



Prof. Vidya Rao

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Prof. Vidya Rao is retired professor of Social Welfare Administration from TISS. She did her masters' in social work from Michigan and worked as a social worker in Detroit. She subsequently worked as a lecturer at the Madras School of Social Work and joined the SWA dept of TISS in 1979. She did her Ph.D. From TISS. She has many years of teaching, research and field action experience and has set up the field action project Navchetana.



Part 1

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D: Thank you so much for being with us...today. We could start this interview right at the very beginning. Tell us how, when you came to be in TISS and what your specialization is.

VR: I had done a Masters in Social Sciences from Madras University in '68 soon after that, I got a chance to go to University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, US. There my cousin had put a...an application for a Masters in Social Work. I...it looked very strange that you had to do a study and education to do social work because my family, everybody was doing social work without any kind of a degree, so it didn't think, I didn't think it this thing, but then she convinced me that social work you have to study and you have to do it. She herself is a electrical engineer and she knew more about social work at that time and she put me so like that I did not know that this was a field of study. And I graduated from Michigan in one year, in '69. I went in '68 and '69 I graduated. '70-'74 I was working in Detroit, the Auto City, and I was working for the United Community Services. Now it is known as United Way of America. So I was a social worker and working for the Information and Referral Service, now, these days it is called call centers, but it was emergency. I used to handle suicide cases, prevention and other kinds of emergency cases and also we used to handle people who wanted emergency cash, assistance and things like that. Mostly on the phone. After that experience until '74, I came to India. In between, in '73, I had come. At that time Dr. Gore was the director here, and in Michigan I had specialized in community organization and social welfare administration and in '72 the social welfare administration had been started as a specialization within social work. So he wanted me to, right away he offered me a job. I landed, the next day I had a job on hand, in TISS.



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But then I had returned back, though I had a Green card, I returned back mainly to be with my family, who, my father who was a widower, I wanted to be with him, so I did not take this job and I worked in the Madras School of Social Work as a lecturer till '76/'77. '77, '76-'79, I was the, I felt that, you know, my degree was an American degree, didn't know anything about social work in India, but I was teaching. I felt inadequate, but some of my students at that time, one is, you know, Shanti Ranganathan, she is running a Deaddiction Hospital in Madras, Chennai now. And then...Gangadharan and his wife were my students. Now they are running a...Homecare...they supply the people who will take care of old people and sick people at home, they train them and all that. They're doing a very good job. He, Gangadharan was with the...Nandi Foundation, Nandi Foundation and another very good student during, of that time, is now Vidyasagar. He is unmarried, but then he is running an Udavum Karangal in Chennai. He is looking after more than three thousand to four thousand children, women, mentally ill men and all that. It's more like a, you know, vagrants he picks up and brings them and takes care of them, doing fantastic work there. I was teaching. I felt that teaching I got some idea about what is curriculum and how to go about it but then I felt that I didn't have field experience. So, I resigned that job and joined Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board. This board is a government body and they had a NGO called New Resident's Welfare Trust. The DMK Party was trying to shift slum-dwellers into tenements and that shift, we were to, you know, had to help them with and so on, how to change their lifestyles and things like that and so, though it was an NGO, we were completely funded and were considered as a branch or a department of the Slum Clearance Board, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board.



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I was the executive officer for 4 years. We were working in 32 slums in Chennai. We were running health, education and job training, and something like; three hundred employees were under me; 4 doctors and 14 nurses, and 14-15 social workers and all those things. So that time the DMK was in power, it was, you know, slum clearance and slums were very much politicized so I had to deal with the government, and politicians and local petty politicians also a great deal and after that I felt that I should have a doctoral degree in order to move up... You know, so I resigned the job and came to Tata Institute, at that time also, Dr. Gore was the Director, he offered me again the same job, lecturer's job and mainly I came here to do my Ph.D. This was in '79 and '79 August, I came here and Prof. Gopalan was a visiting Professor in the, in those days there was a Dept. of Social Welfare Administration, so he was the Head of the Dept. and I was with him, and two of us, and other, there were two other ad hoc people, we were managing something like 15-20 students, in each batch. So in the first year itself they came to us, so we were in touch with them for the two years. So, from '79-'85, we had the Social Welfare Administration. Prof. Gopalan, his tenure was finished in two years. In '82 he retired and I was the reader at that time, and I took over as the Head of the Dept. of Social Welfare Administration and I had no other lecturers and there was no other faculty along with me. I was managing 15 students, their field work, teaching 4-5 courses, everything single handedly with the help of Agency fieldwork supervisors and so on. So it was quite a challenge at that time. At the same time...in '82, Dr. Armaity Desai became the Director.



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In between, I think Prof. Ramachandran was the temporary Director until she joined, for 6 months or so. And when she joined, I talked to her and said that the syllabus, the curriculum of Social Welfare Administration is, you know, too much heavily borrowing from the management sciences. It did not have social work perspective and I wanted to change it. She agreed with me, and I very innocently I thought, she will support me in all these things. But in 1985, you know '83-'84 itself, she appointed a special committee to review the curriculum. The other aspect of this Social Welfare Administration curriculum was, apart from borrowing from the Management Sciences, because we borrowed from Management Sciences, many of our graduates were becoming, getting jobs in the HR departments in the corporates. So the personal management people objected to us and this is a backdoor entry to personal jobs and so on. So that is another reason why we had to go through this and how we can make it more, social work perspective should be strengthened and so on. So the committee reviewed our curriculum and they gave us a tall order saying that all the social work students should have a Social Welfare Administration, not just the specialization students. So the courses that were Social Welfare Administration courses were made open to everybody, there was no specialization, you know, from 1985 onwards, we did not admit Social Welfare Administration specialization students at all and these courses were open to all the social work students.

