Mrs. Zakia Pathak

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Camera/Sound: Prof K.P. Jayasankar

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Mrs. Zakia Pathak did her Diploma in SSA from TISS in 1953. She worked at the Indian Conference of Social Work at Hyderabad. She subsequently shifted from social work to English Literature and taught at Miranda College, Delhi, from where she retired.

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Q: Thank you so much for willing to be interviewed. Can you talk about your family background, where you came from, what is it that led you to join TISS, to be attracted to the program at TISS?

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ZP: Well, so far as my family background is concerned, it's a mixed marriage between my parents. My father was a Muslim and my mother was a Hindu and he came from the rural areas, and she was very urban (Pune) and Bombay.

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And they met when they were in college and got married after that. What led me to taking up this course was that when I was doing my undergraduate degree, I was in a hostel in Bombay, a Missionary settlement for University Women, which was a lovely place, there was a girl in the next room called Sundar Karbe and she used to tell me about her experiences.

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And they seemed to me so interesting, so much more exciting than being in the four walls of a library doing your work. Later on that library became lifeblood. But at that time it seemed a big bore. So, both I and my roommate thought that we would be going for this course. That was what led to it.

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But it was tough getting my parents to agree to it. There was very little idea of what professional social work was. The tale that used to trickle of field work was certainly disquieting to my parents.

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The places, the work sites, were slums, bastis, and refugee camps. And the working hours were known to be stretching late into the evenings sometimes. And the kinds of clients one had to deal with were rough, basically educated people.

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Their wives mostly uneducated, if not illiterate, and from these slums. So they thought it was inevitable that this would entail a much closer contact between the sexes than a middle class girl

has been exposed to. So that was, altogether, disquieting thought that their daughter would be going there.

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My father was absolutely against it and he said that if you do take up that course I won't finance your education. I called my mother a feminist before her times because she had these very strong values that women should be allowed to choose what profession and education they are going into. So she told me that I will pay from my salary the fees of the institute but you must assure me that you are serious about this and the basic condition of seriousness is you stay the course, get the diploma and then it's up to you. So that's how I came to this field.

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Q: Do you remember your first experience of coming to TISS, entrance interview, the campus, any memories that you might have about your first encounter?

ZP: Yes, my first encounter that I remember was that I slipped and fell at the Marine Drive Railway Station, got all thoroughly soggy and what not. Wanting to appear my best, I must have come looking like a wet rag.

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There used to be a bus waiting for us outside Andheri Station and somebody to guide us into it. And we went to the institute campus. I don't remember any untoward experience. All of us were new; all of us were keen on making friends. And for one month I was not in the hostel because I didn't have room.

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So this one month was as a day scholar. It passed off well, didn't have any problems with it.

Q: Could you talk about the campus, because that campus no longer exists, what was it like? Can you reconstruct it for us?

ZP: Well, it was basically two buildings. In one building in the ground floor, they housed two class rooms. And on the first floor there was the hostel.

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We were at the most about 10-12 girls in the hostel, on the outside I think. And the other building was for administrative staffs, offices and that kind of thing. It had been a private home, so there were garages, and those two garages were used as dining room, mess for the students. Girls were in Andheri, the boys were in Versova.

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So, there was no separate canteen or such arrangements for the boys. So they would come to the institute and have all their meals with us. So, in a sense, that kind of loosened up the distance that used to exist between a boy and a girl coming from my kind of background. And even eating, you can see why sociologists say that eating is a good indication of culture, and eating in company of boys was something rather startling for me.

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We only ate in front of our relations, nephews, you know, cousins and things like that. But gradually the difference dissolved.

Q: Can you talk about your fellow class mates, your student life? What was your experience like? Probably, it was the, you had lived in the hostel in your undergraduate years, but this kind of thing where you lived in a campus and studied there, what was that experience like? If you can recount from your past.

ZP: I think that the most emulating thing about the TISS education, including the hostel living etc was that it introduced to a wholly new and different world.

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Where we were in the undergraduate hostel, we were mostly from areas in Maharashtra: some from Pune, some from Nagpur etc. but here I had my class mates and hostel mates from practically all of India, from Kashmir to Cape Comerin there were these boys and girls and that made for a big difference because it brought home to me certain things which, later on when I began to study critical theory were known as defamiliarisation theory.

