



Prof. K. G. Desai

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Camera/Sound: Prof. KP Jayasankar

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Prof. K.G.Desai is former Head, Department of Personnel Management & Industrial Relations, TISS. He has published extensively on issues such as ageing and personnel management.



Q: So as a part of this we are talking to very senior faculty, alumni to get a sense of how the Institute has changed over the past 75 years. So as a very senior faculty in Personnel Management, you've seen a lot of changes. You know we're very interested in exploring those with you. So, you know, we'd like you to talk about how you first joined the Institute, what the Institute was like when you joined, how the department was like when you joined.

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KGD: Okay. See I think I joined in '63 and at then I was not attached to Personnel Management department, I was an independent person and... But I used to work with the department and also other departments also. But mentally I was always with the PM department right from the beginning because one of my subjects that... psychology, there was industrial psychology and I was more interested in that kind of area. So I was working with the people. I was a lecturer; way back in '63 I joined as a lecturer then continued as a lecturer 'til '73 and I think I officially joined the department in '73 as a reader. And in '75 I was given the charge of the department and I'm the Head of the Department right from '75 up to '93 when I retired. So for eighteen years I ran the show.

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KGD (cont.): We had, maybe in those days about twenty-two students, that's all and so it was a small group. Teaching was really enjoyable because you are addressing a small group and you can clearly have a dialogue with the students' right in the classroom. So I always enjoyed my



teaching and I always believed it's a two way process; so not only I talk and they listen, but they also can ask questions, interrupt me and all that. In fact I used to tell them that whenever you feel like interrupting me, you can stop me, ask the question. Sometimes they would be very impatient and I'd say *thik hain*, wait a couple of minutes, let me finish whatever I'm trying to say and then you can raise your question. So it would mean there is lots of dialogue, you know in the classroom and it was really enjoyable.

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KGD (cont.): And of course outside the classroom I was always accessible. In fact my door was literally open, I never kept the door closed and any student can walk in. It is nice to encourage them; you feel like walking in, come in, you're always welcome. And actually I remember when anybody walked in and sat down, my first question was; 'what can I do for you?' That would really sort of hit them because this was my approach, that I'm here to help the students, if there's any difficulty they can always come to me or even go to my colleagues and all and the problems will be sorted out. So that was my kind of philosophy, student-friendly approach and I think I was appreciated for that. I may not be a good teacher, I don't know, but I certainly tried to be a good human being. I tried to be helpful to the students as much as possible.

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KGD (cont.): Even I've gone out of the way to help the students because I always said that their problems should be taken care of and, you know, in any office so-called 'bureaucracy' can create problems for the students. Some minor problems can even assume major proportions and all, so I always used to sort out these. And that was my philosophy.

Q: Can you talk about how TISS was in 1963 when you joined, in terms of, you know, the number of faculty....

KGD: In '63 when I joined, we were only ten persons; I was the tenth person. And then I think it remained like that I think. In '66 after we became part of the UGC, deemed university, then I think we started expanding but 'til then there were only about ten faculty members. One of who was the Director and other nine, and that's all. Seven departments; six social work and one was Labour Welfare it used to be called. And, yes.

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KGD (cont.): In all the student body was about 140 per year, so at a time there would be around 250 students on the campus. So it was really small and I think there was a personal rapport; the students will also feel free to approach us and all that. So that much was all really friendly and said what you call 'small is beautiful!' so it was really a small place and I think quite enjoyable. Somehow I believe I was enjoying my teaching and all.

Q: As someone who was coming from a different institution- you studied in Delhi University and you came to TISS- did you find then you changed when you came?



KGD: No I think... you know in Bombay in colleges nobody knows you. You're a class, one in 150 maybe and then there is hardly any contact between the teachers and the students. Some student may go and seek some help, but otherwise I think students would be away from the teachers and teachers also, not many of them would be taking any interest in the students.

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KGD (cont.): So, you know there's nothing like a teacher-student relationship, in college I'm speaking of. Here, being a small institute and with only about twenty, twenty-five students I think that relationship can develop. So that was one thing that I got to hear because... so, it's enjoyable I suppose.

Q: In terms of the curriculum- as you said, when you joined the Institute it was called Labour Welfare and then later it shifted to Personnel Management. So can you talk about that shift and what were the reasons for that?

KGD: You see, one thing is there that in the Trade Union Act, any organisation which employs 500 employees, must have a statutorily qualified Welfare Officer. So our Institute was recognised for that.

