. You have to take that responsibility as a woman, still be a woman, not become a man, and not be like a man. You be a woman Director, still you have that nurturing attitude, that attitude towards growth of people, their development is important to you... that is the kind of thing a woman head is much more good at, I think, and can do, and should do and shouldn't give that up. On the other hand you have to be firm and that firmness is what helps. In fact one of the secretaries in the Government of India, Ministry of Education once told somebody, ' she has an iron hand inside a soft glove.' So you know people have to learn at the end of things.

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Q: Could you tell us the anecdote about K R Narayanan and his time at TISS, when he was a student?

AD: Well it was much before my time but this story I have come to know from Prof. Kulkarni who always told stories in very humorous ways so I can't measure up to him but this story goes like this, K R Narayanan was an applicant of the J N Tata Trust for going abroad and he was selected Mrs. Vesugar was then the person in charge of students going abroad and I knew her personally because I was also sent abroad when she was the personnel in charge, then the director of it or whatever she was called.

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And she was a terror, she would decide on everything. What ties they should take, what shirts, what color they should take etc and she used to rule everybody's lives. She even tried to tell me what saris I should take but that I was firm not to, which made her very angry. She one day got so angry with me, she said "Your father thinks he's god, you brother thinks he's the lord and what do you think you are?" You know she was so angry with me, she knew all of us. So she was quite angry. Anyway she told him [K.R. Narayanan]. He came to see her and said "Before I go I want to go and see my father and say goodbye." I think he was a primary school teacher or something like that. So he decided to go to Kerala.

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In those days transport was very bad, she said, "Don't go, you'll never come back on time." He said, "No I will come back on time." He went and sure enough he missed his boat. He couldn't get back on time. So then something had to be done about it. His cousin was a student of Tata Institute in those days. So he approached Clifford Manshardt and asked whether his cousin could stay there till he could... you know he was to go 6 months later. In between he became a journalist for the Times of India. So he was allowed to stay there in the hostel and he joined the chemmy Kulkarni was telling me, this place where they stayed was about ten men, all of them in that one room. So they had renamed the thing... they called it 'Number Ten, Downing Street'. As a label for their lodgings. So Narayanan joined them there and then finally went. But Mrs. Vesugar was very annoyed with him for having not listened to what she has said because she was hell bent on saying that every single person who went did exactly how what she wanted them to do. Then she was a very... she wanted the Tata Scholars to shine out, when they went there. She would even take them to dinner and show them how to use forks and knives and how to behave

at the table and all such things. She was a Gandhian to begin with, for many years. What happened in between, I don't know because she didn't seem to be very Gandhian in her dress afterwards when I met her.

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Q: Do you have any memories or anecdotes about Prof Behram Mehta?

AD: Behram Mehta was great fun. I think if I ever enjoyed a teacher it was Behram Mehta. What he taught was never from any books. So you never knew what to study. At the end of the whole thing, it was impossible for us to get ready for his examinations. But he, in the class was very... his ideas, his logical sense; his way of putting forward was really excellent. We enjoyed his classes in community organisation. Not that we knew what he taught at the end of it but it was the way he presented things. Of course he was very humorous too. And he was a tease from the word go. He knew my mother because they were in college together. He knew her as Ms. Nariman and when I became a student here, in the class when he would do the roll call, he would say, "Ms. Nariman" and it was Ms. Desai right in front of him but he would tease me saying "Nariman" and all the class students would ask me, "What's the matter, why are you called so?" So one day I got fed up. I got up and said, "Dr. Mehta, my mother married before she had me" and that was the end. After that he never said anything.

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One other student of ours, years down the line, not when I was a student but many years later... I was teaching here when Mrs. Desai had gone on an assignment to Sri Lanka. I used to come on a Saturday and teach courses for her and one of the students used to wear a skirt with a lot of flowers on it. It was very usual for her. So he used to call her Ms. Flower Pot. He was like that.

When I came back from America... as a student I had gone there... the first time I came to Tata Institute and got off from the taxi he said, “Hello! How's Marilyn Monroe”... all kinds of things he would say but he was a superb teacher and we thoroughly enjoyed him. Of course we students used to sit before the exam together and try to sort out our thoughts together because we didn't know what he had taught and where we began and where we had to end. But his exam questions were also like that, open...something you could answer with your thoughts, you didn't need books for that. He wasn't the book type at all, he didn't give you references, just didn't have any such thing. A very good teacher.

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But sociology I didn't like, which was a first year subject, because I had done sociology in my earlier years. Full two years of the BA. So just one course in sociology wasn't much. I thought that the Institute should offer some electives, if you didn't want sociology which other subject you could take rather than do the same thing again. We had a very set syllabus and hardly any electives in those days because there were hardly any teachers. There was a head but no team. There was hardly anyone in the department. Only one teacher and one teacher did everything whether it was field work or teaching. Of course the other teachers taught. We had one Murthy; he used to teach personnel management. He was head of personnel management but he also taught us social problems. He was another very humorous teacher. We enjoyed his classes also. Whereas when we came back here Indian Social problems were being taught and students used to object saying the teacher was very boring. Whereas in our time, she was very good. Also in our time it was not taught by one teacher. We had all different teachers teaching Indian Social Problems based on their area of problem, whether it was criminology or family or individual or whatever it was. It was very interesting, a good course.

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So not integrated again because different teachers came and there was no link between them. But it was a good course. We didn't have to study too hard I think. We studied, we did go to the library every evening, all of us, but I think we weren't pressured. There was not that type of pressure on us in those days.

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Q: Do you think there was any influence of Gandhianism on social work because that was the ideology in terms of service to people that was very prominent outside. Was there any resonance within social work education?

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I think that in Kumarappa's time there would have been because he was very close to the Gandhian Philosophy. His brother was the Gandhian economist. But I think by the time, we came to the Institute, that kind of a culture was not very strong here. It was... I don't think that became the central part. But many of us had lived through the independence period. At that time we were a crop of that kind. So our commitments were very national and all that. Belief that change can occur. We can be the agents of change. That was very much within us. But I felt that our course didn't lead to that kind of thing. It was very heavily weighted by case work and human behavior and psychiatry and all those things.