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You can't really look at your own culture from inside it. You have to take a position outside your own culture in order to appreciate both its strength and its weaknesses. So, that was what it provided in a big way. And it has also left a value for cosmopolitanism which I still have today. If I have to buy a flat, then I see what is the religious composition like, what is the state among the tenants etc. that remains a very strong value with me even today.

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Q: What about your teachers and life in the classroom? Do you recall anything that struck you, or even any funny experiences that you might have had?

ZP: Well, the relationship between teacher and student was very informal, of course a lot did depend upon the persons concerned. But it was very informal, in a way that had not been at the undergraduate level, because even though there wasn't a physical distance or podium or all that

sort of thing, there was a distance in undergraduate education. For one thing the classes were bigger, etc. here they were not like that. And once I remember, there used to be a professor who used to do social economics and something else, I don't know what it was.

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Prof. Lorenzo, he was a bachelor and a bit of a heartthrob among the girls. And once in the hostel, on a Sunday, we all got bored sitting around. So we said lets visit Lorenzo. So we jumped into the local, and went there and knocked on his door. He was way down in Colaba and he was very surprised to find this gaggle of girls. But he adjusted quickly, he called us and we had a very good time and then he said I am taking you all out for lunch. I still remember it was a lunch at the Ritz, and it was a very very enjoyable time and then we went to Churchgate, took the local and came back.

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And then there was Prof Murthi, I don't know what his initials are. And I remember in those days he had bought a car. It was a second hand or third hand car, and was forever breaking down. So we were warned by our seniors and in turn we informed our juniors, "When Murthi is leaving the Institute, just vanish because he warmly invites you to come and take a lift with him, and you find yourself pushing his car.

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But of course he was a nice person in that way. Gouri Rani Banerjee, she would take medical social work and case work as well. She was very, very different from the other people. She was very earnest about her work, extremely dedicated, and I think slightly lacking in the sense of humour. So she, I mean she was an icon for my husband who came later into the medical social work because she had a lot of commitment and her notions of social work came from the Hindu religious texts.

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The Sarvodaya workers, the Gandhian figures etc. But I am afraid it didn't hold much attraction for me. And who were the others? We had Mrs. Renu, who was a field work supervisor and she was very good. And how could I forget?

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We had Dr. Behram Mehta whom I never got on with. I mean, there was a kind of, you know, aura about him in the Institute, and I am very sensitive to those auras, I don't like them. And the thing that everyone used to say, "He is so good, he may scold you and shout at you and treat you like dirt today and tomorrow he is so sweet."

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I used to say, "What's so great about that? It would be great if I started treating him that way and he took it nicely which he didn't, we didn't dare to do that. So I don't see what's so great about that kind of thing." And later on I fell out with him in a big way. It was my last term and we had to do a dissertation.

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And he had at that time just got interested in the Bharat Sevak Samaj. It was his baby in the Institute. He wanted me as part of field work staff for that project, whatever it was. I said, "But the time that I have to do it, that is allotted for my dissertation and then I would not have time to do my dissertation." So he said in his usual dismissive way, "Don't talk as if you are the only person who has a dissertation to do.

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Everyone has their dissertation to do and you come for this." So I said, "Fine. If he thinks I can do both, its fine. So I went for the Bharat Samaj Sevak field work. And when I came back, he had changed his mind. Kaikobad was guiding me - it's a series of mishaps - he lost my questionnaire.

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So that made me mad and I said, "Transfer me to somebody else. Kumarappa transferred me to Behram Mehta. That's how he had a say in this whole thing. And he said you can't do your dissertation now in these 15 days that are left. I said, "But on that condition, I came to do your camp!" But he said, you know, you can't do it.

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And there was a committee meeting of the staff members and they made up their mind - I think nobody dared, you know, to battle with him officially in the Institute. He did have a locus standi there which was important. But I think they sensed that I could be trouble or the Students' Union could be trouble. So when I came back from a recording in the All India Radio - it was again for students in social work - I found a letter in my pigeon hole (Mind you, the next day was the convocation) saying that I could not get my degree at the convocation since I haven't completed my dissertation satisfactorily.

