



Dr. Lata Narayan

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Camera/Sound: Ms Shilpi Gulati

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Dr Lata Narayan has been a faculty member at TISS, since 1984. She joined the Unit for Child and Youth Research in 1984 and shifted to the School of Social Work, Centre for Equity for Women, Children and Families in 2006- after the restructuring. In 2011, Dr Narayan shifted to the centre for lifelong learning.

She has earlier worked on the thematic areas of children, social work, and human rights, The thematic areas of her interest currently, are youth, lifelong learning, and training methodology



LN: I was a faculty at the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan prior to this and then there was a time when I was looking for something else, a change. And I didn't know much about TISS but there were a lot of advertisements at that time, faculty positions. You know it was that phase of recruitment in that plan. So I kind of applied. I'd applied for two posts; one in the Department of Family and Child Welfare and one in the Unit for Child and Youth Research.

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LN (cont.): So child was my theme and, and I still remember that I had... I had my baby in December and I was called for the interview for social work in Jan. And I was like I mean, forget it, I'm not going. Anyway I had the job, you know so it wasn't some emergency kind of thing so I said forget it, I'm not going, I'm too tired. So actually I missed that interview and I forgot about everything. Then later the Registrar at that time called me and said Ma'am do you know you applied for another post also, you know... and then I said, oh, did I, kind of. And I kind of did that interview and then came into... and I made a shift, I- in a way it worked out well- to a research unit rather than a teaching department. So then that's how I landed here.

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LN: This was 1984, June, and that was one year where... I mean, there were thirty new faculty approximately, who joined. And if... it was even smaller than what we were before restructuring. I'm not sure Anjali-Jayashankar were part of that. Anyway, so... and I remember the Director had a special tea party for us with all the faculty, and us, where we introduced ourselves and things like that and we felt very oriented and, you know, part of the family. Which you know is just



impossible today; you don't know who you're walking into and, you know... so many, I mean, the way it's expanded.

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LN: I was in a research unit so, I mean I don't... I didn't have the interaction that Social Work faculty has. That time you must remember there was only Social Work, HR and HSS came later.

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LN (cont.): So... but I was teaching. I was teaching one course, Group Work and I do remember one thing. I always had time for informal interactions with students. And they used to come, drop in for 'social visits'. They used to call it social visits; 'Ma'am social visits', no business, you know. And I somehow had the time for that. You must also remember I was much younger, okay. So there was definitely a kind of bonding which happened, also because of my age you know, at that time. At this time however, much I try to be, I mean you know.... There is a difference in the kind of... also depending on age.

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LN (cont.): So it was much more informal, I think students just came, and pressures... I think in society, largely for youth, were there but not the way it is now, or it is felt now, it is perceived now. So yes, I remember some batches you know, of those students but now I may not remember many. And also HR students used to interact, you know, it was not just Social Work because there was only this campus and dining hall and all that, you know, students used to interact. And you generally knew who was pairing up with whom because Social Work, HR pairing up was



very common. So HR students also, you know the boys... because there were more boys at that time, they used to come and have a chat and it was quite informal.

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LN (cont.): We also used to interact like through Institute Day, you know. The staff club of course, the admin staff had much more interactions. I remember going for a staff club picnic, you know, and I have photographs of Shiv Raju and Ravindran and me, and Vrinda Datta and all you know, looking different than having a ball you know, somewhere far away . But now, somehow, those places, I don't know if it happened consciously, but it is not there. I mean there was much more interaction and much more closeness that way.

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LN: Yeah, Golden Jubilee and we... that was great fun because we had, we had the academic program, we had the review part of it, all that. We also had Resonance which began... which was there that year and that was a lot of coordinated work, tremendous. And the students' role in that, and also I must say the process by which students got involved was very interesting in that particular program because I remember the GB which was held, and HR and Social Work.... There was this HR student who, who was so adamant that this was all bunkum, it was not necessary at all. And the Director then, who was Armaity Desai, she took the whole thing forward in such a way that by the end of, I think one hour or two hours, he landed up being the convener of that program, you know.