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It wasn't at all related to the basic issues of poverty, issues of development, the Panchayati Raj

System which was being developed, community development movement. All these things were given a sort of a 'quicky' but they were not really central to our learning because Dr. Bannerji was a graduate of Chicago University and Mrs. Desai of Columbia. Both were heavily weighted towards psychiatry. Had a lot of therapeutic social work. That came into our curriculum to a great extent. That seemed to be strengthened further because in those days there was an American technical mission to India and they had sent out whole team of social work teachers about 5-7 of them and they were placed in different schools of social work - Delhi, Tata Institute etc. Luckily we didn't have a therapeutic one, but one was very much into urban development and racial integration. It was a black man from California and he was very much into the whole racial situation in the US and all that. So it was his inputs in my community work in Kumbharwada which played a very wide role in helping me to learn participation, community involvement and all that. So I felt that was a very useful thing. But the majority that came and later the team leaders had a very heavy therapeutic orientation. They were the ones who initiated the annual workshops for the schools of social work and developed curriculum in social work, case work, human behavior etc. So the social development aspects were largely not there. Even in that curriculum which eventually became the Association of Schools of Social Work and it was in the 1970s that the curriculum in social work development and all began.

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Q: We were talking about this whole issue of the relevance of the social work curriculum to the social realities of the country and how it was when you were a student and the change it brought to the later relevance... could you reflect on that?

AD: After I came back in 1969 from the United States, I somehow began to feel that we weren't

being very relevant in what we were teaching in our courses and all this must have come because I also did my PhD research on looking at how relevant was Social work in the United States for students from other countries and the two variables I had were students from developed countries and students from western countries as opposed to students from developing countries/ non western cultures. It was a very interesting study of all foreign students who were then students, at that time there were only 166 in all the schools of social work. We developed a questionnaire and it was sent to the schools and administered by the faculty there. It was a self administered questionnaire but one faculty was in charge. So I got back a fairly large number of responses and then I did a more in-depth study of a few campuses. Where there were just a couple of people it would be a waste to go but where there was some concentrations like New York and Cleveland and I went there and interviewed students.

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It was quite an appropriate finding that students from non western and from developing countries did not find the learning that applicable to their requirements. They found sometime that their field work was not very suitable. For example, a student came from a Muslim country. He was placed, of all things, in a very black community where norms of sexual behavior were not stringent and they were relaxed, there were girls with pregnancies before marriage and all that and he was in a state of shock. He couldn't deal with that situation. Why was he placed there, when I asked the faculty he said., "He comes from a country where there is poverty so we put him in a poverty setup." Regardless of looking at the culture also which has an impact on the learning. So I learnt a great deal from my study and found it useful. That got me thinking that okay, when I get back what this will have relevance for me in India, so I found our curriculum was quite old.

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It had all this case work, group work, community work all that business. Students were placed in field work in separate places like I said earlier so I began the changes in that. Even in the US, I have to tell you this because it has relevance. Because of my field work experience in Kumbharwada and my ability to move from case work and community and back because of all that background which I already had, when I came to the [United] States for my field work, they had again put me in family and community service. It was okay, I didn't mind that but I told them, I also want a community placement. They never heard of that. They said you cannot have a split placement. I said, "Never mind, I have done a split placement and I'm quite comfortable with split placement." Then I persuaded them. I told them to let me try for one semester, if you find that I won't be able to cope then I won't do it. Then they placed me in an urban renewal programme which was very close to my university. I learnt a great deal from that experience because it had a good community organization teacher in the school and I was able to make all the necessary learnings from him. When I came back to India, I decided this split business is no good, we should have one placement and the student should learn in a more integrated way. So we did a lot of restructuring of field work. I did a lot also of restructuring of the class room. Developing courses on social development issues and all that

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So in the meantime, the International Association of the Schools of Social Work also had a very strong connection, starting again from my PhD thesis for which I had some consultation with the Secretary General of that organization, Catherine Kendall. So as a result of that, they also began to see that there was a need to shift curriculum but they saw it in a very different way. Family planning was being advocated by USAID at that time in India and Asian countries. So they

wanted to introduce family planning in the curriculum of these countries whereas we said, Family planning is one aspect but we need to take development as the major aspect in which family planning... I mean Development itself is a contraceptive if you look at it. We said we cannot do this family planning by itself but we all stood up and made a group representation and then Catherine said, “Well I will have to see if USAID will agree” but she managed to get them to agree and then we began to work with the ESCAP in Bangkok where Frances Yasas was there and we began to look at curriculum in social work from a development perspective. So that’s how the Asian countries began to come into it. Then the Association of the Schools of Social Work took up seminars and workshops on it, so gradually the ingredient of social development came into our curriculum. So it took time and effort and knowledge. We didn’t have knowledge, we had to learn what is component of development and how community organization, Panchayati Raj, development issues come together. Then how in field work, students, what type of community, can an Institution be looked at as a community, are there some community related issues with the Institution. So we had to find ways of integrating the social work learning in the field so that students don’t see group work as recreation but groups form a part of your work in the organization. Even your community you work with is a group, so we began to look at group dynamics from various perspectives. So we began to teach our social work differently and then my interest had started in the United States because towards the end of my PhD stay I had begun to attend the Council on Social Work Education Annual conference which was for schools of social work professors.

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They themselves were beginning to come out with this integrated perspective so I picked up a little but it wasn’t enough. But when I came back I picked up some work, read some literature, I

began to give some thought to it. At that time I was also organizing the work in the municipal schools of Bombay and relating it to the community so I had already got some field back up for that so gradually I began to work on a curriculum which was on integrated social work practice. Began it, began to teach it then Ms. Desai said, “Why can’t I teach it also?” So she borrowed it and brought it here but basically when I came here, I revised it and taught it here at Tata Institute so it was introduced here also.

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It wasn’t much introduced in other schools of social work. They didn’t have this concept and I really failed in the sense that I should have had some workshops for faculty of other schools of social work which I didn’t do. Anyway that’s how gradually the development issues came, the social work issues came. Then we began to take faculty with that kind of interest, so we had on our faculty, at Nirmala Niketan and people like Dominic and Nafisa and others and people with other kind of bent of mind, so it all helped to grow the curriculum and develop it in that sense and I think the thrust began. One time, I think Dr. Gore wrote a small book on Social Development. I think the trend started but when I came to Tata Institute I did not find the curriculum development oriented at all, you know, the Family and Child Welfare or the Medical and Psychiatric... they didn’t not have any community base whatsoever. So again, a lot of work I did with them to reorganize the field work, to some extent make changes in the curriculum so we began to work towards a community oriented or development oriented rather than a focusing on a very institutional type of learning. I think slowly it grew within the Institute itself.