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So I went to the Students' Union and the Students' Union took it up. And the same night I issued a letter to the Director saying that if I was not given the facts of the case and if I was not given the certificate, nobody would attend the convocation. So the very strategy of doing it at the last moment went against them.

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They couldn't make any alternative arrangements in 24 hours and the Governor's son, who was an architect at that time, was the Chief Guest. So clearly they decided to go on the back foot and they sent for me. And this was by now, you know, about 20 hours before. And they said, "We are going to give you the certificate.

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Not because of the Students' Union but because we think that yes, you are deserving." I kept my thoughts to myself, you know. At the convocation we were all lined up. I think my number in the queue was 17. And when the Master of the ceremony or whoever, called out number 16, he skipped to number 18.

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And there I was in the stage and he had asked me to be, so that I don't waste the Chief Guest's time etc. And so there I was on the stage looking an absolute ass. But then the Students' Union President just jumped on to the stage and said, "Sir, I think you have missed out number 17."

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So they had to call out my name. There was thunderous applause. I remember the Chief Guest saying, "You seem to be very popular!" I didn't tell him the story behind that. So that was one of the things with Behram Mehta. Afterwards, the atmosphere had become so poisonous by that time, neither did he want me nor did I want him. So Dr. Prabhu took over as my guide.

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Q: Did Dr. Kumarappa teach you?

ZP: No, we had really nothing to do with him very directly. He never taught our batch, he didn't teach us and so far as hostel matters were concerned I think it was the registrar, Mr. Kudchedkar, later Dr. Kudchedkar who used to deal with us. I don't remember any interaction with him except for this.

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Q: At that time where there specializations and what was your specialization?

ZP: Yes, there were specializations, only four, quite unlike what it is today. I think there was medical social work, labour welfare, community organisation and I think family, family welfare.

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So I was in the community organisation group and that's why we had these various chances to deal with the women and children, really.

Q: Is there anything else you remember about student life? Things that you did together with your classmates, maybe even beyond the curriculum?

ZP: Well we did have a marvelous time, that I must say and particularly as, you know, there were very few restrictions kept on the hostel girls about their returning. But at some stage I don't know what got into the head of the authorities, they said we should come back by sundown or something of that sort, you know. About 7 o' clock or something.

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We objected to that because when we did our field work - at that year I was doing it in Worli. Twice a term, I think, there used to be kinds of functions where all the men and women and children had to be together. Now the men returned from their work only about 7 O' clock in the evening. So we could not start those functions before 7 or 7:30. As a result of that, the function got over at about 9:30 or 10.

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And we had to come back alone on those locals and it was nothing like the locals are today. today you have to fight at 9:30 to get out at Andheri but at that time even at Dadar the train used to be practically empty. So we said if we can be safe when we come back from field work, why can't we be safe when we come back from enjoying ourselves? So then I think some compromises were made in that hour we returned home.

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But that was one thing if I could go on to it, a little official kind of thing. I feel our field work reports were not made too much use of. For example, I myself am very interested in discourse theory, I came to be later. And how is it that facts are constituted in discourse theory? Something that is meritorious in one discourse, like you see "so committed, comes at 10 O' clock in the night on the locals alone", becomes such a vice when you get to your personal relations.

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Similarly, if I might take up your time on this business, my classmates and I were in Worli's, no, lower Parel slum at that time under Mrs. Renu. There was a boy there who had served a term in a juvenile delinquency home for stealing. My classmate was assigned to him. So one day when we came back we found he was in the doghouse because he had stolen from the purses of three or four workers.

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Naturally people condemned him and all that sort of thing. But his one plea - I remember this so clearly - was that. "But I did not steal from my aunty! I did not steal the purse of my aunty!" It meant such an important thing to him and I thought that is exactly the discourse in which that statement is taken! The two completely different discourses - one is loyalty, bond etc and therefore it has a lot to be said for it. And the other was thieving, law, you know - so I felt that if our field work records, experiences were made more of in the academic front it would have been a richer experience for us.

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Q: If you can go back on the convocation, and describe how was it organised? What were the rituals like? Or if you can talk about the Institute Day celebrations, since we have no records of how they were organised in those days.

ZP: So far as the Convocation was concerned it was a big item in the years that we spent there. Like in other cases too, we had come to the end of an era in our lives, and we didn't know where we were going to be later on and certainly that comes to because there are certain people that I haven't met at all in these 55, half a century and I have not met about half my classmates since the day of the convocation.