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And I was teaching and one or two others were teaching. At that time, we had just introduced disaster management as part of Social Welfare Administration and at that time the Gujarat, there was a flood in Gujarat and we had gone on a relief and as a result of that we felt it was necessary to have a course in Disaster Management. So it was, it became a part and Dr. Pandey who was there at that time, he was teaching Social Welfare Administration, I mean Disaster Management in the specialization there was, I also felt that the, this is Social Welfare and, you know, the tribal and dalit perspective, minority perspective was not at all there, so I felt, very strongly, that we should bring in that. So I introduced a course called welfare of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and that course was taught. It confined itself to mainly the government programmes and reservation and so on and it was not again, though the course was there, the kind of perspective...dalit and tribal perspective was not there. Again it was hegemonic kind of teaching in stasured kind of a position, you know status doing so much for the dalits and tribals and scheduled castes and so on and that kind of a perspective. That again I was not very comfortable, but I did not have any other kind of a help. Though there were social science people, they did not have much inclination to give me any kind of...input in that direction. One of my colleagues was teaching that and she felt that this is really not important or, you know, she had her own biases and so on, so again I was not very satisfied with that.

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But then, anyhow, Armaity Desai stopped, you know, admission for Social Welfare Administration. This course on welfare of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was anyhow offered as an optional course, from '85 onwards, this committee had suggested various things.



One of the major suggestions was, Social Welfare Administration should be offered as a certificate or a diploma course. So and at the same time in 1980, I had registered for Ph.D. under Dr. Hebsur; he was Pol. Sci and Research Methodology. I had no...I have never studied political science and I was working with him, and he's a taskmaster, so at that time, as a predoctoral programme, we had to write 9 papers. Each one of the papers he made me write 13-16 times and I was at my wits end and I really, with this Armaity withdrawing Social Welfare Administration specialization and he giving my such a tough time, I really thought it is not worth living also. Really, I was, you know...really very depressed and all those things. I don't know how I came through, but Prof....you know when she...I think she went somewhere...no, no, she was there and Prof. Hebsur became the Deputy Director, and even then, you know, already he was not giving me time, and now Deputy Director he was not giving me...able to give me time at all, and also, he was not clearing papers also, my papers, so it was really tough on both ends. And then...somehow I took leave for two years...one year, and that time also the pol...The study leave policy was not very well laid down, so Armaity used to say, only one semester at a time. Every time I had to renew, again and again ask and justify that I should have more leave and so on. So that was all So and my colleagues were not very supportive of me, and during that time, in addition to this, I was also the Lady's Hostel warden and Armaity Desai would send me a note at 2 o' clock in the night saying the girls are making so much noise, what are you doing, did you take a round, so I had to go in the middle of the night to look after all those things.

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Then in '86, Golden Jubilee time, we had department specialization wise seminars, we had a successful seminar. We called all our alumni and some of our alumni are, you know, P.D. Kulkarni, he was eminent and one of the first social work graduates in Tata Institute to join the Government at that time social welfare dept. which became later ministry. He was the executive director in the central social welfare board, then he moved on to UNDP and ESCAP in this thing and he served in Geneva also. He was responsible for giving the social dimension to the development programmes and not economic... development should...also include social development and that kind of a thing. And out of that effort only ESCAP was established in Bangkok. He served there also and he came back here after doing all those things to...be the, you know, head of the dept. of social welfare administration. Before that, in '72, the dept. was established by Dr. Gore and Prof. S.N. Dubey was the HOD. He was there until about '76. From '76 onwards he had an adjunct professor's job in University of Chicago...University of Chicago, yes, Jane Adams Schools, you know, as a director of the institute, Prof. Gore said, one cannot be drawing two pay cheques and be employed in two places and all that, he was, Prof. Dubey was given a chance to opt for either one. He resigned from here and went there as a full-time professor and so on. He was in Chicago. So he had set up some kind of a legacy in the social welfare administration, what courses and all that. That is the one that I wanted to change and so on. So Prof. Kulkarni, when he was there for two years after coming back from ESCAP and so on, he conducted, and he produced, lot of...at least 2-3 books on social policy. During that time, Dr. Gore has also written on social policy, and social policy became a very important kind of a focus for social work and at that time, Dr. Gore was member of planning commission, was a member in Ministry of Social Welfare, you know, whatever working committees were there, or standing committees were there, he was a member of police commission, he was a member of



the committee which planned the New Bombay in Vashi...New Bombay area, creation of CIDCO, all these things.

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So he also had written quite a bit about social policy. This was also reflected in Delhi University, Delhi School of Social Work, Social Policy, S.N. Ranade and then Shankar Pathak; all these people have contributed a great deal too social policy writing. So social work has really contributed a great deal to give some kind of a academic, intellectual...shape to social policy in India...and this social policy perspective and all that was quite similar to what is social policy conceptualized in London School of Economics and UK and so on. that is the time that I realized that the Dorab Tata Trust had instituted in 1920's and 30's a chair in social policy and social administration which was occupied by the...you know, Beveridge, William Beveridge, who is considered to be the Father of Welfare State and so on. So Beveridge and Keynes together, they had shaped the national health services. So those ideas also had influenced...Dr. Gore and Prof. Kulkarni and Prof. S.N. Ranade and so on...so that's, those things you can see now, even today in their writings in Social Policy. But it was mainly stasured kind of a...at that time, you know, in the 50's and 60's, Indian state was also evolving, there were...nation building was also one of the important work that was happening, and so Prof. Kulkarni was member of, or Secretary of the First Renuka Ray Committee which really was responsible for making of the ministry of social welfare at that time. It was only a dept. under the labour ministry, but he brought...he in this committee, they discussed social...scheduled castes welfare, scheduled tribes welfare, orphanages, and poor, and dependent, and disabled, all these people, there is a...all these



services were taken from home dept., labour dept. and all these things were created there. So Prof. Kulkarni was very much...has contributed to social welfare in India a great deal. And after he left, his tenure was two years, Prof. Gopalan took over. He came after retirement from Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration in Mussoorie. He retired from Govt. of India Service and he came here for two-three years as visiting professor. And after his tenure only, I took over.