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I think the environment itself created to some extent but it had gave a filip when we had both the

Associations of Schools of Social Work as also the International Association in the South East Asian countries, developed a project and then the literature that came out from it. So I think it moved in that direction to that extent. Even the changes in the Tata Institute after I came, those changes had to be done. For example, health in the community, that was never been looked at so we began to look at it from that perspective, mental health in the community. So these are perspectives that one has to develop...issues of children in the community. Not looking at the child after he goes to the remand home but before that at the community level, street children, so all these issues we began to pick up on. Then the field action projects also began to be moved in that direction. So to some extent we had that change taking place. I don't know where they are now, a lot of further changes have taken place but that was the shift away from only the very therapeutic mode.

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Q: Do you think these changes percolated into other schools of Social Work? Into the Social work curriculum of the country as a whole?

AD: I don't know how far the other schools have taken change. They do teach development, social development etc but to what extent, it is reflected in their field training, how integrated it is in the students' learning, I doubt that very much. I'm not any more in touch with them. Some oldest schools like in Delhi certainly made changes, also Madras but if you take the new schools of social work, they are pretty bad. What they are teaching I believe is no good. Because I can tell you, one time I had to interview students from various schools of social work in Maharashtra for our Latur Project. When we were asked to work on the rehabilitation of the affected people in Usmanabad and Latur.

0:13:07.679 I needed social workers for that project. I interviewed about 75 of them and I couldn't take any of them. I only took 1. And that too she was teaching in a Social work School and wanted to come into the field. But otherwise they were so poor in quality. So I'm afraid that the Association of Schools of Social Work which did this task, of developing faculty over the years, that has fallen into total disuse. The Association doesn't exist, and there are no mechanisms for this much. I started that special department with Murli Desai of social work education cell, because I said if there is anything, we should reach out to the schools of social work. We are a premiere school, it is our obligation to do that and have short term courses and all that. They didn't quite reach that stage unfortunately because Murli was more research oriented. She built up a good base. We got to know, information wise which are the schools. Where they were etc but we needed to go beyond. We started refresher courses, a few courses were on. But we need to do a lot more. I don't know what the status is. I think that department doesn't exist. So I think we have lost that initiative again. And this Institute needs to do that. The basic role we should play of qualitatively improving the schools of social work at least in Maharashtra and then move around the country. I believe that Initiative isn't there.

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Q: How do you look at the whole relationship between Social Work and Social Sciences?

AD: This is unique to Tata Institute. This tension does not exist in other social work schools, most of them do not have social science faculty. They have visiting faculty who come and teach the course. So that question doesn't arise there. But it does arise in Tata Institute to a great extent and I found it also when I came. There was this constant thing, is social work a discipline in the social sciences and I kept saying it's a profession. It does use social sciences inputs and

disciplines in order to create a theoretical base and it isn't a social science and its professional courses which teach you skills to work with people and social sciences does not have any of that components. It doesn't teach you to work with people. So I said, basically it's a professional course. The diehard social sciences people wouldn't agree to that. But basically I don't see it is a social science thing. It started that way in this country. A few schools of social work started in sociology departments and then you know cut off into social work, But where is the social science component except for in two or three courses, sociology, political science, anthropology. And the rest is something else. We have medical information, psychiatric information, so we take from many sources. It's a very interdisciplinary programme. And that interdisciplinary nature of social work is very little realized. Because it's been taken for granted. You have all these inputs in the programme. But basically it is one of the earliest interdisciplinary programs you can think of, anywhere in the world as a course.

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And I think that should explain that social work cannot be a part of any discipline. It's really a separate programme by itself.

Q: To what extent do you think social sciences inputs within TISS, given all the kind of research, have been effectively used in social work teaching?

AD: In fact that has been my bone of contention with the social science faculty. Why aren't you teaching what is relevant to the social work students. Very often a basic course in sociology is taught. What they need is things that are relevant to social work. For example understanding the concept of family, society, caste system, various things which make for the community and how

it functions in our social structure. Things like that are what we need to learn from. From political science what we need to learn is for example conflict. Now these things are not selectively taught. What is taught is, what is political science, what is ... they don't need to know definition of political science. I feel that social work students are not getting the main essence for their social work programme. Even social work students, once one class told me, because I used to take evaluations, they said the social science teachers were so boring why they don't learn from social work teachers how to teach. Because social science teachers come from these large colleges, they only learnt how to teach as a lecture course and they do not know how to stimulate a classroom discussion and all that. So the result is that this lecture approach was very boring for students and they weren't learning unfortunately.

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That was what was happening. Even with anthropology. I had a long talk with Parsuraman who used to teach Anthropology. I said, turn this course into a more learning course for these students so he then devised the course which had more tribal anthropology which then made more sense to the social work students. So I think we need to give more thought to what is relevant and then teach it. I think it's very essential, sociology, political science, anthropology and economics, these four social sciences should be taught as basics with the relevant information because the students come from all kinds of streams at the master's level and this input is very necessary. Again political science is to be taught from a political economy point of view and not as political science. So all these kinds of changes required in the social work programme.

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Q: We were talking about social work education and the changes that have been taking place

over the years and the whole process of indigenising social work education. Would you like to say something about specialisations versus generic degrees?

AD: You know for many years I worked with a generic programme, the College of Social Work and I was not too keen on specialisations. The reason is that we take our masters students from all kinds of disciplines, social sciences, sciences and what not. There is no restriction. In two years we have to ground them in some conceptual framework which is in the social, society, social structure area and then again into methodology and then into specializations. I think this two year band is too small. It's not appropriate for a specialisation. Also I feel that specialisation tends to be very information oriented something which the students can always go and find out for themselves. So I'm not very specialisation oriented. I think skills orientation is very important and students do need sharper skills development then they get at the end of the masters program. That is possible if you have a full two year generic program along with special interest papers. I'm not saying there should be no specialisation. Yes there should be because people have different areas of interests that they would like to go into. Thus special interest papers should be offered but they should again offer flexibly so that students can again build their own special interests. For example I'm interested in children, so I take a course on children. But I should be able to take a course of management of children's programmes. So I want to take a course in management not all the courses on children. Only some on children and some on management. I believe in that kind of a cafeteria approach where students take what they think is relevant to them and build their own programme.