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For various reasons of course. What was exciting, because we all knew by that time who was going to get their certificate and who wasn't, what was the variety entertainment program that would follow it. I can see in hindsight that it was a dreadful bore and the Chief Guest was put through the torture of seeing through the whole of it. Most of us were allowed to invite a guest or two. Even our guests after some time said "Okay so we will be getting back, you know, trains, dark etc."

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But we used to enjoy that variety entertainment, really used to have a good time. Ultimately, at the end of the entertainment, it was just us watching us. After that we had a good meal and things like that. As I wrote to you about the photograph that appeared, this was for the foundation stones they were laying for the new buildings at Deonar. It was just mud at that time.

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And we were sort of lazing around, lounging around in the hostel - it was a holiday - when suddenly an office bus comes along and we were huddled into it and we were like "What? What?" "No, you have to come to Deonar." We were wondering what, we didn't even have time to make ourselves too respectable. So we jumped into that bus and somebody had got that

brilliant idea that we should hold, touch the stone as it was being put into the ground, the foundation stone.

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So we did that. So in a way I am one of the founders of that part of the Tata Institute. I am sure there must have been many little incidents but maybe they will come a little later.

Q: The other interesting thing you were talking about is that how something that makes sense within one kind of way of seeing or discourse is delegitimized within another space. So how would you critically look at social work itself and the kind of discourse that it created, what was excluded, what was included, who was delegitimized? Also there was a discourse in the classroom. There was another set of discourses that you encountered in the field which obviously you had to kind of, deal with, as a social worker, as a human being. If you can also reflect on that area. In fact you have written a little on that, the linkages between the field and the class room. So if you can reflect on those ideas.

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ZP: Well, I think there was a kind of distance between an authority figure and a student but it was partly traditional. You are not regarded as having had a rich student life until you have messed with authority, you have something to tell your children or whatever about. But by and large, I remember feeling welcome whenever we had to go to, say Dr. Prabhu's house or Mr.

Kudchedkar's house for any kind of work. It was a very informal kind of relationship. Among the students, well, we were perhaps not sufficiently politicized or we were still, too soon after independence - it was three or four years - to develop these statewide tensions which they would have today.

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Maharashtrians against... involved with Kannadigas or Kashmiris involved with Punjabis. I don't remember any repercussions from the massive evacuation that took place after we got Independence which could have easily taken place because we had a girl from Punjab, we had someone from Kashmir.

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But they never reached acrimonious positions. So that was one thing that made for a very good life in the Institute perhaps. Perhaps 'innocent', in dubious terms, but still it's a kind that gives nostalgia.

Q: What about the class room instructions and field work and tensions between those two spheres of life?

ZP: As I said, thinking back on it, I think they were kept somewhat separate, which was a shame. We enjoyed, I enjoyed the academic component. I think basically I am an academic because my

parents were teachers, my aunts, my uncles - they were all in the education department. It was just that there were too many of them and so I had this kind of backlash about it temporarily.

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We had guest lecturers: they were very interesting. Marfatia for psychiatry, and there was someone.. Massani, Homi Massani: very well known people in their own professions and I used to enjoy their lectures. But I must say field work did not engage me in the way it should have engaged me because after all practice is the point of the whole course and staple of the future. But I would say to an extent, to a considerable extent, it was one's middle class upbringing that came in the way of some of the things that you were supposed to do as a field work.

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For example, a woman from a chawl in lower Parel had come to our field work supervisor, who had her office there, and said that her husband would not take up a job and it was telling on their marital relations. So our field work supervisor spoke to someone in the Bombay Municipality who was also a Tata Institute person and he said, "Okay, I will find something for him." So she told me go and find him and take him to this officer.

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Now he got the wind of what I was coming to him for and whenever I came he would disappear. Two or three days of field work and I could never find him. So I reported to Mrs. Renu that look I can't do a anything with him until I find him. If he is always not there, what can I do? She said, that your job. You have to find him and take him to that officer. So I remember going very dejectedly to Lowe Parel Station and I had to go to Churchgate side and the down train was towards Andheri. And I said to myself sitting on that bench that only if I could jump onto that down train to Andheri and go back to the hostel and forget about this person!