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LN (cont.): And the whole thing was student-faculty, there were committees really working together on everything. And I also remember some norms we had at that time for all the programs... all the items, I mean, all the... yeah, items; music, this that. TISS would participate, but would not compete. You know, so that was a nice thing which happened also. And this is something old-timers know, that I am a dancer. I... I used to perform classical dance professionally, so that was one image I also I had in the Institute because I was performing on Institute Day or this thing. And I remember Resonance, you know, there was nobody for classical dance among students or anybody. Then there was a lot of persuasion to me, you know, Ma'am you do an item from TISS, you're part of TISS.

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LN (cont.): And finally I said okay, but it was kept a secret 'til the end. Nobody knew that I was going to perform 'til I came onstage, you know. So that was also, well, a memory I have of being... that sort of thing. Resonance was a lot of fun. We used to work through conflicts and dialogues and things like that in a very different way at that time.

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LN: See the campus has expanded, the mandate of TISS has expanded tremendously. There have been spurts, let me say when I joined that was one major spurt of expansion in terms of faculty and in terms of outreach, you know. The first time Bhopal gas tragedy... the first time when colleges of social work across India came together and were coordinated by TISS, okay. So there was a lot of social action of that kind during that phase. Then there was- what do you



say- stabilization of certain processes and all that, and now again since last five years we have seen massive expansion.

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LN (cont.): Keeping in mind the vision of the Board and the Director, and the larger society, what's happening in higher education, okay, so I won't go into that. So those processes... I mean, having two campuses itself has made such a big difference, you know. Like, people like Professor R N Sharma and all of them were all... all of us, you know we used to meet for tea or, you know, have talks, discuss.... We used to have our annual- what is that called- Institute Day nautanki, okay, faculty group. We started with a play and he used to be a scriptwriter at that time, and now we just say... I mean, it's okay, those were the days. So definitely expansion means less interaction, you know, interaction across. There may be that kind of interaction in your own little orbits, like say in your centre or particular school. I don't know, I'm only aware of our school.

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LN (cont.): But interactions across the faculty- even people we knew earlier are much less now. And of course new faculty, many of them I just don't know, especially if they're on New Campus. And since we have younger faculty, I'm not sometimes sure whether they're students or project staff or faculty or whatever it is. But I see this... though there is a sense of, wish we could interact more, I feel if this is the direction that TISS has taken, it is bound to happen. I mean, you have to see it as part of growth of an organization, you know. I remember when I came from NN to here, NN the group was even smaller, and we were just ten or twelve. So we knew exactly who had what for lunch and we were just changing, exchanging recipes and this and that. When I



came here I found this large, though it was small you know, and now I just feel sometimes lost in this whole place.

LN: See, field action project... let me do away with the name. If you read Clifford Manshart's Director's report of 1940 or so, I think, since that time TISS has been very clear that they are here not just for training but response to social... to society, and he's used the word 'social servant'.

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LN (cont.): That's one. So, it was there in the vision throughout, that we have to respond to society. Secondly, historically when social work started in 1936, I mean, when the Institute we didn't have any trained social workers in India. So the first few went abroad and came back and... Or we had faculty from their teaching. And so social work went the way of the West, of America. And the first methods course was casework and social work needed fieldwork, that was absolutely clear, but there was no fieldwork here. I mean, where do you place students? So actually the child guidance clinic, Muskaan, was started as a response partly for fieldwork placement.

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LN (cont.): And then even later when community organization came in, project in BDD chawls, Worli, and another one... well, two community projects were started to place students. And in fact the CG... the first person of the... fieldwork practitioner was the CGC social worker. So the role of social work education to create or demonstrate the role of social work in different areas



was there from the beginning. Then gradually other field action projects started and each has a history. So field action project... one is today if you look at it, every- the University or higher education, has a responsibility to give back to society. In social work education it is absolutely mandatory. Its like doctors have to practice, you know, doctors have that kind of thing, so social work educators, faculty and students need to practice.

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LN (cont.): And field... and then the name field action project came in. Over the years, there have been many definitions. If you just look at the annual reports of the Directors... over the years, you know sometimes what we call just extension work, you know, what is Bhopal gas tragedy field action intervention is... In one year the students had a major campaign against RCF, you know; was that field action? All these were debated. There are many, you know... action research which everyone... you know, many social science people... is that field action? All these issues were debated and discussed say around 2004. And then in terms of social work, we kind of finally defined it as a long-term intervention....