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Now to do that of course it's a horrendous programme for anyone to make a timetable and it's

not possible to suit everyone's interest to get everything but at least allow that flexibility and let them build what they want. That is what one should do. One should widen them into interest areas. Broaden it and not get into specialist kind of things. It's a premature thing. If we had a bachelor's full program - a full three years program and then this specialisation, it makes very great sense but not when you take them directly from other programs. I still hold that to a large extent and I would have liked to see a lot of flexibility in Tata Institute towards that end. Especially now in the 21st century, things are changing so fast, there is nothing rigid about anything and in that scenario you want students to pick up things on their own, learn on their own, know sources where they can go to find out and in such a scenario too much information and orientation has no meaning as such. I'd like them to become analytical rather than getting information and regurgitating it in an examination. So that is my perspective on social work. And I felt that social work students coming from generic programs have had a great advantage over the others in terms of field practice because they tend to be far more ready for field practice because they put far more in puts into methodology than information that I think should be the perspective. Even now I hold that.

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Q: Moving from social work education to social work as a profession. The profession has also seen sea changes from the 50s when you started off as a social worker to the 2010 today. How would you map some of the most significant changes or milestones that have taken place?

AD: The shifts are tremendous. After all when I started social work, social work as a profession was hardly understood, nobody knew what it was. Since there were other people who called themselves social workers, there was no ability to differentiate between a professionally trained and a non professionally trained person was not there. And employment situation was also fairly

limited because agencies were not employing trained social workers. Then what happened was that even when we went for field work, the agencies were not really prepared for the kind of professional activities we're like to do or suppose we wanted to work with children through play, understand the child's problem, we would need toys or we would need paper or crayons. But none of this was available and if you asked the agencies, they would say they had no money.

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So ultimately that is how we started the Family and Child Welfare fund raising programme which went on for many years. We initially started it to help us with field work and we raised a very small amount. The first was some picture at Roxy Cinema somewhere in Mumbai and we raised 5000 rupees. It was a lot of money in those days and we used it for field work activities and enrich the programme etc. Suppose we went for games for children, there was not even a ball or anything to play with. So we bought materials and we were able to do this. Gradually these fund raising programmes also began to be used for placements of students in jobs. What was done was money was offered to the agency to employ the social worker. So they employed the student after graduation, the salary was paid through this fund and over a five year period, the salary was diminished and the agency had to raise the funds. What happened was, once they had tasted the use of a trained social worker, they didn't want to let go. So eventually this agency would then start looking for funds and retain the social worker. And that is how in the early days, a number of agencies were able to get trained social workers. Over the years this was not necessary.

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It became a thing to do, to have a trained person in the agency, to do the regular programmes and

the voluntary person did only the committee work or some specific jobs. So the end product was that over the years, this fund itself didn't need that kind of an activity and eventually we just stopped it, the fund raising. But that showed that over a period of time, professionalisation began to take place, especially in Bombay this happened. Then it happened gradually in other cities of India. It happened more in cities, Of course didn't happen in smaller towns.

Then over the years, the kind of jobs that social workers went into also began to change. Mostly Tata Institute Students went to the voluntary sector because they found it more flexible, innovative etc. Many times the students who came out for the schools of social work in smaller towns looked for government jobs, because that provided long term security. But those were mainly administrative or of probation officers, social welfare officers, of that type. So the kind of jobs sought after was also different by different groups. Both College of Social work, Nirmala Niketan and Tata Institute tended to go into the voluntary sector.

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I think also because majority of students were women and for them it wasn't that necessary, they felt to have a social security which a government job provided. What they wanted was creativity, challenge, things like that. So these jobs were very favorable. Then over the years, also the change came that more social workers began to walk out of institutional agencies to non institutional programmes. Because we started those in the '60s. For example, Family and Child Welfare. Originally it was institutions, orphanages and what not. But then we started sponsorship programmes, foster care programme, adoption programme, so we changed from the institutional to the non institutional services over the years and that took the students into a different mode all together. And then came the thrust to change the whole community therefore urban slums, in some place villages, became the focus of social work activity. So the change took place

gradually from highly institutionalised to non institutionalised to community based programmes and then over the years students have also come out of these institutions and started their own programmes. Sometimes very activist based programmes, sometimes it's a regular social work type of known activity. But these new thrusts have also added to the professionalisation of social work where activism is also seen as relevant to social work practice and not something that others do but also what professionals do.

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So i think over the years the change has been tremendous. Now of course the students also have the added temptation to go into jobs which are high paying, which come in these international agencies coming to India and working in the area of social work. They want people to act as project officers and so many of them go into the field for that. So there are many changes that have taken place and today the situation is that there are less social workers available than the field needs whereas in the '50s it was the opposite. I think the change is very remarkable over these years that have taken place in the field.

Q: In terms of perspectives and values do you think there has also been a change?

AD: I think that some change is there, because in the earlier years, the social worker's values were very strong. Only commitment to the cause you know, to children and women. Now also they are highly committed, but that's a small group. And there's a group which looks for opportunities, their finances. So you have the group that shows high commitment and there's the group that works really with activism or child rights groups and all that; and then there's the group that would rather go to an international agency with good money while it lasts. So you

have both the types and that's human. You are going to have a mixed group. It's very important that in your selection process you will be able to see that. And see who is likely to come with high commitment and is likely to show that commitment later on in the field.

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So the selection process is also important. We go by the students' ability to talk, to present themselves, but that's not the only answer. There are many ways to identify students' qualities. I don't think we have done a good job in working out methodologies for selection which help us. For example I found that there were students who come highly committed both from lower socio economic groups and higher socio economic groups and I also find that students from both groups coming with a desire for a very secure job. So it's not the financial background of the student, it's not the educational background but it is the commitment of what they have seen or perceived or the problems of the country and what commitments they come with when they do come. So that is the important thing I feel and we are not sufficiently sensitive in our selection process to look at that.

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Q: Would you say overall, as compared to the '40s and '50s where perhaps one looked at society more in terms of social pathology, today it's more in terms of social justice?

AD: That change is very great, we have gone from treatment and rehabilitation to a stage of prevention, promotion and social change rooting out the main problems that create the pathological solutions rather than wait for them. So the change is very great in terms of looking

at it. From participation of the community to looking at the rights of the community. So we have gone to a very important rights based practice, or should be rights based practice for social workers. I think that is the biggest change that has taken place over the years. It has happened, not basically because of the profession, it has happened outside of the profession but at least the profession has seen it important enough to absorb and to be able to use it. So I agree that is a big change from the charity and philanthropy days to the days that we talk of today of people's rights and social justice and all that.