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I asked myself, why not? Who's there to stop me? And I did it. Of course I had to explain to Mrs. Renu what I did and she was okay with what I did but she said, "Now you have to find him." So I went to the chawl on the next field work day and I told them, "look you tell your husband that I am coming on the next field work day and he better be at home because I don't have too much time to waste on him. Can't you do something? "Mein kya karun bai?" You know, she was helpless. So I went there, he wasn't there. I had an artificial blow up of temper because I knew he was not going to be there.

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And I went out of the building as far as the eye vision of the flat was concerned and I hid at the bottom of the staircase. Now that man must have thought he is safe from me now. He must have

been hiding, if I am not mistaken, in the toilet. Because the house has only one room, and I looked at the verandah and he came out. He was relaxing over his cup of tea when I entered and said, "You just have to come." He couldn't get rid of me so I took him to the Municipal Corporation. The officer was very good, he said, "I was also from TISS. This is going to go in your report, isn't it? I will write that you did your best and you succeeded." Anyway, he went there and he sent a report to my fieldwork supervisor and I guess things were done after that.

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Q: So what do you feel about the linkages between what you were doing in the field and what you were studying in the classroom?

ZP: Yes, I felt that, as the example that I gave you, it should be because when you are studying an academic subject, in order to make it really relevant, when you are in a social work institution that's what you have to do, you need to have some other culture in that sense to compare it, to talk about it, to assess it. And the only thing we used to do was talk of films. We used to talk of films. I remember once when Prof Kaikobad, our teacher for community organisation, was talking about the ways to organize a community and etc. I had just seen the film called Viva Zapata.

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And all the time he was making a point I said, "Well you know Dr, in Viva Zapata this is what they say, this is what they say." He listened interestedly once or twice, and then he said look I have to see Viva Zapata. So that was a kind of thing they encouraged us to do, he didn't tell me to just shut up and listen to him or things like that. Who were the others? I have told you about Murthy, more about his vehicular problems than other. Dr. Prabhu intended to be a rather gentle person. His tone of voice etc was quiet.

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But I remember I was very impressed by Dr. Behram Mehta's first sentence which he obviously intended to be a thing to remember sort of. There we were, with our note books and our pens, ready to take down the golden words, and he said, "The end of social work is to end social work." I thought. "Waah! Yeh toh bahut acchi cheez hai!" Very impressed with it but he was good as a lecturer, though rather I should say unstructured and that's him.

[...]

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One of the things coming to my experiences in the Indian Conference of Social Work at Hyderabad - because ICSW was my first job and my only job, though later on I came to Bombay central office - in Hyderabad, which is my first professional exposure to social work other than

field work, I found the experience that remains most with me was the antagonism to professional social work from the voluntary social worker. They were at the top of the power game and they very much wanted to remain there. Now because of various factors, because of the antagonism between the two, was exacerbated.

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For one thing, age and experience. The profession itself was young, so its graduates were naturally in their 20s or 30s whereas these ladies were sometimes 50s, sometimes more than that. And they had lots of experience in voluntary work. And this was construed by class. We were all middle class people coming from families which were professional and so forth whereas these were the wives of bureaucrats who often held very important positions, or the wives of ministers, and that tended to make them look askance somehow at us.

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So there was age, there was class and also in some cases there was a difference in the level of ordinary education. I mean, obviously when we came to social work we were all graduates. They were not, not all of them were. So these factors in a sense had created already a divide and the social work training put the lead on it, so to speak. So their tendency was to devalue it.

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Now my immediate boss, who was archetypal this kind I was describing, used to be very keen on showing that I was the subordinate. She would insist wherever we went that she had to introduce me as "my secretary". So everyone thought I was kind of a stenographer, private secretary kind of a thing. It took me a lot of courage to say the simple words, after she introduced me, "I am the Secretary of the Indian Council of Social Work." But I did come around to that.

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Then her English was bad so she made me draft all her letters and it came as a convenience to her as I should be regarded as a stenographer because then her linguistic inadequacies were not exposed. I used to resent that but then, you know, you can't fight on all fronts.