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Between him and me, we had several conferences and several training programmes. The...one of the conferences was development without deprivation; one of those conferences was there. And the other conference that I remember is...Corporate Social Responsibility, we had two conferences on that...at that time, Bajaj people...Jamnalal Bajaj was the Gandhian who had persuaded the Indian Merchant's Chamber to undertake some social responsibility and so on...so we had funding from them and we had a conference like that. Though the personal management department was there, they did not take up the CSR, and it is Social Work, we took up the CSR in social welfare administration, at the same time, Family and Child Welfare, one M. Manu Desai...Family and Child welfare person, she had started teaching social work in industry. And that too, in those days it was mainly the family planning kind of a thing for factory workers, and more of savings and alcoholism and those kinds of things. So this is CSR part that had...we had...built up that as part of social work. The other thing that had happened was...we did not have too much of local governance. So we introduced subjects like...Democratic Decentralized Decision Making to teach students about Panchayat Raj Institutions, Zilla Parishad and so on.



And then we had introduced a course on social action for social change...for the first time advocacy was introduced in...In the syllabus of the thing and it was in the social welfare administration. All these things we had done during that period...'80...from, you know '82 and '86 and so on...in that period.

Part 2

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VR: In '82-'83, Prof. Grace Mathew was also there...I was given first year students to supervise field work, as well as second year students. You know, from...coming from Chennai after teaching in Madras School of Social Work and all that we had heard so much about Tata Institute and so on...I came with great expectations. I found that you know, syllabus...and then students' performance of assessment...all these things were subjective and ad hoc. There were no set procedures. I was quite taken aback and a little disappointed also. So when I got...and Prof. Gopalan retired in '83, I became the HOD so I set some of these things...I could set the syllabus for field work, what are they required to learn during the field work, specially if they're doing Social Welfare Administration. So I...categorized the organizations like NGOs and among NGOs, those who are delivering service and those who are funding, and then Govt. organizations and semi govt. organizations, those who are working in the community and development work like ICDS and so on and those that are working in from the office like the Mahatma Phule Finance and Development Corporation to give loans to the...Scheduled Castes persons who want to start their own business and so on. So we had a syllabus for all these kinds of organizations



and it was compulsory for students to come and share in a seminar. And that kind of a peer learning was very effective. To know the variety of issues and variety of fields and openings that is there.

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So it was a very useful and it was you know, some of them even engaged in activism, when they were there. And at that time this committee was there and they were going to change and in '85 they stopped taking...admitting students. In '85-'86 was the Golden Jubilee year. I called all the alumni and we had prepared some written material on what is Social Welfare Administration and what kinds of things that they should do and so on. I was still teaching Social Welfare Administration to all the students when it became a general...it was available...general subject to all the students, all the other specializations...FCW or URCD students, everybody used to opt for Social Welfare Administration subjects...papers..Courses or whatever. '88-'89 onwards, you know the, I think it was 6th plan or something. I kept on asking for...by that time '86-'88, around that time Prof. Pandey also left. He resigned and left... I was the only one who was teaching all these subjects. So some of the subjects that we were teaching were shifted and there were other people from social science, you know, schools or in those days it was research units. They were asked to take, teach those subjects. So slowly one by one, you know, many subjects were given away to the social science people and I taught only the main four or five specialization courses which were generally available to everybody. But during this time, Prof. Gopalan and myself conducted lot of training programmes. We used to have the IAS officer, probation officers coming here and we used to give them an exposure here, entertain them as a this thing and we



used to say what social work, social welfare and all that is. And then we had conducted three or four...three training programmes for the central social welfare board program officers who were giving grants to voluntary organizations. It was a grant giving organization.

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We had the...those training programmes. District planning officers we had conducted two training programmes, district tribal development officers we had conducted two training programmes, like that we had conducted several programmes. And in addition to that, after Prof. Gopalan's retirement I had conducted a workshop on two issues. One was social welfare administration and its relevance for income and employment generation programme. It was those days when the integrated rural development programme was a big thing. They had some twenty point programme and so our students were to be em...you know fieldwork and then they had employment charges or opportunities also there. So I conducted a workshop on income and employment. Now that has become social entrepreneurship. And that was a subject in Social Welfare Administration specialization and now it has become an independent M.A....Social Entrepreneurship. Our Disaster Management course also, which was part of the Social Welfare Administration has become an independent M.A. M.Sc. Programme now. The other workshop that I had conducted was fieldwork in social welfare administration. So that was mainly to draw attention to, you know, my...that time I did not have that much imagination or...though I had a degree in social sciences and all that, my sociological imagination was limited, you know, So in the workshop, the idea was to see that they get the dalit and tribal perspective. So fieldwork...how to do fieldwork from that perspective and so on, we had a one day workshop on



that. So all these things are not very well recognized or thisthinged because none of my colleagues...at that time, I was the youngest in the...among the social work faculty and Prof. Pannakal, Prof. Apte, and Prof. Panvalkar and all these people were there and they had...they were much more articulate than I was and I could not assert myself. All these things...you know...was not very well recognized. But then we had done all these things.

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Subsequently...from '88 onwards I kept on preparing proposals to get the specialization reintroduced in the M.A. Programme and Prof. Armaity Desai did not believe that Social Welfare Administration is part of, or is an important method of social work. She had some biases, you know. She was mainly Family and Child Welfare and Case work group work and things like that and also maximum community organization. Social Welfare Administration she did not have much, you know, she didn't give much importance to that. And also, you know social policy also, she was mainly into Child and women and thisthing...so the dalit perspective and the poverty perspective was somewhere, it was lost. I felt. Very much. Though...Armaity Desai was part of the Shakti, you know, Commission which produced a report on women...women workers...you know, it suggested what are the difficulties they go through and different fields, construction workers, women in that and women who are working in agriculture, what is their difficulty and all that. But then somehow poverty perspective was completely not coming through. She was also a member of the High Court appointed commission to look at the prevention of Beggary act, to repeal it and all that. They recommended repealing of that. But then all those things were not part of the curriculum and teaching and so on. So you know that



kind of a thing was...and during that time again some...even senior students were placed, though I was not running a specialization. So my students used to be placed in ICDS and some students were very talented. You know Bharatnatyam and classical singing and all that. I used...I channelized those talents to help them to work with the tribal people and in the tribal language, write lyrics on balanced nutrition, you know, A Vitamin deficiency, how to detect that and all that, she trained them also in their own dance. Tribal dance and so on.