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Q: When you came back as a Director to the Tata Institute, what do you think were the priorities and what were the major changes you brought about? What were your major contributions as the Director?

AD: It is hard to say for oneself what one's major contribution was. When I came here I was a little... of course before I came here I was very reluctant to come. I spent about six months dangling the trustees and not agreeing for a long time...because I was happy in what I was doing; it was a very challenging work at the College of Social Work. But finally I did take a decision to come. Before I came, I kept thinking to myself, "Where shall I begin?" This is an already ready made institution. Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, I started the institution, developed it, grew up with it and it grew with me, so it was a parallel thing there. 25 years I was there and out of 25, 7 years (3 and 4) I was away doing my studies but I always had the connection there and right from the time I graduated from here, till the time I came here, I was with the College of Social Work.

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For me that was the baby that I had nurtured and I thought to myself now I'm going to the mother! You know from the baby to the mother. And what will I do there? I felt I had no scope for anything. Then I thought to myself, where should I begin. Then I thought, as a social worker what do I teach my students when they go to a community or somewhere. To begin to understand, to get the facts of the situation. First learn the facts, from the facts, analyze the facts, assess the facts. After you have assessed them, decide the course of action. So do that. Do what you do in Social Work. When I came here I did that. I met every department separately. I assessed what they were doing, what they needed to do, where they felt they were going, where they wanted to go. All those things, I discussed with them. Fortunately for me, it also was coincidental that I came in November and by December, the UGC committee for the 6th Plan was to come and therefore I had to catch hold of the situation and be ready for this committee. I couldn't appear to them not knowing what there was. So I took that opportunity to then therefore understand the whole thing. In that they also came out with the Plan and what they had said and now what they wanted and many changes were made in the 6th Plan. Dr Gore had prepared but then many changes were done in that and again that was sent to UGC.

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So I thoroughly went through all the departments and everybody and that way I began to understand where were the requirements, what were the needs and I felt that for the time being I should pay attention to social work. That was the priority. Also because that is what the trustees had told me. They said we believe that the social work departments were not where we would like them to be. They had heard from various alumni, a lot of criticism about the social work. Because Dr. Gore was basically more interested in the social sciences which grew and which he

developed. But the social work part he left to the social work faculty and social work faculty didn't have the breadth or the horizon they needed to have. There was a gap. The older faculty had left. The new faculty had come in position as the heads and there wasn't that road map for social work. Since that is what the trustees wanted and that is what I thought my strength of area was and I should do, therefore the priority became the social work programme and I therefore had several meetings with them on field work. I changed the field work pattern also because instead of Tuesdays and Thursdays we made it, Mondays and Tuesday. Which I had done in Nirmala Niketan also, Thursday -Friday-Saturday we had there. Because we were even sending students to tribal communities outside Bombay and they needed the time to go and come back, that Tuesday-Thursday didn't facilitate anything like that. And any project work they couldn't do in their organization. If they wanted to hold a programme, you can't hold it in a one day situation. So when they had three or four days in their hands, they could even hold some programme of duration.

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So we changed it to the field work days also. The type of field work that should be done. What sort of agencies we should look for. All that was done. And of course a part of the curriculum change was also brought about. So I think my priority distinctly was social work. I had felt the social sciences much to themselves. If I tried to meddle with them I don't think they liked it also. They thought they knew more than I did. So okay, I left them to do what they like to do and then I liked to nurture the smaller new things that were starting. Like your media department or social work cell that I had conceived - things like that I was more interested in so I moved into more nurturing that and then the younger faculty - I felt I really spent more time with younger faculty, talking to them, trying to see what direction they wanted to take in their programme and then

giving them more inputs in that. Like for example Parasuraman, he was after all a person from demography. I think he needed to find his feet and finally Narmada gave him his feet and then I moved him more into the whole area of rehabilitation because I felt that his strength was this area which I could give him.

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Similarly I think somebody else, I don't want to take names, I helped her move in the area of children and various activities related to child care. So that each one could move into some area and become an expert and today I see all that expertise in front of my eyes and I feel happy that it gave each one of them the kind of space they needed. I didn't give them the direction but nurtured the direction they wanted to take or they took in terms of research projects, attending conferences and seminars. When I got information from somewhere then I knew who would be the person who would benefit most from that. So like that gradually, and then we had such a small amount of money in those days. For example sending people around, nurturing more the younger people to go. So we put the older people in a lot of restrictions. You must get some money on your own, then some money will be given and all that because they were going anyway. What right did they have to use this money?

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And then gave it to those who were starting afresh. In that was I think that today the faculty I see are the ones at that level, beginners and I feel I did the right thing, giving the nurturing to the younger ones so that was my focus area. The students, I taught because that is the only way that I'll know what students think and what they wanted. And the classroom was the place where I learnt a lot about what's happening in the Institute from the student community. And that was a

major thing. I taught three courses which was a lot for the Director to teach but I enjoyed my three courses all of which were created by me. I had created them when I was in Nirmala Niketan and continued them here in Tata Institute Two courses, one on field instruction for social work education, then teaching and training in social work education and the integrated social work practice. I loved the course on Field Instruction and the students liked it very much because I also had the field instructors in that class. Whether they were from the field or on our faculty and there was so much exchange and learning because each could see the perception of the other and the problems of the other. A lot of discussion in the class and all that. So I think that class was very enriching for me as also for the students and the faculty that came for the course. So I think that all these things were my areas of interest. I didn't like much doing Ph.D guidance to tell you the truth.

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That kind of work I never liked. I did some but I did it only because I should do, not because I want to do. I did some of that and that was it. But the students I enjoyed and then of course the student life on the campus. I tried when possible, whenever possible, not always. Once a year go at night to the hostel and meet all the students of the hostel and have hot chocolate at night with them and talk with them about what they wanted and then they would sing and give me all their talents. So I had a little informal interaction at that level also. So a lot of interesting things on the campus if possible. For a Director, it's a 24 hours job because at night also they wake you up with emergencies. One our gas cylinders were stolen from the canteen and the smell came in the ladies hostel and they were up because it was exam time and then the boys also came. They came to my house to wake me up. Then I went with them and we discovered that our dining hall staff, they risked themselves. They went into the Nala. These fellows had come into the Nala and were

taking away the cylinders. It was a dangerous place because it was rocky and all, not paved like it has been paved after that.