LN: Haan, in 2004, since there were varied definitions of field action project, and sometimes then in social work we were feeling uncomfortable that anyone does a little thing, is it a field action project or is it extension work?

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LN (cont.): So then we kind of defined it as, a field action project is where TISS is the legal holder of the project; that is, staff, and etcetera are appointed through TISS and the norms of



TISS hold. And secondly, it is the issue which is important. Like if it's child, children, that is the primary mandate; it's long-term, sustainable, so it's different from a crisis intervention like Andamans you go, that... we... in social work we would not call that field action. But a crisis intervention project can become a field action project. Like communal harmony project; after the Mumbai riots, you know, we intervened **and rehab as an Institute** and then there was a need for a little long-term intervention, which was multidisciplinary and social work-led.

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LN (cont.): Jambalpada floods then we took on as a field; it became a field action project. Long-term, sustainable... see the issue is primary, and hence it's different from action research where... action research is usually testing out an intervention. Action research may be part of a field action project, but that's not the primary motive for starting it. Yeah, it... now today since we find that many interventions are called field action projects and obviously, I mean, many... most of it was led by social work, but today others might start, you know, field action projects. So we have said, as a school, we will define field action projects for the school and let other schools or disciplines define field action projects, you know, as they see it. So this is where we are right now, with the expansion.

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LN (cont.): That's, yeah, that's what we would say a field action project is. But each has started with its own history, you know it's either come out of a workshop recommendation like Humara Club which started on street children, was a recommendation of a national workshop on street children. The special cell started when Professor Apte. So I don't know what she has said about



the special cell, so she must have said how it started.

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LN: Yeah, because... this is what she said at a seminar; she said that there were, you know, near Sion Hospital there are these nurses' quarters and some guys were bothering them, so I think they contacted TISS and Professor Apte and said do something about it. So she spoke to Doctor... Commissioner, Mr. Ribera and he said fine, we'll put people there to, this thing. But what are you doing for the women? Are they going to constantly, sort of, this thing. And that's how the germ of the idea came that we need to, sort of, do something for them. So that's how that project started. The Family Courts thing came from, I think, an invitation from the court itself, some Judges said. And they're very interesting experiences there, you know, the social workers were given a room because they didn't know where to put social workers in the court because they don't exist, didn't exist.

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LN (cont.): And they were given a room where all the flags were kept, national flags which are used and there was no rule of how to dispose of national flags. So I'm not even sure now whether there's any... how legally you can destroy a national flag. So that room was stinking and one little thing, full of national flags of I don't know how many years. So, you know... and from there now it's institutionalized as a post; Family Counselors. See many of the field action projects- in fact most of them- have created posts, have demonstrated the role of social work and created posts. Hospital social work, school social work, Family Courts, in prisons, in the police cell, all these have been sort of, part of field action.



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LN (cont.): Sometimes it's an idea, like Hum started just with Professor Nasreen Rustomfram and me, we interact and then... right outside here, we were... just telling her, you know, we need to do something because we both have come from the field. So there are times when you miss just doing something in the field back. So I said start something, and then came the whole idea of starting Hum and this work, so.

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LN: Yeah, see, students have been very, very crucial actually to the birth and the growth of field action projects, okay, from the Institute's point of view. Because initially nobody gives money for the projects, you have to test out, so the first two, three years are usually the faculty and the students doing full-time work. Faculty is also like a, a field work person... social worker. So students initiate... I mean, with the faculty, sort of do that. Now, once in the existing field action projects, they're placed there for fieldwork, you know, so they're learning. And field action projects, since we kind of monitor it a little more seriously and we hope, I mean, there is quality intervention. Students have a kind of learning which sometimes is not possible in other setting, which is the feedback we have got.

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LN (cont.): So definitely their learning is much more rigorous and effective when they are working. And you know when they're supervised by faculty or directly by TISS there is a certain



kind of quality to the field supervision also.