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She prepared a group of those people and she was also able to get from ICDS a contact for them to perform in 500 places and get paid for that. So all these things was part of our training and, you know, somehow the...more remedial and pathological perspective was overwhelming rather than the development aspect of it. So in social welfare administration, we were trying to give that kind of a perspective, and slowly my thinking also improved, and anti-oppressive kind of a social work, I felt, was necessary and at that time in the '80s, rights based approach also was becoming popular from UNDP and such international fora and so on. So, all these things got, you know, introduced. And in Social Welfare Administration papers, though they were not specialization, it was available to everybody. Some of my students have written papers on water policy. For example how water should be costed, you know water taxing and all these things. We didn't get into too much technical aspects of it. But then at least that issue, as an issue, this is you know, if it is privatized, what should we...is it a public good or not, those kinds of debates we were able to introduce to the students. So with every year I was trying to get the specialization introduced and she refused to do that, she simply blocked my, all my this thing...efforts...and she was not



even allowing me to have more colleagues. In '85, only one post, one lecturer's post was there and that was, she allowed that to be filled. So we were two of us and then there were two ad hoc people coming and going and so on. These women were getting married and going away to America, they did not stay but then this social entrepreneurship, you know, course was shaped by them. These kinds of courses we used to conduct in orphanages. Those who are, you know, 14 to 18 years old, they are, you know, the...either neglected children or delinquents in the various homes.

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We used to conduct these kinds of entrepreneurship courses for them. How to start their own tea stall or you know any kind of a paper distribution and those kinds of training programmes we used to hold in there so that after release from the homes, they can integrate very well with the society and not go back to criminal activities and so on. It is during this time that Armaity was very much interested in...In you know, having FAPs, so by '90 I wanted to have some kind of a FAP because I didn't have faculty, I was not able to...finally in 1996 I started a FAP. This was in Ulhasnagar; there are four government children's homes. They are all mostly neglected children, not delinquents. So one is for the disabled neglected children, the other three were for ordinary children...all of them were for boys, no girls. I started working there because one of my colleagues who was an ad hoc, she came from Ulhasnagar, it was convenient for her, so we started there. At that...you know, it just happened that at that time...continuously in the newspapers we had incidents reported that abuse was taking place in these govt. children's institutions. Whether they were beaten up or the children died of negligence and so on...so we



decided to work only in the govt. children's homes and supplement whatever was govt. doing but not substitute the govt. I was very clear govt. should be made to do what it is supposed to do. So that is one of the things that we did. That's how we started working for children's rights. But then I found that at that time the child welfare children were a very prominent people. My colleagues, Kamini Kapadia and others...Asha Rane were all working on children...so lot of work had gone in. But then I found that there, one niche area that is the rights of the institutionalized children were not very much in their focus. They were talking about street children and then, child trafficking, prostitution and those kinds of things. But you know children's rights to education and development and identity and all those things of the institutional...were neglected. So I took up that, and we started that, so first time in '96 I prepare a proposal and Dorab Tata Trust gave us the fund for that project. So there we were conducting Anand Melas and other kinds of things which...helped the children in addition to their school and other things...more life skills and so on.

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When we were doing this we found that the people, superintendant or the warden who was in charge of these homes, they themselves were taking away the grain and other things meant for the children to their house and selling it and all that. So this we came through...came to know from children in their group work. So when the students asked me these are the things what you are running something, Tata Institute, such a big name, what are you doing about it and why you say you have a FAP and so on. So we started thinking how to tackle that, because I didn't want to get...you know, anybody suspended or dismissed from service, you know. I didn't want to do



that. I wanted some kind of a sustainable change that takes place in the persons and then they change their attitude towards the children and so on. So the children wrote a letter to...at that time, there was a high court...because of this abuse reported in the newspaper, high court had appointed a committee. So the children wrote a letter saying that this is what is happening. So that's the committee...came to visit these homes and that particular superintendant was dismissed actually. And because of that, we were not allowed to go back and work there. The other superintendants in other three homes did not allow us to work. But then we continued to work for few more years and until about 2003, I worked there. And then, I found, during that period the juvenile justice act was passed in 1986. That was inadequate and people were, my colleagues and everybody were working to get it amended. And new Juvenile Justice Act was passed in 2000. And they were all involved with the Mantralay and the secretariat, in forming the rules for that. So since they were, you know working on the juvenile justice act and all that, most of the...the...children, neglected and delinquent children, their rights were being taken care of and they were all mainly urban based. And I wanted to know...I was sitting in one of the superintendant's room and children were brought by the police to be admitted there.

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One child, just about 12 years old...the child looked like he was a boy, but then it was a girl who was in boy's dress. She said I am looking after my sister and my grandmother. My grandmother is a construction worker, she's too old now, she cannot earn. I sell these things on the train and in order to do that, I have to look like a boy, otherwise I will be exploited. So I work in the morning and sell these trinkets and other things on the train, in the afternoon I go to school, my sister goes



to school in the morning, before I come here, I have to cook and do everything, household work, for my grandmother so I just can't...you know, that child, I happened to talk because she was a Tamilian child and other people were not able to converse with her. Why she's in boy's dress and things like that. So I started thinking, what is happening. Then I...it came to me...it dawned on me that, you know, SC and ST children, especially in poverty groups, specially who are losing their parents early in life and so on, they are driven to all these things and I'm working at the wrong end. I should work at the other end to see that they get education; they don't end up in the institutions and so on. So that's how I shifted from working in the correctional institutions to educational institutions, ashramshalas and so on. So that's how Navachetana was born. And at that time I was running a certificate in social welfare administration.

Q: So could you tell us something...I mean exactly about how Navachetana started and also if you could talk about how important it is for students to be a part of field action and how...