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KGD (cont.): So that what was why the name, Labour Welfare, because the original appointee of Personnel was Welfare Officer, then it became Labour Welfare Officer and that way. Personnel as a word came in much later; in those days it was Labour Welfare and Industrial Relations. The focus was more on Industrial Relations and later on, I think, the word Personnel came in and I think then it became Personnel Management, then we changed the name also; Personnel Management and Industrial Relations and that nomenclature thing was there for a number of years. So there was a shift in the field also, of course. From Welfare to this Industrial Relations. And then I think Personnel Management came in. And I think after Rajiv Gandhi and all it became Human Resource Management or something like that... funny thing.

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KGD (cont.): So now it is all HRM, Human Resource Management.

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Q: Since you have been with the department for so many years, you would have seen the changes that have taken place in the curriculum or where students were going off for jobs and what are the kinds of other... any major shifts that you see over the 30 years that you were with the departments.



KGD: Yes, shift is there in the earlier periods, so right up to '70, '72-73 the emphasis was on Industrial Relations. And slowly I think the research shifted; now it is more of Personnel Management, a little less of Industrial Relations. And the major reason I think is that the Trade Union movements and... I think suffered a lot. Now the unions are no more that powerful which used to be the case, maybe even in 70s and all that.

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KGD (cont.): So now I think the Managements have gotten the upper hand The Trade Union movement I think has sort of, you know, is on the decline. Of course the Union leaders may not agree to this, but then that has been the reality. Nowadays you don't speak about, think of any last train strike and all that. I think, general knowledge has stopped I think. So now the Personnel people are busier with the training and development, that kind of thing. So in a real sense, Human Resource Management has now shifted to more of taking care of the employees, also the Managers and very little time is spent on Industrial Relations. So that has been the shift and I think our students have adjusted to that. That's it, they're doing well. Even now I think they're getting some good jobs, competition is quite good, they're quite happy.

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KGD: The nature of work of course has changed. So in our teaching we would try our emphasis on Industrial Relations, and trade union movement and all that. Nowadays we speak more on the



development of people, training in and those kinds of things. That way we are trying to be helpful to the management and I think that way HRM movement has caught on. Actually you will find organisations, there will be positions in the NHRM unit and HRM department and HRM managers will be there, in all organisations. So that has been the shift.

Q: In terms of the Institute itself, I mean what are the broader changes you have seen during the time that you...

KGD: Ah, yes. I think I've noticed one change. In our earlier period, we used to give a lot of emphasis on what's called fieldwork, practical experience.

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KGD (cont.): In fact that was our strong point all along. Our students were acceptable to the industry because they had lots of exposure to reality. In the course of two years a student would have the first-hand knowledge of at least five organisations, where we used to spend two days a week for a term and then used to see four terms in two years, plus summer training. So he would be knowledgeable about at least five organisations fairly well, and that I think was our strong point. Now I think unfortunately the interest in fieldwork I think is on the decline. Partially we are responsible, the faculty people. The faculty people don't believe now in importance of fieldwork. We used to get a lot of people to do fieldwork. I used to visit organisations every fortnight, meet the people over there, bring the students in the setting and that way I think, we



used to know a lot about the organisations and the students also would be getting a lot of information about the organisation.

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KGD (cont.): But that was because we were taking interest in the activities of the students when they were in the organisation. Nowadays I believe that it's changed. To some extent other old faculty members also don't quite believe in this philosophy that we have to practice a kind of coordination. That I think is one thing that is missing, as I view it. Of course my experiences are now twenty years old. But when I talk to a student nowadays, they also say the same thing. But when you talk to the students, they will always say that fieldwork has been our strong point, and we are acceptable to the organisations because of our emphasis on the practical knowledge which we acquired in the course of two years. So that theory practice mix, I think now is not being emphasised. I'll put it very mildly.

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KGD (cont.): And unfortunately our own faculty colleagues are responsible for this because they don't believe in this at all, and they somehow go through the motions, don't take interest and that is why I think the students are suffering. But that is impression, as I said; I've been away from the scenario.



Q: Do you think this is partly to do with the shift from Industrial Relations to HRM or Personnel Management or....

KGD: That could be one reason, but that I think our emphasis will not be there in our teaching also now. We will be giving more emphasis on training and development, those kinds of activities. But the fieldwork part is I think that you have to be there in the organisation, try to understand what is happening in the organisation, talk to people down the line also, also talk to the managers and try to get a lot of information about the organisation where you are going to spend at least two days a week for some three, three and a half months.

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KGD (cont.): And that is where the students need support from the faculty members. The faculty members take interest in fieldwork, then I think the students also can benefit. But I don't get that impression nowadays when I talk to the students and also the faculty members. It could be my bias, I don't know because as I say I've been away from the field. Q: Are there any memorable experiences about your stint in TISS that you would like to detail.