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And I think when there was a vacancy at the central office in Bombay, and fillers were sent to me, no, actually they weren't sent to me really. There was a Central Executive Committee meeting on which - we had a Minister with us, Andhra had just merged with Hyderabad and become Andhra Pradesh, so lot of these Andhraites came and took positions. One of them was Gopal Reddy.

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We met just briefly over a cup of tea at some function of the Indian Economic Institute or something like that. And he let it out that you know Ms. Khan, they want you at the central office. I didn't say anything to him. But I said how come my own boss has not said anything? And Gopal Reddy who is simply a member of the CEC whom I am meeting very casually, I need never have known of it. So I went next morning and jumped into a cycle rickshaw and went up to Nawab Mehdi Nawaz, he was our President. Nawab Mehdi Nawaz jee, and he was also the Health Minister. He was surprised ki "Biwi kya ho gaya? Aap kyun aa gaye?" sort of.

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Then I told him what it was and I said, "Nawab Saab, if they want me, I would like to go." And he was so kind, so friendly, that he said, Kya baat hai didi? Is it the salary? Is it the difference in the salary? If that is the case, he said, I would see to it that you get the same salary here. As from the next month you would get the same salary, I would arrange it. I said, "No Nawab Saab, it's not the salary. My people are there. That was an argument that appealed to him. He said, Thik hai.

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And he cleared the way for my getting to Bombay. This lady didn't like it. Our relations further wind because she was in the Central Executive Committee and I don't remember what indication, what it was that really led to a bit of a nasty five minutes when Dr. Jeevraj Mehta - what was he, the Health Minister of Bombay? - He was our Chair then. I think it was about the minutes of the meeting and she said that Muskan has not given a truthful account of what took place at the meeting.

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And so Dr. Jeevraj's method told me to reply to that. I said it was not possible for the minutes to record all conversations that take place in any meeting. I have recorded the crucial one which led up to the decision that, whatever it was, x or y, and in order that there should not be brought a charge against me, if you look down at the minutes that I have given, you will see that I have said for a full account please refer to the minutes of the meeting dated so and so and so and so available at such and such a place.

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So he read it and then he looked at my boss and said, “It’s there." Then Dr. Jeevraj Mehta decided to abort the whole thing and said, "Well, anyway, now the relationship can be maintained I think between the two of you." So I said very coolly and probably a bit presumptuously, "A working relationship can always be maintained." I remember, but my boss

of course took the horrible way out in the sense that she put her arms around me and kissed me and all that sort of horrible stuff you know and mind you in an official meeting, taking to that kind of strategy. On a personal level, with the voluntary social workers in Hyderabad, I enjoyed a good relationship.

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Nawab Sahab's wife, Begum Mehdi Nawaz Jaan... no, no, let be get back, let me get back to how does one address the divide between voluntary social work and professional social work? Mind you I didn't think these things all out. You are responsible for it. I began to think and that's how I have come to this kind of.... I thought it would be a good idea to have an orientation course for people who were just interested in social work.

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And the Committee passed it and drew it up, an academic component and it was just about a month, the weekdays and the other component would be visits to institutions where the students would be free to discuss with the workers any problems that they might have, any questions that they had raised and so forth.

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This would trade on nobody's toes because the students were a completely different category: they were not professionals, they were not volunteers, and they were just people who are interested in social work. So I put the ad in the paper and I was overwhelmed by the response. So many people who want to do something, that's what I thought.

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I think I had to stop admissions when the number reached 60. We just couldn't go more than 60. And it was a very successful course and so forth. As an indication of success, it was quoted, cited by Nawab Sahab in the decision of the Hyderabad branch to choose me as the delegate for the International Conference of Social Work at Munich. That's how I first went abroad and had a contact with international social workers.

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On the other hand, when I returned after two years, just on a visit, to Hyderabad, I was very happy to see that the orientation course was being continued but chagrined to see that the academic component had prevailed full sway. To go briefly back to the volunteers, Begum Saheba never interfered in social work herself, as opposed to the wives of the bureaucrats and such forth. I never remember Begum Saheba at any meeting or function or anything of the sort.

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But when Nawab Sahab told her that we are sending ZP to the conference and asked her to come for a farewell meal, so when I went there, before we had the meal, she took me to her bedroom and on it was laid out three or four silk sarees and a Himaroo cape. She said, "Bibi, you must not spend on these things just for three weeks. You take these and you use them. I was so touched I can't tell you. Then there was another lady, she was at a much lower level.