VR: See that's what I wanted to say this...through group work, students who are doing group work...that's how they found out that superintendant is selling the grains, okay...so the student asked me, you know, this is the situation, what should we do? So students, you know, what...how to work on child rights, they learned. I mean, instead of confronting the superintendent right away and all that, we wanted to discuss and devise a strategy. So we did not want to discuss that also so I asked the student to discuss with the children. Some of the older children said we will write a letter to the Chief Minister. Then we said 'Chief Minister se kya hota hai'...let us see who they should address it to and we helped them to do that. That's how the students also learnt how to do rights based work.



Q: It also exposes the children themselves that they have the agency to, you know, approach a bigger body...So Navchetana was started in which year 2000?

VR: I got out of Ulhasnagar in 2003 so I wanted to work with the tribal children. I didn't want to work in the NGOs managed ashramshalas. I wanted to work in government managed ashramshalas. So from all the way from Pen to Vasai, you know, all those areas in Dahisar and Dahanu tak, we had gone there to find out what are the kinds of ashramshalas are there. Most of them were NGO managed. We didn't want to get into that, we wanted to...so these two were there at that time. So we decided to work. So it took me from 2003 to 2005 to identify. And then also when we identified we had to get government permission no, so that took two years for us.

Q: Also m

VR: See...'92-'93 I was on leave...study leave again to complete my Ph.D. I changed my guide also at that time to Yadiv Phadke...have you heard of him? So Yadi Phadke is a Political scientist. He's been...he's mainly written...

Part 3

So I was saying that...where did I lose you...?

2003-2005, we were scouting around to see which ashramshala is run by government which is nearby and which students can reach by 1 and a half hours travel and it should be in the rural



areas and all that. So students should you know in 1985, golden jubilee year, one of the self-reflection was that social work was very Bombay focused and urban based. We did not give any kind of a rural emphasis. So that is how the Tuljapur was started at that time. And my students, Social welfare administration students, I placed in Thana Zilla Parishad, Thana Block Development officers, you know, in blocks and things like that in rural areas. So that was one of the main things. So this identification of the ashramshala, there were in Dahanu, some government run, but it takes 4 hours to reach there, so I abandoned that and then I found that there were two in Pen which is just about from chembur it is just about one and a half to two hours journey by bus. But if you go by truck and all those things it is just one hour. you know if you hike a...there are lots of share kind of...you know empty cars going on the...like that they take one hour. So I...we identified that and then we had to get permission from the government to thisthing. Now this field action project was mainly Armaity Desai's idea. I felt it was a good thing. Now because at that time, when I was acting alone, I had ad hoc faculty members...they were all talking from their hat. They didn't have hands on experience, you know. You know, because you are located in Bombay you immediately reach to Mantralaya and the Mantris and so on. It is the grass roots, the field level officers and the field level government people who are the ones who are mischief makers. You know, they are the ones who try to decide, use their discretion, who to give and who not to give their entitlements and how to give and all...politicians and they, together.

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So I was keen that they should work with the grass roots level people and the government. and, in social work at that time, not only it was urban based and they were reaching the...in the name of policy they were reaching the mantris and mantralayas all the time, they were really not working with the kinds of you know grass roots level, one thing, and the other thing was that mostly remedial kind of thisthing, not development oriented kind of a social work. So unless you put the foundation, where will you get the people? So atrocities against the dalits and so on...they were not even engaged with it. So I was keen to work there, and that's how we started with the Pen in government ashram schools. Ashram school concept is like this, that the teachers and the students will stay together and also because the tribal children live in deep forest and all that they cannot have access to school, they have hostel, residential facilities. So while the teachers and the students stay together, it's a gurukul type of a teaching arrangement. But then the government is thisthing such that they don't have quarters..so teachers commute again. There are only few teachers who live on the campus and they have interaction. Where there is such an interaction, it is a good one, but at the same time teachers themselves are exploiters. We found, in some of the..when I was working in Ulhasnagar, they were going to the municipal school. girls who were not yet...who had not yet attained puberty, the male teachers used to have sexual intercourse with them. Because they cannot become pregnant no? That kind of an abuse was taking place in these ashram schools that kind of abuse was not there, but prejudice and use of corporal punishment and then verbal abuse was quite common. So these things were something that we wanted to stop... this kind of a field action project was very good for a faculty who did not have any hands on experience in actually working directly with the people or in an NGO or an organization. Just lecturing is very superficial and shallow, you see. So the students can find



out...and in those days we used to have government deputed candidates...two years spending here and these

they used to find the depth very shallow and they were not serious at all and it doesn't make sense for government to spend two years of their time, paid study leave, to study here. So I felt that it was a good idea to have FAP. And because my relations with Armaity was not so good, I had to raise the money myself. So I approached the Tata trust, they gave me..so we started this project. And when I shifted to Pen in the ashramshalas, Navchetana, this name, Navchetana was also suggested by students. I said, you know, what is the purpose and so on...and they were not very clear as to what was the...I wanted to work with the institutionalized children. The child line that was started did not have any thing for the institutionalized children. They were being abused. There was no access for them to childline, so I felt that it is necessary, and I wanted to sort of...child rights means what. So there are so many rights of the children, so I wanted to focus on education. Development. Right to development, right to identity and things like that. So that's when I decided when I work with the tribal children, they are being abused by their teachers. You know, they call all kinds of names, and you are all not capable of education at all...and that kind of attitude. So that itself was a barrier. So we...started working on that and that's how the Navchetana name was given by the students themselves. when we worked even the ashramshala people did not know what it was all about..Tata people are coming and so on. So I said that we will not use Tata name at all. We will use, when we are working there, only Navchetana name. Because Navchetana is ok. But then Tata name means everybody starts expecting not only



money and employment and all kinds of goodies from Tata's, you know. So that also I had to take care of.