KGD: No, that one thing I never lived on the campus. I lived in my own place, and somehow I always believed that one should be mentally away from the Institute, at least after office hours. So I followed that kind of idea.



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KGD (cont.): Believe me; I didn't have a telephone right up to '83. So eventually we must have thought that we will have to come down there. But then I was not bothered because you're away from the Institute and that I think is a good thing as I would view it. That mentally you're away from the Institute, and once you're in the Institute, you're in the Institute. So that kind of philosophy I follow. And I think it has worked well.

Q: I remember when I first joined the Institute there used to be this bus from Dadar...

KGD: Yeah, yeah. I think it would be an interesting.... When Dr. Punekar was there, he expired in 1980 I suppose. And we told a lot of stories. Jokes and all, all kinds of stories would be there and even the students got quite abused by our, sort of, dialogues. Because the jokes my colleague Dr. Punekar used to share.... I remember one joke very, very clear. He said one traveller was travelling in a bus, ST bus and he wanted the bus... the conductor asked him, which class you want to travel? He says I want to travel first class. Said okay, here's your first class ticket, then I think he boarded the bus and then many other passengers came in and he asked them, they said no, some of them were only second class tickets and some were having third class tickets. So he just asked the conductor, what is all this! I've paid first class here and you have given me the same seat. He said, you wait and watch what happens.

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KGD (cont.): After some time, the bus broke down. And then the conductor made an announcement; those with third class tickets help push the bus, those with second class will walk along the bus, and the first class passengers will sit in the bus. That's how he realised that first class means this. Such kinds of jokes I think were always there, and I think we had a lot of fun you know. So that was a social occasion, our four o'clock trip back home and 9.30 trip to the Institute. So, that's it.

Q: Can you talk about any variances between what would happen sometime?

KGD: No, I think nothing much used to happen. Even when there were floods and all I would always be there in the Institute, so my students would always curse me, say sir you never stay away from the Institute even when Bombay's flooded, you still manage to come to the Institute.

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KGD: I said yes, that is it. So I would always say that, you know, I never fall sick. That is the thing. So I was... I know that kind of commitment was there I would say.

Q: What is the kind of research that was done in the department?

KGD: Ah, research, you see that is one weakness of the department, I would say now the weakness of the entire Institute; not much emphasis on research. In our department I think not many have done, sort of, research on their own. Even I am guilty on that count. I have published maybe three, four books and a few articles. But I've given guidance to the students, that was my



commitment. So I've guided about twenty to twenty-five students per year in the doctoral degree. That I think still is a record in the Institute, I don't think anybody has come near that also.

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KGD (cont.): So that was my personal conception, that I've taken lot of interest in the students doing research. But that focus is not there nowadays. You can imagine, I think; you see the Director's report, how many students get their doctoral degree. Maybe a few, couple of... I don't know, I've not seen the Director's report but not more than two, three, four. And how many professors are there who can guide? Around 60, am I right? Sixty professors? How many of them are giving guidance to the students? You see that interest has to come from the top that we have to emphasise research. And fortunately my Director in those days, Dr. Gore was very, very supportive of research and Board of Research Studies was really a very, very strong kind of academic body and research was getting a due respect and importance in those days.

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KGD (cont.): Nowadays I'm not very sure. We have a PHD hostel, okay, but then how many students are there and how many are really working for their degrees and how many get their degrees? Where is the commitment of the faculty? That is why I feel bad.



Q: Can you talk... since you were there for eleven years with Professor Gore, could you talk a little bit about your time with Professor Gore or perceptions of him.

KGD: No, one thing I will always say; he was a scholar and a gentleman, both. And he puts his emphasis on both the words. He was very, very good to the faculty, to the students, he was always willing to listen to us. I don't know how much approachable the faculty nowadays, I don't know. But in our day at least we used to emphasise that whenever any student wishes to meet somebody, you should make yourself available to the students.

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KGD (cont.): And try to sort out the problems. So that accessibility can be a strong point in any Institute, that some faculty member is accessible to the students. I do not know faculty, because I don't have any first-hand knowledge how accessible the faculty is to the students. And I think outside contact is also much more important than what happens in the classroom. So if the relationship between faculty and the students is, I think, that way; cordial, personal, I think a lot can be done. And many students' woes I think can be minimised by this kind of approach because the students get the feeling that if I have a problem, there is somebody to whom I can approach. And that accessibility has to be sealed rather than just say, well I am accessible and then you are... like you're in a government. Minister is available between two and three, the huge queues outside but the Minister is never inside; that commitment is not there in the Ministers.