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I had other incidents where everyone saw me as a social worker. One night somebody started crying at my door, at midnight. I was up and there was a knock on the door, I said 'who is it?' She said 'Me' and she was crying. I said 'Who's me?' The she identified herself. Then I opened the door and asked her what happened and she said, "My husband beat me." I said okay, we can't settle the problem now so you come here, sleep here tonight, we'll settle it in the morning. Then it seems the husband went searching for her all over the place in the campus at night. He went to the watchman; he said she never came here. So he couldn't figure out where she could have gone if she didn't go out of the gate. He could never believe that she could have gone straight to the Director's house and slept the night there. So that was it, of course in the morning, I told the Registrar. He had a darbar of his own with the husband and several other staff from the service staff quarters and they came to some resolution and she went back home but these were all little incidents that happened during the time because the Director is seen as... one woman came, I was unwell and lying down in my home and she insisted on seeing me, and she came to my bed room and said, "My son says he's going to catch my neck and choke me." I said 'what can I do lying on the bed.' So I called the Registrar and told him to take care of this.

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But then I went to the Governing Board and said I can't do all this social work along with other jobs, teaching, administration, other things so can I please have a full time social worker? They agreed and that's how we had a social worker on the staff and so many activities... that time we

had so many small children, it was a worthwhile thing also, to keep a social worker. So that's how we kept on adding things to the Institute. So these are the activities I can remember. I don't know where I started out to tell you, or what was the question. I wandered away from that.

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Q: One thing we would like you to talk about is the Rural Campus because I think that was something very interesting that you started.

AD: Even before I came to Tata Institute, in the College of Social Work, I was very keen on rural programmes where we would have rural social work. So I did have a small programme. Vijay was a student and then he took full time responsibility for the project. We did start something but it wasn't much grown at that time when I came here and I don't think it grew. It grew in the sense that it became a separate project and the student graduated and took it over and all that. When I came here, and we had the Golden Jubilee in 1985. We were discussing what does one do for the Golden Jubilee. I said at least one thing we should do which is durable and long term. I said we have a very high urban presence because we are in a city, we don't have a rural presence except for the few rural projects we do. We come back but we're not impacting on rural life. So we should have something and I think the faculty picked it up at the Heads meeting that we had and discussed all this. So then small committee I formed of people from rural studies, community development and all that and worked on a project to develop this. And I sent a letter to the Governing Board, the Governing Board approved in principle of the idea. Then we wrote a letter to the state government to give us some land. But I had written in my letter that land should be in a low rainfall and a high poverty area. At that time Mr. Deshmukh who later

was our chairman, he was the Principal Secretary of the State Government.

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So he was very surprised, he called me and said ' Why do you want everything that nobody wants? Everyone wants land between Bombay and Pune and you want this land?' I said 'Then how do we make an impact. We want a land where we can show what social work can contribute to so I cannot go to a high rainfall place where farmers are already doing better.' He sent us to two places. One was Jalna and one was this place at Tuljapur. Then I sent Panwalkar and Dr. Acharya and they went and saw the two sites, came back and informed me that Jalna was going to be a growth pole for Maharashtra which means that it will become urbanized in due course. Tuljapur was not a growth pole. Then I said, we should not take an area which is not likely to be touched by the Government and where we can make some impact. So we took Tuljapur, we accepted the 100 acres of land. Of course Mr. Bhabha said, "Why the other 400 acres you don't take? You write to the Government for the other 400." But the Government was not going to hear us. So we took the 100. Then our project proposal was something that I believe strongly in, that we shouldn't start building the campus. We should first start to get trust of the community. We should know the community, we should build up our expertise of work in a rural community, especially in that context, and of a low rainfall area and then we should go for starting a campus after sometime.

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Then it took a lot of effort because the local people didn't know, the Collector and the local MLA said, "Why are you not constructing, why is there nothing happening on the campus?" It was hard for them to conceive of a project where you didn't want something of plenty coming

into a land of such poverty. That was no way to start, image wise also. But it took us a lot of effort. In fact one Marathi paper *patrakar* [journalist], he phoned me and said “I believe in the local meeting of the planning committee, they said these Tata Institute people should be thrown out.” That was an incident which also caused some rumbling.

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AD: Well what happened was that there was a meeting of the planning cell but before than there was an incident that occurred. We were working with the women in the various villages and one of the government projects that these women were working on was on social forestry which was the nursery where they were growing the plants, they were sent out everywhere for planting. So the women were engaged in this task and the forest Officers brought these women workers to our social workers and said for six months these people haven't been paid by the Mantralaya so please do something for them. So we social workers sat down with the group and tried to find out more details.

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We found that the women were not being paid their wage. They were being paid less than their wage and that was the reason to bring them because even their share they were not getting.

So this was known to the workers, the workers were very angry and they went and demonstrated in front of the district officer's office and that created a lot of hubbub because it created trouble to the concerned people. The local MLA got into the frame and said, “If they had something to say, why they didn't come to me? Why did they go to the social workers of Tata Institute and those

Tata Institute people are here to trouble the government, they are against the Government so we must get rid of them from here.” So that patrakar asked me, he said, “Why did this happen?” I explained to him, “When there is a certain balance in the community, power balance, gets upset because of another body coming in and creating a challenge to that power balance, this happens.” He understood the dynamics. Then he wrote up the whole thing in Marathi. But what he essentially did was, he gave one column only to the MLA and gave three columns to what I said. And he put the title on top “What aches the stomach of the MLA?”

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It created even more trouble. Anyway the collector said, “We have to do something. Why don’t you call him to one of your villages when you’re starting some work and give him a garland or something and he will be happy”. So I said, “Look I won’t stand for that because as the Director of the Institution I can’t put my hand to such a thing but if the social workers want to call him, that’s their business.” So they did call him and he turned his face around and said exactly the opposite, “These people are very good, they are here to help us and you must cooperate with them”. So we used to get these kinds of pressures and the Collector used to call me a number of times “When are you starting? When are you starting? People are saying others want the land.” I told him “This is our philosophy, please understand and bear with us.” He said, “I understand but explaining it to others is difficult.” Then finally we succeeded and before I left I had worked out the plans for the constructions, what should do, where etc. And raised the funds partly from the trust and partly from the UGC Grant which the last plan before I left, the 8th plan, left that as the core money for starting the construction and then came the construction work and all that in my absence.