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And then...you know, lot of NGOs in that area build houses for them, give them all kinds of free goods and things. They started expecting me...and so I did not in the beginning get any participation from the parents of the children and the villagers...and village panchayat and so on. Because I was not distributing material things. I said I will not encourage and go along with the dependency. I will not encourage dependency at all. They should be independent. We will facilitate the kind of this thing...we'll supplement what the government is doing so it took me about three, four years for them to...three years, now they know what we are at and then they are giving good support for us. We are reaching out to 75 villages, wadis they are called. And one more thing that I decided...I prepare this annual report only in Marathi because my stakeholders are only in Marathi, not English. And I wanted the social work students also to be...you know when they say the come to Bombay and Tata Institute means English is the only language. They cannot communicate and engage with the people at all. They should learn the language. If they know Hindi it's okay, but they should learn some Indian language to be able to communicate. And language should not be a barrier. If you're serious and committed, people know that you are committed, and they'll relate to you and you can learn Marathi from the children themselves, and the people themselves. So I'm particular about language as a kind of a part of the social work training. And social work...I don't take only the Tata Institute students. Here I get Nirmala Niketan students and SNTD students as well as from Nanded, Nandurbar, Solapur Kohlapur,



Yavatmal and other...Nagpur, Puna, all these students also come to spend one month in April, June or whatever whenever they can. They do their...the city students do the concurrent fieldwork, the other, out of towners they come for block fieldwork.

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So through them, we have built up...we were doing workshops for the village education committee, Gram Shiksha Samiti. What is their role, what is their responsibility, we have conducted in Wadis, these kinds of workshops for them in Marathi. And then in the past two years after the introduction of M.A in Disability Studies, those students have been coming to us. So this is the first time we discovered that disabled children, tribal children have not been recognized as existing under the sun, on the earth. Their existence was not recognized by the school system, government and any society at all. So these students, you know one by...we do every year a survey of children who have either discontinued school, dropped out of school or irregular, and also we do from every wadi, those children who never enroll. By these surveys, in the second year itself, we located something like 15 children, disabled children who had never been enrolled.

Part 4

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So where was I? Yeah...disabled children. Through the surveys we found out these children. And the...students, disability, DSA students, they took them to Alibaug, the district headquarters



civil hospital, got them tested and got them disability certificates, caste certificate, birth certificate, all these certificates that are necessary for enrollment in the school...and also some children required medical operations and so on, for rehabilitation, so they were able to do that and they, the students also have been able to bring the parents of the disabled children together and form a self help group kind of a thing, so they come to know what entitlements the children are entitled to from the government welfare schemes. And also where it is possible, one or two children have been institutionalized, that is the govt. is running a medical school for mentally retarded children. They've got admission there, and then the child can come back during holidays, to stay with the family, that kind of a thing. So they have been able to do this. During the period...the M.A. Social Work students organized health check up...Anand Mela, Anand Mela is mainly for joyful learning. So science and all that they have and that is the games that they have, they win prizes and so on. they also engaged with the newly admitted children who have to come...leaving their parents to stay in a hostel, they don't know how to take care of their clothes and themselves and all that, so they work with them...to get them used to or if there are older children, they sort of link the big brother and big sister, like that and so on. Also these, some of these children, the students have been able to work with the children to bring out their creativity. Children are very creative, so they write poetry, and then...small essays, their drawings are excellent, they all bring them together, make a scrapbook and present it to the teachers on teachers' day. And the teachers, some of the teachers are very popular, so they recognize...they help the children to recognize the teachers and teachers, they...they observe. And we have helped the children...through the students to prepare street plays, also regular drama to take part in drama competition at the state level and so on.



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So these are some of the things that the students do. One of the things that we say is...I have now...you wanted me to talk about how some things closed down and all of that...see...I was...this project was supported by HDFC for 3 years. I tried to use that money, though it was meant for both salaries of the two social workers and they programme activities, programme activities, the students who are placed, they are supposed to learn how to mobilize local resources, so they have to find money for health camp or Anand Mela and so on and whatever programme activities...if the children are being taken to Nehru Science Museum, all that they have to raise, okay. And the money that I got from HDFC...I stretched it to five years. Now...I don't have money. So I'm asking different Shipping Corporation I approached, and different corporate...so far I have not succeeded, so I don't know what is going to happen. This is one of the reasons...you know, you know if I were full time running an NGO, I would have engaged in raising funds and all that in a different way...but because I'm an academic and this is a project of the university, I feel that I have to spend so much time and not more than that for raising funds and things like that. So I'm still trying to see whether I can raise money. If that is not possible...I...now managed to get my social worker to be appointed as a field work supervisor, part time supervisor in the school of social work, so he will be there. Maybe in another month, I'll be able...I'll be succeeding...I'll be successful in raising the funds. So every time this happens, I'm in a crisis. So that is one of the reasons why some of the...field action projects closed down. Specially Koshish, you know, I was part of that all. So the students, the social welfare administration students, one of the '98 batch, Abhishek Bharadwaj, he...I placed him in some organization, he was so bored in one or two days, he came back in saying..you know...I want to work with the homeless, will you allow me...I said before I allow you or decide about it, you take



me where you want to work and show me what you planning to do...and have you got permission from your parents, and whether it is safe for you to go.

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Because they can be contacted only at night, after 11 o' clock, on the streets and all that. So I went with him...in the night and spent the...you know, came back at 2 o' clock in the morning and then I decided he can work. So that's how I started working with the homeless...You know, first one year, Abhishek himself and I, both of us found that homeless people are...they have to be very clever and they don't easily reveal their identity. They tell one name to Bharad...Abhishek and another name to me...and they never...especially if they're Muslims, they give Hindu names, so that they're not harassed by the police and things like that. So it took us a long time to gain their trust and Abhishek now has set up his own NGO, out of this fieldwork and so on. Similarly, I had placed my students with the beggars' home. You know the...students who...concentration on criminology and criminal justice, they have been going to...beggars' home as placement, and they do some research, rehabilitation work and so on. But, women beggars and that issue as a feminist issue, they did not look at it from that point of view. You know, the point is that driving a person mad within the family is a way of domination or exclusion. The social forces excluding certain inconvenient members from society. They did not look at it. And then they first drive them mad and then they make them vagrant and then they end up in the beggar's home. So rehabilitation is not very easy at all...about...these people. So that is something that we started working... now...when new faculty members were taken and all that, they were given this responsibility. I have got nothing to do with it and there also, in the initial stages I was



responsible for also to some extent, to get the action aid to fund that project. So that project has become independent and one of my students has also set up his own organization to do that work. So the other reason is...the other aspect of...field action projects closing down and all those things is that...continuously we had to find some funding, and UGC does not give. UGC gives some, there is a field action project fund that is there, they give 1 lac per year and we are something like 18-20 projects, we get thousand, two thousand or at the most fifty thousand and it doesn't even cover to social workers' salaries and so on.