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KGD (cont.): But if the commitment is there, I suppose problems can be solved. I'm not saying that the students are gullible or anything like that, but that personal approach I think could be emphasised. It could be a part of the philosophy.

Q: Were there any field action projects that the department had, or... like the Social Work departments had....

KGD: No, we never had that. Some of us would take some consultancy assignments in the organisation that were on a small scale, but nothing like a field project taken by the assister. Still I was allowed nothing, it was not there.

Q: How do you, do you think that TISS sort of contributed to your own growth as a professional and as a... given that you spent so many years here.

KGD: What should I say? Maybe I have become a better individual, I don't know. But I have learnt a lot in the Institute, to the extent that if somebody asked me the question; if you were to live your life all over again, what would you like to be? I would still say that I would like to be a teacher.

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KGD (cont.): You know that kind of feeling is there in me because of the Institute, so. I got an excellent environment in the Institute and I think.... I'm sure that the college teachers will never



say that, that in my next life I would like to be a college teacher. So that love for teaching I think is something which I say my Institute has contributed. I owe a lot.

Q: Are there any other senior colleagues, I mean other than Professor Gore who you remember and have any memories about.

KGD: And Dr. Banerjee was there, I think she retired in 1970, and then I think Dr. Punekar was there 'til 1980, he was a good friend of mine, friend and colleague. My mentor was there and then others were there, we had a very friendly relationship.

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KGD (cont.): You see the group of records and I think the relationships were bound to be personal, friendly and all that. But in a huge set of... nowadays, I can't expect that. So you may have small cliques and all, but then I think you can't have a kind of...

Q: What about the relationship between Social Work and Labour Welfare, Personnel Management....

KGD: Ah, that. That is a very interesting question. You see I think- I don't know- our students, Personnel Management students would always put on airs. Then their reason for that I think when they come out of the Institute, they get a much larger pay packet. The Social Work students are regarded as poor colleagues who were this I think. But there is also another side to it; many of our students have married Social Work students. That you can't forget.



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KGD (cont.): Quite a few of them have married their own colleagues in Social Work department, so. That way, those relationships are there. But then somehow I think that feeling was always there in our PM students, that we are a bit up here, on a pedestal. And they used to look down on Social Work as poor colleagues or something like that. But that I think can't be avoided, you know, in a world which gives more emphasis on money and pay packet and all that. That is bound to happen.

Q: How did you address that kind of, or did you feel it necessary as a

KGD: No, not true. I... that way, you know, for the first ten years I have also taught in many Social Work departments. I used to run a course; Social Research I used to run a course; in Family/ Child Welfare I have guided students, the project Director was doing that project with me, though she was in Family/ Child Welfare department, something I think.

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KGD (cont.): So that way I mean, nothing, having close relationship with the... But that was on a person to person basis, I think. But we never had this kind of tiff, you know, that PM students or PM faculty versus these kinds of things, it was not there at all.



Q: You've been in a relationship between the research units and the teaching departments. Do you think there was synergy, do you think it could have been better or.... Because you've probably been there at a time when the research units were being set up, so how do you see that?

KGD: No, I think I didn't have much of a contact with the research units. That time Dr Punekar was the Head of the Department of Research so I think it was a personal relationship; then Mr Ramchandran was there, I think I had very good relationship with him.

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KGD (cont.): But I think department to department, I think there is no such thing. And I'm sorry to say that even the Social Work departments have not taken advantage of the Research Methodology department. In fact, when you're... even you're doing a project work I think there has to be an emphasis on the research angle. The attitude to research, I think that has to be there, but it's not there. So that interface I think could be strengthened even more. There is a course on Social Research and all that, but then while the students are doing their projects, they won't consult the Research faculty which could strengthen their own fieldwork projects.

Q: You know I'm also taking about the various research units on specific topics like Unit for Child and Youth Research....

KGD: No, I have absolutely no knowledge of that thing. I just don't know.



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KGD (cont.): We only used to read the report that so-and-so got published once in a while, but then nothing. If a unit has taken up a research, the project report and all could be discussed in a broader faculty meeting. And then I think some exchange of ideas can take place. For our PHD students we used to have that kind of idea, that if our PHD student writes a paper that was read before the other PHD students as well and the guides will also be present. And that kind of thing was a good thing, and I don't know how much it is happening now. But exchange of ideas between departments, between people is not given an emphasis.

Q: Given that, you know, TISS is now completing 75 years, is there anything you'd like to say on this occasion to all of us here, or to students....