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I also had a very interesting meeting of architects. Those who did very innovative type of architecture with stone and other things because I wanted stone to be the main use for the architecture because the local area was of stone and our area was full of stone. People said that you use stone then it would help because people have lost faith in some after the earth quake and you will restore that faith. We had a very interesting idea but none of the architects were practical enough. Then finally they gave it to the same architect who started the work there. But I'm not too happy with the style of the architecture because my idea of to let it blend with the local architecture. It wasn't blending in that way. That was when Parsuraman came, now let's see what he can do, landscaping and other things. We started tree culture, because it was there, the whole land. It was a very thrilling experience I had was because it was used as grazing land, grass was never allowed to grow. When we took responsibility of the land we built a stone wall.

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Just rough stone wall, how they build in the villages using the local craftsmen. In those areas where the cattle used to come up from the valley below. We fenced it up and we told the villagers, when the grass grows, you come and take the grass. They were using the land, we thought we owed it to them so we told them you take three pudis and leave one for us so that's how we negotiated and that's how they used to take the grass.. During the time of the earth quake I was there, and I took Lata and I don't know who else, to see the land. It rained during that period and it was such a fabulous site, the grass had grown, it had many colours, because now the seeds had a chance to sprout and whatever the land lying dormant in the ground was all coming up, it was beautiful, and on top of it was a double rainbow. It was the most beautiful I have seen of that campus at that time, there was nothing there except for the grass and all our

trees that were growing. Now the trees have grown quite a lot and the social forestry that we did has come up a lot.

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I wanted to start three educational activities. One was the para professional which I wanted to start at the 11th and 12th standard level, where they could come in and have a programme specially designed for para professionals to work with NGOs and government projects and also help them to learn language better, whether it is English or whatever and improve the language so that they can go the Bachelors level if they wanted to. Then start the Bachelors' programme. But after I went, the Bachelors became more the focus and the para professional has not really come up. And the three years Bachelors degree has come up. They invited me to inaugurate the first batch that came up and I was very rewarded that the programme has come to this level and has grown to this level. But I feel that the Institute should start the para professional programme ultimately in the near future. So that's as far as the rural campus is concerned.

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Q: The Field Action Projects are a very unique feature of Tata Institute and some other schools of Social work. Could you talk about why it's important to have Field Action Projects and have been the kinds of shifts that have taken place?

AD: Well, actually Tata Institute even years and years ago used to have some programs. They used to have some programmes in the Wadia Hospital, they had a programme for bedridden children and they had a programme at Worli in the BDD chawls. So the programmes were already there. We did have some amount of activity which was Institute run activity, employing

its own social workers and the activity was in an area of work where others were not working, like the work for the bedridden children or even the community program at BDD chawls. So these were unique in their own time. Then when I came back from the states to Nirmala Niketan after my master's degree I felt it was very necessary that besides Kumbharwada which was a field action project, we should have other Field Action Projects in College which should be worth while. So gradually other projects came up.

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One was, we took over the Family Service Centre that was run by another group to run a professional programme there. And we started all the non institutional services, in those days when all the services were institutional, the sponsorship program, foster care, adoption, almost all these were pioneering activities at the Family Service Centre and I was responsible for that, funnily enough because when I came back Dr. Baker was the Director.

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So Dr. Baker said to me that I'm sorry another Mrs. Nambiar is running the Kumbharwada, I wouldn't like to take it away from her, so would you mind taking the Family Service Centre. I said, 'I'll take that, it will be interesting for me to take something new. So I took that and started the family counseling programme and also the non institutional programme for children. Because one of the main demands we had was put the children in institutions. Parents who were coming to us with various problems which they had, either husband was drinking or not earning or mother had died or whatever it was. I felt that non-institutional services were required. Adoption was hardly being done in Bombay. So all these services we established at the Family Service Centre. I enjoyed that work and then when I left again for the United states, did my PhD and

came back, again someone else was doing it so I said Okay, it doesn't matter, I started a counseling programme in Wilson college to show that it was necessary to have counseling for college students and it was not just counseling it was also other activities so that the students don't feel marked out that she's going or he's going because he has a problem. It should be other activities which are enriching for the students so that it's a holistic kind of a programme. I was doing that.

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So always I had some field action where we were developing, we were learning from it, from various activities, models of service delivery, which skills were required with which kind of clientele. So all this gave me the basis for thinking that you have to have field action. Even these projects with municipal schools where 80000 children we were serving through 17 major centres in slum communities of Bombay, all these became for me a learning environment for social work and I thought this was necessary because we had all young people who had not been exposed to practice.

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Even faculty coming up in those days had no exposure to practice. They were just graduating and getting into a school of social work as teachers which I felt was not satisfactory. So if every faculty has a practice responsibility then they will learn also. So that's how I began to nurture these. Then I also found in Nirmala Niketan that they also became a good nurturing ground for faculty. For example Lata, she was in a school social work project then after that I thought okay, now enough, you come and start teaching. So she became the faculty. Farida was the first one, Farida Lambe.

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Two of these projects were for teaching. Also there were showing what kind of work to do which weren't existing. Adoption did not exist, How to do it systematically never existed. All the practices were started by us, Foster care was unknown. It came to Family Service Centre because Central Social Welfare Board, the person who worked there, knew that I had worked in a Foster care programme in US and I knew what was Foster Care and Adoption. So that's how I introduced it to Family Service Centre. So it became then, how do you adapt it to our Indian situation. Because we don't have a law for adoption for example, or foster care with an alien family may not be possible but it is possible with a relative of the child. So we have to change our models according to our requirements. And that taught us many things. We ourselves are learning in that. So I think it is vital to have this experience here. So when I came to Tata Institute, I found that before Dr. Gore left he had wound up these two other long standing programmes – the school for bedridden children and the Worli programme. So there was no activity going on.

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Then Mrs. Apte came up with her idea about starting the cell for women in distress. And I gave her all the scope and whatever could be done to start. I think Dorabji Tata Trust came into the picture to give the money and start the programme. Gradually that started and other programmes started and gradually they just started proliferating on their own.

The only requirement I had was you can't do what others do. Because if they can do then there is no point in our doing.

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So I feel what we do in an academic institution is that we have to show something new, something different and once we have shown it, we should give it to somebody to run it. We are not a service agency. Ours is to demonstrate, new models of practice, new models of service, to develop the concepts related to that practice. To do whatever research is possible, evaluation of the programme and then we should hand it over to others to run. And that's what we have been doing, almost all our programmes have been developing and some of them have been handed over, for example Child helpline has become a programme of its own and has now become the Government of India programme but started at the Institute when Jeroo Billimoria was a faculty member. So our approach is how to use field action to impact on policy. What are the policy changes. For example, Mrs. Apte had done one project with the civil courts where she had social worker counseling in a divorce court and that became a very useful demonstration when the family courts started. In fact Sujata Manohar who was responsible for that work asked me a lot of information on that work where we had social workers because they were going to employ social workers here and Mrs. Apte gave them a lot of inputs on that. So I think that our programmes are those where we go out and demonstrate and then they should be on their own.