LN: Again, I will talk about field action projects from my definition, what I have said. So like I will not... I mean there may be other definitions, other... I'm taking based on the social work, School of Social Work, sort of, what it has defined. See the core remains the same; intervention in new areas. If you see Navchetna which had started with children's education... institutions, you take Koshish which is with the beggars' home and the homeless, they're all interventions which are not there on a regular basis in terms of social work, beggars, homeless. So they... that whole emphasis, value framework and all the norms for field action projects still continue.

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LN (cont.): The number has not sustained itself, okay. So that... we have been reflecting on it, whether it's a phase now because of all this restructuring and expansion, because the School of Social Work is also churning, you know, regularly in terms of new curriculum, this, that. Is it that somewhere we are overwhelmed by all that and we don't have the space, is a question that we are asking ourselves? The number of field action projects, new interventions, has reduced. So that is one thing. Challenges are many because if you see, in terms of funds, one would get funds maybe for a new project or something, but to institute the role of a social work... or a post of a social worker is sometimes more difficult now. Because the NGO sector itself is going through, you know, a lot of ups and downs in terms of getting funds and you know, in terms of the global funding and in terms of local funding, so they are having... so instituting a post is sometimes a little more difficult today.



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LN (cont.): Though, if you see the special cell you know which you do more in detail in the film that has become a national scheme. One thing which has worked is that special cell... is not a national scheme, but the whole model has been taken up by several State governments, it's partly influential in the Domestic Violence Act and the Protection Officer as part of the Domestic Violence Act needs to be a social worker, so that kind of policy interventions are there. And Childline has also become a national scheme; those are of course the older ones. Today that is one challenge... this is one major thing which I would say.

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LN (cont.): And also probably... we've always been multidisciplinary. The need for greater multidisciplinary interventions may be required, but we have been, I mean, every field action project does have a multidisciplinary team. Those would be the challenges. As far as UGC is concerned, you know, still it is largely invisible. See, even in the NAC report for assessing social work education, we had kind of recommended at a national seminar event here that college of social work anywhere should be, one indicator should be their ... the existence of field action projects.

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LN (cont.): But in terms of UGC it is still I think, sort of, combined with extension work and... It's like invisible work for us. That's a big, big challenge. See earlier we didn't mind doing it, we just did it okay; but when today there is a credit for everything you do and you want that you know, sort of, you feel that you would like some more visibility and recognition. That is



definitely there. Earlier I think, we weren't looking for it so much, you know. Yeah.

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LN: It could, okay; definitely outreach. Prayas with Prisons have been on state-level committees and all that, when you're kind of making large policies. Special cell also has been in terms of women, and the Act and the DV Act and all that. Childline is... I mean, though it grew in TISS, Childline is now a national scheme and when it's a national scheme, it has been insured that TISS has a role, the Director has... is... the member of the board. So there is some intervention at the larger board level. What was your question? Policy, yeah. See, and there are some small level policy- small, not very small, but still.

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LN (cont.): Like say in prisons, when children are born in prisons, you know, from the women prisoners, they have a birth certificate which says that they are born in prison, you know, which is terrible. I mean, you know the child grows up with that kind of a certificate which is... and nobody thought about this as something which is so demeaning. And it was Prayas kind of, fought through it, changed it and brought it to the notice of this needs to be changed, you know. That woman has a home somewhere, and you know so what if the child was born in a prison hospital. Identity should not be related for life with a prison. So those changes have been brought about, in terms of its functioning. Those things have happened.

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LN: Yeah, actually that is how... how it is institutionalized. There has been two, three ways; one is if has been terminated, when we feel the role is over. The role of TISS is not seen as a sort of mushrooming FAPs and sort of managing so many NGOs, no, that is definitely not it. You terminate it when you feel a community can take it over or the need is over, you know that Jambalpada project, or the communal harmony project. So it's, it's terminated, given over to the community and things; that's one way. Second is they've registered independently as NGOs, okay. Childline was an NGO, Meljol is an NGO, Humara Club is an NGO; so they have moved, and that is, it is hope that you know, the demonstration projects take on a life of its own in the long run.