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KGD: I am not a priest or a Father who can be in a pulpit and give advice; I think I've never believed in that. But I think as an Institute we have to emphasise research. We have to produce more doctoral students and that is not happening. And I don't know, that can be given a little higher priority. In fact, every professor should be asked this question, that have you guided anybody at all, and why have you not done that. So if you make that kind of thing obligatory, that a professor must take the student for his guidance and then help him to get the doctoral degree, things can improve. But that is unfortunately not happening. Maybe the process has to begin from the top. The top person has to take more interest in research; if he's committed to



research then I think things can improve. I believe that this is the situation in IITs and IIMs also; their students hardly go for doctoral programs. Even in IIT this is a complaint.

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KGD (cont.): So, you know, there is no point in blaming our Institute, it is there in all of them. In institutes of higher learning, there is not much emphasis on research.

Q: Do you think that that is partly also because of this whole thing it's seen as a professional kind of a degree?

KGD: Yes I think everybody would like to choose a path where he can get more money and selfish kind of thing. So if a student passing out of IIT and IIM gets a very huge salary, why should he spend two, three more years in research? That is the kind of equation that he may be thinking of. But then I think in a way education suffers, especially management; if there are managers who take interest in teaching in management institutes and teachers of management also spend some time in the industries that kind of idea can really work out well.

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KGD (cont.): So that kind of exchange I think has to be there and has to be encouraged in the institutes.



Q: Personnel Management has always been a much sought-after course and a huge number of applications for a very small number of seats....

KGD: Yeah, but then now there are so many competitors! I don't know whether I'll be... we'll be able to retain our image after five, ten, fifteen years. And in those days there were only two institutes worth the name; our Institute and that XLRI at Jamshedpur. Now there are tens, I would say hundreds of institutes and many of them are running a program. In IIMs also they have a program but unfortunately that gets the least emphasis, it is one of the least popular courses in IIMs also, Personnel HRM.

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KGD (cont.): And if our students are not to be good students, then they will be the ambassadors of the future. So a student who goes out to proudly say that I belong to Tata Institute, that pride has to be there in the student. And how much I think care do we take of the students, which will enable them to make this kind of statement...that I owe a lot to my alma mater. That is the kind of problem that I visualise. It could be purely my imagination, I'm not sure. As I'm getting older maybe I'm a little bit away from the reality, but nowadays I met some students and they don't speak so nicely about the Institute. That is a situation which I think makes me a bit nervous I would say. But let us not end on a pessimistic note, I think as a department we've done a fairly good job but there is a lot of scope for improvement, I would say.



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KGD (cont.): And I think the main point which I would like to emphasise I think is that we have to establish better relationships between our own students and the faculty members. And the faculty members have to be also ready to give more and more time to the students. If that commitment is there I suppose the problems can be minimised.

Q: Do you think that that Personnel Management here in TISS being alongside Social Work made any difference to the way in which Personnel Management itself developed, or the courses...?

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KGD: You see, one thing is there, let us be very clear. In Social Work, I think they also realise, even Schools of Social Work - all of them; there I think the strong department is Labour Welfare department. There they teach this Labour Welfare, but then it is not Personnel Management so the emphasis on management is not that much. So they turn out good welfare officers but they remain at that level. In an organisation, labour welfare has a low priority, let us be very clear about that. The higher priority is for HRM. It used to be for industrial relations but now it is for HRM, and that I think the Schools of Social Work can never attempt. Or at least they don't want to, put it that way. But they know that I think, among all the Social Work departments, the more popular even in the School of Social Work is the Labour Welfare department.



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KGD (cont.): That is the reality which you can't escape. But the students don't get good grooming on this because Labour Welfare now has become a not so important part of the organisation. It has been relegated to a kind of lower position, and that reality the Schools of Social Work will have to understand and shift their emphasis, which I don't know whether they are prepared to do. That's why I don't have much contact with the Schools of Social Work, so. But from whatever little contact I have, this is my impression.

Q: The whole sort of industry has changed so much; there has been a shift from the manufacturing to the service sector over the last... particularly over the last twenty, twenty-five years. How do you think that has affected the field?

KGD: Now you see, we used to tell the students in those days that you must have experience of shop floor. Now we don't have to say that because not many students get a job on the shop floor. They straight away go to the head office and be the part of corporate office. So that I think emphasis has to be toned down because the service industry I think is there and it is there to stay. So we have to focus then on 'man management', relationship between colleagues, relationship between colleagues and supervisors, dealing with subordinates and those kinds of issues. They will need a lot of emphasis.

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KGD (cont.): And not much Industrial Relations and dealing with the union and that kind of thing. That could be a minor kind of activity. But the major emphasis would be in the area of this; dealing with people, people who are your colleagues, people who are your subordinates, people who are your bosses. Those relationships I think will be given more of an emphasis.