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So that is one of the important reasons why it doesn't and faculty do not have time to raise funds on their own and so on. And some projects, you know, like this homelessness...and because Abhishek has taken it up as a full time and he as set up, that also is a reason saying that the...you know, some kind of stability, sustainability has been thisthing, so it need not be only always the project of the institute, you know, it can be done independently also. From that idea only, now Dr. Parasuraman has been giving fellowships for the students so that they get these kinds of ideas and then later on they can set up their own if they like. Okay...so that is happening. But then, like....women's cell, special cell...they have been...because of the feminist...women's movement and all that, there was a lot of people in the govt. itself who were very keen and some of the women's, women and children department secretaries, IAS officers were also keen and they were taking up these things to make it part of the government programme. So that is how it becomes...and then...social workers in the court also are like that, you know. Family court is like that. Govt. has adopted it and everywhere there are counselors, social work counselors. And



similarly one more thing that had happened no...Social workers have been absorbed by the govt. So that is possible. Child line has become an independent organization. It was taken up...it has become a scheme of the govt. of India and they give money to NGOs to be a support group for the childline and they attend to 24 hours emergency calls of children who are abused and specially domestic or street children and so on. It has become this thing. So where it is taking up. For example now, Navchetana, I wouldn't say that, you know, it has completed its mission and it can close down. Certainly, our presence has brought down child abuse quite a lot, whether it is verbal abuse or corporal punishment and those kinds of things...or you know, denying their entitlement...all those things have come down quite a lot.

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past, since 2005 only one incidence of corporal punishment we have come across, and that also, we have dealt with it in such a way, that the person, the teacher, gave a moral commitment in writing saying that I'm sorry I beat the child, I will not beat the child again, you know, I will see that I...I am able to control my anger and all those things, I got it writing... So there is some kind of moral sustainability about these things. You know, suspending and you know, dismissing, I don't believe in all those things. It should be a change of mind, mindset and so on. That is what I...so that, we have achieved. But when we disappear, whether it will again happen, child abuse and these things happen, I cannot say. So I would really like to continue this and the other reason why some of the field action projects like Hamara club, that had to be closed down because Asha Rane retired, and there was nobody else who was willing to take her...take it up...and so she



managed to convince some trustee or a donor, it has become an independent trust. And she continues to be associated, though she has retired with..all that.

Q: So does every FAP aspire to be taken up at the national level by the govt.?

VR: They might aspire...you know, who doesn't aspire? Something you want to live behind, no? That way...yes, they aspire, but then I don't think that is necessary. See, because it is a government scheme, it doesn't make a difference at the local field level. If the things make a difference at the field level, then I would...that is my aspiration. You know, at the field level people should not be abused, exploited, and victimized and all those kinds of things...so that is my aim, you know. I am...you know...there are enough policies, enough laws, all that we need to do is help them to implement it true spirit and letter. So that's what I'm keen on. So in...Many of my colleagues are very keen on being part of the policy formulation. My....like...Narmada Bachao Andolan...it's not, you know...it's not...your job doesn't end by formulating the policy. You have to see that it is implemented in the true spirit and letter. So you have to work at both ends...so my..Personality and my inclination and my comfort level are at the field level. I'm not so keen at changing the mind of...Chidambaram or somebody like that or...you know, Prime Minister or something like that, Kapil Sibal or something like that. I'm quite happy to change the mind of, mindset of people at the grassroots level. That is where casteism, and all this exploitation takes place. So I'm keen on...at the implementing stage of the policy and giving a feedback. So this FAP is very much involved...my social worker attends all the meetings about the Right to Education Act, wherever the rules are being made and you know, he attends the meetings, and he is also attending the meetings in the network coalition or network of people who are working with the disabled children, community based rehabilitation and so on. So we



give the, most of these people who are at the policy level making rules and all that, they have no idea about the rural difficulties at all. So he is able to give the...that kind of a thing.

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And al So FAP, we are very closely working with the activists. See, you know, SEZ, we got it...you know..cancelled. So our social worker and our children, 8th and 9th standard children, we give them, we discuss with them what are the land issues, forest issues, water issues, industrialization issues, all these things with them, to show what are their entitlements and what is their right, how to go about it in a democratic way, and in all these things how education is important, you must stay in school and not drop out. So we tried to link these two. We don't work on Right to Education alone, by itself...okay...we take some of these older children for these morchas and dharnas and things like that. So they do education. And then we ask them to come back and write an essay on that, what they're feeling about it...and then....our social worker is also able to discuss with them if they own land, whether they will sell it and what is involved in that and so on. So teenagers and all that because tribal boys, by 9th standard they are married, tribal girls, by 7th standard they are married. They have adult roles to play. They need to understand what is happening around them. And then also we talk to them about political parties. You know, peasants and workers parties, shethkari kamgar paksha then shiv sena then our republican party, NCP and then Congress. All these things we say what it is and so on and Panchayat elections take place and we see how, what you should do or what is the advantage and disadvantage of different parties, and they should know to be a responsible citizen and avail the citizenship right, not just be a sheep and vote bank vote like that.



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So these things are...we are linked through this this thing. All these things are very normative and it's in the head. We cannot show tables and chairs and things like that, things like that, you see, it's all normative.

Q: Towards the end we also wanted to talk about how imp it is for students to engage, and how do you think they have benefited...