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LN (cont.): This has been another way NGOs... and Childline became a national scheme, it got upscale. Now with Prayas and special cell, they are under the Department of Criminology, Justice, Correction, you know legal this thing. Where it's a little more... it's very important yet to have the TISS name supporting it, you know. Because they are difficult systems, difficult in the sense, very challenging systems. So currently they are still there with TISS, but constantly looking at how can it be separate, at the same time linked. So we definitely don't see FAPs as being permanent fixtures; the only permanent fixture is the child guidance clinic, Muskaan because it was the first one. I mean nobody thought of FAPs beyond that, since 1937.

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LN (cont.): So only those staff, you'll find a permanent staff of the Institute and things like that. Others are all project based stuff. So we definitely see them moving out.



LN: HUM stands for Humanity United and Involved. Now we were just discussing and seeing in the ward itself we have so many contacts through our fieldwork placements- again I'm talking social work, there's so many agencies, HR places students in so many industries, hospitals. So, many organisations know of TISS, you know, and they're connected ... Sometimes they come for workshops, these things.

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LN (cont.): But they're all piecemeal, can we kind of come together as... all in the ward and should and can TISS take a little lead in this. That's how the whole thing started, and then we definitely said human rights sensitive ward. That was our vision and mission, to create a human rights sensitive ward. We have a whole note on that, I will not go into details but broadly human rights education, firstly creating awareness about what is living together. And this ward, you know, it has two deemed universities, it has a nuclear plant, it has the biggest slums of Bombay, it has the oil refineries here and it has a very active citizenry, middle-class I'm talking about also, through the ALM movement, very active. Chembur is very good that way.

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LN (cont.): So it is this... I mean, it's a microcosm of Bombay also. Mumbai, Mumbai, please edit and put Mumbai. So we just thought that the large populations of marginalized, vulnerable plus the resources actually are there in the ward, you know. It should be the ward looking after the poor that was our vision. It's also the first step for migration, for people who come you know, so it's the most... the newcomers, the most vulnerable, those with illegal settlements, and all that.



Dumping ground, the biggest in this ward, so we have everything sort of, there. That's how we said let's, sort of, do something to get across class, caste, gender, everything.

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LN (cont.): So any activity we've done, we've kind of tried to see we break class, okay. Okay, that was our vision; we said we'll start with doing needs assessment. So we did a study of all organizations, we got a profile and we asked them whether they would like to be part of this Endeavour, and 95... 90-95 percent said yes of course. They didn't know how, you know, but they said yes we would like to be, sort of, part of this. Then we started with workshops of Me to Be, titled Me to Be which was really taking... with the NGOs, with the Rotaries, with the community people, different workshops we've had. NSS volunteers, we had five colleges here, school teachers, and principals. How do you move from being 'I' to community, it's a two day workshop which we have done, and we continue doing it?

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LN (cont.): Then every year we also started taking up one... haan, then 2007 happened, that was the floods no? I think its 2007, the floods, Bombay floods happened. Mumbai floods. So at that time the government, the self-government Municipal Corporation was looking for an agency to kind of coordinate relief in the ward. We actually wanted an NGO to do it, you know, we said now. But then many of the groups came and said no, we'd rather have TISS do it because somewhere there is neutrality to a university. Taking, you know... it's not seen as biased or taking positions or in there for power. That brought a lot of organizations also together and setting norms of how to this thing....



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LN (cont.): A lot of volunteers, middle-class citizens, housing societies, so that also sort of helped. Then every year we used to take up a theme. We've taken up child's rights one year, one or two years with the schools around where we had child's rights educations and we used to have camps at the end with children from different schools. Again, we used to have the elite schools, we used to have the Marathi, Urdu Municipal... not the Municipal schools because they, we felt they already have a lot. There are many private schools, no funding, which are very, very poor, in the slums and we had the specially challenged schools, you know, the disabled. We have about seven of them in the ward.

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LN (cont.): So we used to have camps with all of them together, and those really worked well. I mean, the... and in fact especially the elite schools, the teachers came back and said now when are you having the next one because this kind of an exposure our children will never get. So... and processes which helped were that we made the medium of language Hindi, so children who came from English schools... I mean, there were conscious efforts to break hierarchy. So the language was Hindi, so they had to now not be the English ones in power, you know, they had to sort of this thing.... Then the specially challenged children, we found out what they were good at. They are good at making flowers and something like that, so we made them the resource persons for teaching everyone else how to make flowers.