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We didn't enter the Family Court; we let them develop on their own. So that should be our aim, so I feel that academic institutions which are also a professional body like ours where practice is a very important aspect of our work then students must see practice and they must see good practice, good policies that are taken, because many of the agencies do not have that. Or they

don't have good policies. But our demonstration programme shows that so that is exactly what we are trying to do through these field demonstration programmes. I think they had a lot of values for teachers, especially young teachers who get into them and develop their own practice skills, their own administrative skills, because they have to administer the programme...

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I believe very strongly that it teaches the faculty also, skills they don't have, Skills of practice, skills in management of personnel, skills in administration, skills in policy development, in long term planning, in budget and finance management... all these skills which are not basically taught during their own student days are all learnt by the faculty in their project days. So I think they are very worthwhile in many ways and the time the faculty spends of them is extremely valuable to the Institute. It should never been seen as something that the faculty do. It's one of the most important activities of the Faculty.

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Q: In what ways... after you being there, in what ways is TISS is perceived as an educational Institution, outside.

AD: The regard is very high for the Institute. Even in the UGC, I think they had a good regard for the Institute and its work, even in the earlier years. I think that the Institute, even in the academic field, wherever you go, if you you were from Tata Institute or you were Director at the Tata Institute, it means a great deal. People's eyes pop out. It's got a very good name even outside the country people seem to know of Tata Institute, so I think it has huge name but it must keep it up. Each Director who comes has to give the leadership and continues to build on it. Each

one of us builds. None of us can do the whole job. For example, I felt that this Institute campus was just going to be dismal for the future in the sense that it couldn't expand, there is nothing we could have done it, and that's why the Naoroji Campus next door and the Rural campus came up because I felt I couldn't do the expansion, because I wasn't there for that but I could at least provide the space that that expansion could be built on, which Dr. Parsuraman after taking over has done. I think each one of us comes, leaves something behind and should do that.

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Because TISS has such a big name, it should have very well selected Directors for taking it forward and Directors who take a holistic view of what a University should be. Not the view of just the Academic Programme. Academics is important, because the students go out and make the name for you but also it should have the kind of other things that we do here, like the field action, research, and other activities which have again earned a name for the Institute.

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Q: In what way do you think Tata Institute is different from other Universities?

AD: It's very different because its feet are on the ground; its ears are listening to what's happening in the community. The other universities are airy fairies, they go on, some are very interested in bio sciences but they do not look at bio sciences how it will affect the farmer or somebody else working at the garbage or something like that. You have to look at your work and then relate it to the situation in which you are, the universities are so sadly lacking in this which they could do such a marvelous job. During the 50th year of India's independence, I was in UGC. So what could the universities do, so I sent out a letter to the Vice Chancellors, saying you can have the usual seminars and other things, you can also adopt a programme in the community



after identifying the issue which of concern in your community, whatever that issue is and work on a long term basis, say a ten year plan and see whether the University can make an impact on the problem. Many Universities sent me letters back saying what they had done but they were always “We had awards, we had seminars, we had workshops, we had this and that” but hardly anybody ever took up any local issues. So that is a very sad story and I always say, all our universities are sleeping giants, if you wake them up there is much that can happen in this country.

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But you have to wake them up and that’s what is hard to do. So I think the Institute is very different and when people come here, they say that. And then they will philosophise and say “Yes yes, you can do that because it’s a smaller Institution and it’s an Institute, it’s not like our universities”. It’s no use philosophising like this.

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In the end what can I say, Tata institute has a great future and it has a great future because it has a very strong base and it’s developed a very good faculty over the years and I think the present faculty

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Present faculty has a lot to offer and many of them have been here for many years and they have incorporated in some way the Institute, its values, its humanistic outlook, its desire to impact on



the country's problems and I think it can take a great of work forward.

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They have to work as a team because all our work is very complementary to one another and I feel that we should have separation between Centres and schools and it's very important for centres and schools to work with one integrated goal which is a foreseeable goal and which can be impacted by the Institute. That has to be looked at, what is it we want to do, because otherwise if each of us wants to go in one direction, we may be able to do something. But we can't do everything. We can't do a major action. So how does this institute see itself in the future in terms of such integrated action across the board for a common goal which is to be impacted through various capacities of the various centres, how this can be done is something, we can take anything, education, employment, housing, we can take anything which is of some concern to the Institute and then say how all these centres work towards all this, in what way, through their research, their field action, student placements, all the activities they do, how do they do this and take this forward, in some way that very measurable impact can be seen and I think the Government of India has a very favorable view of the Institute in terms of its contributions. And this has to be taken forward in a more major way so that it's more visible in the future and that I think is the work of the 21st century of this Institute. But it can't be done by individuals or centres; it has to be done in a collegiate fashion by teachers as a group. So I think something can come of that.

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Q: What do you think are some of the current challenges that face, both Tata Institute and Social

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Work education, or even higher education as a whole.

AD: Higher education is in such a transitional stage just now, we don't know where it's going with government making all kinds of decisions, how they will impact on these universities, Institutions like ours, we don't know. Here we are coming out with some N number of types of Universities, there are central universities, state universities, deemed universities, now they want innovation universities and then I don't know what else. So the end of the thing, I do not know where the government is moving this country to in terms of higher education. I think it needs a lease of life which it doesn't have.

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One of the major lacunae in our Institutions is the lack of inputs in our colleges. Now what primary education is to school education, colleges are to higher education and if you don't strengthen the foundation of our students when they come into colleges then they are not going to learners at higher levels? They are going to be poor learners. But learning to learn can come from the college level onwards and then they can become independent learners. So we have to concentrate on college education, put financial inputs into college education, change the methodology college education from just boning up some information to learning to learn. The whole end should be a learning centred not subject centred, not math examination centred but analytical, individual, different exam centred. So I basically feel that the entire system needs a different turn altogether and creating a few central universities and some innovation universities will not solve the problem of higher education in this country Even if a few of us come in the first ten of the world, what about the rest of the thousand? So we have to give it much more than



what we are thinking.