VR: See....in this FAP only I have one social worker. I wanted a...there is a salary provision for a lady and one male social worker. I'm able to get only a male social worker to live there and do that work. I have had three female social workers, they stayed through three months and got married or something likes that and they left. I want somebody to, some lady social worker to work with the girl children, but I have not been able to. But then, in that place I have got some para professional social worker who is in 12th standard, a local person who knows the intricacies and nuances of the political aspects there and he works closely with the youth who have dropped out of school. So with his help we have formed a cooperative society. In all these things, the point I'm saying is only two people are there, so without students, we cannot do so much work. Students are our stilts on which we are standing, they are our main workers, you know it's like a voluntary work force that we have. So students are very important, and they learn a great deal. Many of the students who have been in...You know mostly urban oriented, they have discovered that tribal people are no different from you and me. They look like...they are not wearing grass skirts or something like that and so on, okay...and then those social work students who



come...they themselves are tribals, they come to learn how to work without, you know, making people dependent. Dignity and respect should be maintained. So they learn all these things. Their drishtikon, their perspective changes a great deal. So, you know, as a tribal student in BA and all that, he has been used to free accommodation, free scholarship, free everything. Now he has to pay for his food. We give them free accommodation, but food and all that, they have to pay. So they learn how to live in dignity and how people live in dignity.

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So they learn a great deal. So social work students are my main work force on which...and then they learn how to write reports, and then they are given, as I said...they have to mobilize funds for the various programmes that they want to do so what is programming. For example Anand Mela...they simply had one game for everybody. Four hundred children. How to manage. In your school, age wise, class wise they are divided and according to their thing you have team games and individual games so I make them think so that they can combine their theoretical learning in human growth and development that is taught in the class with the practice. How to...what is programming skills, they learn...so we do extensive, very elaborate planning for all these activities. It just doesn't happen. You know, if you are introducing a game, even if it is...you know dropping the coin in the water and all that, you must know the science behind it and which class has it in the...their science book. So they have to relate to that.



D: Talking about theory in the form of practice...to what extent do you think field action projects or the work that has been done in the field is able to do it the other way around; the practice is actually influencing what is being taught in the classrooms or...

VR: See...for example caseworks. In social work case work, group work and community organization are social work methods...and also social work research, social work administration...all these things. Case work...you know, it is taught in a certain way but we bring back from this field and teach them, you know, there are different types of group work. One is therapeutic group, developmental group and then task oriented group. Panchayat and working with the village education committee is a task oriented group work. What is the dynamics, whose role and all that...so, you know, we are able to enrich the theories about that. And developmental group means in the teenagers, what are their sexual needs and things like that, how to channelize, what is life skills, whether they should believe in god or not, religion or not, whether they should save money, or drink or not, they should beat their wives or not, all these things are taught so that in the developmental group we give them this thisthing. So the kind of substance, content of these things are supplied from the thisthing. And based on that sometimes we, you know, are able to thisthing. I have produced a 40 minute video documentary on decision making. How groups work and that has contributed...and what has contributed is how rules and roles emerge from group work. So that is demonstrated in that film, you see, it's a teaching aid...nobody uses it, that's a different question. But...you know, from practical work these are the things that are...you know, evolved, you know...so that a theory is not understood in a very rigid, inflexible manner. It has to be adapted and understood in a certain way. I mean, I may sound very Hindutva vadi but when you say the Hanuman Chalisa, there is a line saying vinu paisare, literal translation is without paisa you can't do anything.



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What is the meaning of that? Paisa is not paisa. It is social trust, confidence that you invoke, people's respect that you earn. That is what it is. So you have to, these things are enriched from the...fieldwork. But I don't use these kinds of quotations in the classrooms when I teach, but then, just to make it this thing, I'm saying that.

Q: The last thing we wanted to ask you was you've spent so many years, you're one of the most experienced professors we have and this year we're coming to 75 years of TISS, you have been there since '79 so we've covered...and seen the golden jubilee and now the platinum jubilee...where do you see the institute going in the next few decades?

VR: You know...first can I say what should be done? See social work is not still focused on a structural social work, bringing about equality and social justice, okay, that we should focus on. Focus on poverty is not adequate. Focus on minorities is not adequate. These things are weaknesses still, in the social work curriculum, in the way we teach, in the academics. We are not engaged in any training or any you know research in these areas apart from teaching. We should do that. If we don't do that now, it is mandatory, it has to be done. Now we have Guwahati campus, Hyderabad campus and Tuljapur...they are all taking over and the Bombay campus will be left behind. So it is mandatory that we should take up these issues and start engaging ourselves for teaching, writing, research and other kinds of work that we...documentation and so on. So we need to do that. I hope it will go that way, the problem is that you know most of the faculty members are city based. They can't think beyond Bombay.



You know Indira is not India, Bombay is not India. Bombay may be cosmopolitan, but then the thinking and all that is very different in other places...so unless...I wish the school of social work will engage that way...even I don't know too much about the habitat planning course. The way the syllabus and curriculum was presented in the academic council, I could not think beyond Bombay. I mean, their curriculum was not coming through as if they were able to think of small and medium towns and that are coming up and you know, earlier there were rural areas, and now because of the census, they have become classified as urban areas. I don't know if they are able to engage in all those kinds of things. I wish they would do that...and that is where I feel that we should go. The other aspect is that I don't feel very comfortable...I'm talking about other courses, I don't know. The hospital administration M.A....is really joining the privatization force, marketization, and commercialization, social force that is, you know, is, you know, dominant now. We should resist that. We should resist that. So that's why I'm planning to introduce a management of voluntary organization, either M.A. program or as a P.G. Diploma Programme. The question...my colleagues in Human Resources and Labour Studies School, they were asking...Management of Non-Profit Organizations. I disagree with that ideologically.

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Non-Profit Organizations includes capitation fee colleges, fee charging Jaslok and Hinduja and such hospitals and they're all registered as non-profit societies. I don't want to go that way. I want to stay with voluntary organizations and do not want to go into commercialization and privatization and marketization which deny poor people access to these services. So I wish the institute will be able to steer clear of these forces. So this is very...very strongly I feel.



D: Drawing to a close...is there any message you would like to give TISS?

VR: Steer clear of market forces and be accessible to poor people you know, redefine social justice in these terms.

D: Thank you so much.