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LN (cont.): We were, sort of... mentally challenged or visually... hearing impaired, so we had to put in processes which broke this so that children feel that they are children first, you know so. We, we did child's rights then we had one or two years, one on solid waste management which came up from the citizens. This whole thing of how do you manage solid... you know, solid waste management. One year we had a major campaign of awareness where more than a hundred organizations participated.... We had a week, Saafsutra campaign. And NGOs, then college students did street plays, media and culture students photographs are there with us, you know, collected all the waste from the canteen, SMS, from the classes, you know the paper cups?

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LN (cont.): And they made installations all over; actually they drew eyes on the cups and strung them all over so like, you know, they're looking at you, sort of scaring you . And all other waste they actually put up in the, on the stage here as stringers, you know streamers across. So they also participated a lot in that, and we had the Sheriff of Bombay coming and inaugurating lots of things, M Ward public meetings, that was one big event. Then we moved to creating committees, we had a workshop on networking and advocacy; what are the challenges of networks working. You see that's a big challenge because networks... it's very difficult to keep groups together you know, sort of thing.

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LN (cont.): So we had that. They wanted to discuss alternate energy also, so we've had discussions on that. We had one on disability as a theme, as a campaign. It was consciously decided that we would do it with the poorer sections because the middle-class and all know, you



know, that there are services and where they should take them. So we had disability identification camps in Cheetah camp and awareness in... through Apnalay, where doctors from the ward itself came, we did everything, gave them certificates and told them that, you know.... So that was one major thing we did one year, disability.

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LN (cont.): See one of the principles we've tried to use is, is getting financial resources from the ward. We feel that this... I mean the ward, if you're looking towards a human rights sensitive ward; you need the resources from within the ward. So some campaigns like RCF supported... except for the salary of the social worker which is always difficult, which we've got from other sources, but that's a... State Bank supported something small. You know program funds, you don't need so much, there's a lot of volunteerism. We want to build up volunteerism also through this. So that's, I think, a little bit about it.... A long way to go and now that TISS is having an M ward in a big way, we don't know, let's see how it will take off.

LN: See I feel social work response to realities will continue. You know otherwise there is no relevance for social work education and in a way TISS also. So to that extent it would continue. The response, the demonstration of strategies would have to continue because I can see social realities changing, I can see challenges, I mean, different challenges. So response would continue, demonstration would continue....



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LN (cont.): And the changing... role of the social worker might change, you know, different things. I can see more multidisciplinary work, interventions. But see, social work... I can... see, field action projects are also direct work with people, it's not research or, you know... which is equally important for an issue. So I'm hoping that a direct contact with people- the marginalized, vulnerable- continues. And in Bombay I think the challenges are going to be mind-boggling because the whole thing of urban spaces, you know... push out of, displacing of communities, issues such as migration and water, you know, they're going to be issues not really small....

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LN (cont.): So it's going to be a big challenge. It's a challenge for the NGO sector and maybe we'll have to be a little more political; political in the larger sense of the word, not party politics at all. I don't know, yeah.

LN: See, TISS is different. It is unique in many ways. We have been relevant at any point of time in terms of higher education also and response. I feel we must keep this, these. Continue to be relevant but be rooted, in the sense that I pray and hope that our commitment to the marginalized and vulnerable groups continue much, much more because that would be required. I also... so far TISS has also taken stand on issues, whether it is Narmada, whether it is street children, whether it is environment and I do hope that as an institution we are able to take stands because I feel we are very privileged.



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LN (cont.): We are in a privileged position, even in the higher education system and we need to kind of use that standing for sections of society who really don't have... I mean you know in terms of human rights or whatever. Yeah. I hope we remain rooted, that is one major thing. There will always... and also a balance between indigenization and internationalization. I also feel that balance needs to be kept because we are going into a system of higher education where there's going to be a lot of privatization and internationalization of higher education. And we need to ensure that it's local also, I mean we take care of local needs also. Okay, thanks.