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And she asked me what I was doing for Id. I said I was not going home for Id this time, for various reasons. On Id day, a big dabba of biriyani and kurma, all that sort of thing arrived at the hostel. I had very good experiences, you know, at a lower level. But it was at the upper level that all these tensions rose.

Q: How did you shift out of social work?

ZP: I shifted out of social work... No, I tell you what, indirectly. Good I have kept him on the verandah. I got married, and then I was still the Secretary of the Indian Council of Social Work in Bombay. Naturally, once you are married, I shifted to Delhi and I didn't have a job there. But Mrs. Clubwala Jadav was arranging a seminar at Chandigarh and she somehow felt comfortable

with me and my way of doing things. So she insisted that you don't even have any job now, so must help us run the seminar at Chandigarh. I did that.

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Then I wanted a job and there wasn't anything going but I read in the papers that the post of the Publication Officer in the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which was an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Education at that time, they wanted a Publication Officer. So I applied hardly expecting that I would be chosen because I had no publication experience. But I was second on the list, they chose me. The first person was from Calcutta, he did not want to move to Delhi without quarters. So I was appointed as the Executive Secretary there for five years.

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But towards the end I began missing of all things English literature. I went to a talk in Delhi University, where an American Professor had come. Next to me there were two ladies and we got introducing ourselves before the talk began and one of them told me, "Seems you are so interested! You have taken half a day's casual leave to come and attend this course, why don't you do English literature? I said I am in my late 30s now; I am 30 whatever, 35-36. She said doesn't matter, doesn't matter at all. You straight away apply.

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That fired me. And then of course they didn't chose me at once because I had in fact, see this is what I mean about my memory. Halfway through the Tata Institute course, my father was still anxious to get me out of that den and try to tempt me with the projects of a London education. There was a scholarship for Muslim girls for I think two-three years study in London. He made private enquiries with people who had function in the sanction committee etc.

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And they asked him informally about my graduate marks and as soon as my father said she stood first in Bombay University so far as English Literature is concerned, they would say then there is no problem, she'll get it. So he tried to tempt me with that. But since I had promised my mother that I would stay the course, I had to turn him down again. And the fact was that I was enjoying my TISS experience hugely.

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So I wasn't too sorry that I had to turn him down. But there was another instance, see this is my going off, because I feel I have to be just to my mother. Same person, who paid for my education as a social worker, had given me the ideal of being a working woman. You have to, not that she

was a Marxist, but so long as you are not economically on your own feet there is no such thing as freedom. I said, but I am 18, and that sort of thing.

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She said that means nothing. You have to be able to look after yourself in a financial way before you can be said to have any freedom. That stayed also with me for a long time. And my aunt who was a famous educationist in Maharashtra - she ended up as the Director of the Education of composite Maharashtra State- I don't know whether you could have heard of her, Sulma Panindikar. She had been a student at Neonum College in Cambridge. She was unmarried and so there were no children.

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She wanted to adopt me and send me to Cambridge, to Neonum for a degree in English Literature. On her way - she was going to New York as a part of Minister Chhagla's Education Commission - she took time off to go to Cambridge and introduce herself as an ex-student, etc at Neonum and could my niece, is there a possibility of her doing the work? So they asked for qualification and they said yes. And she was prepared to finance my education.

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But once again, this business of my mother telling me, you first stand on your feet, you stand on your feet. So I turned her down. That time, it was a bit of a struggle with me, I must say which it wasn't with earlier on but that time I didn't feel, I was also snob and wanted a Cambridge degree and what not. But I think my mother's influence was stronger.

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Q: Career wise, you had shifted from social work. In what way do you feel that your years at TISS contributed to your own personal development or development as a professional?

ZP: Yes, that is a good question because I have been asked by one or two people, wasn't that Tata Institute stint a mistake? Don't you think it was not the thing for you to have done? So now when I think that when I look upon it in national terms etc, yes, maybe I did block a seat. Maybe some person who had more commitment to practical work, to field work, they would have been there, and then they would have worked in the field and then they would have made a difference - I am prepared to concede that.

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But if you say it was not important for my own development, foundationally I question that because as I said the whole process that it introduced me to, the process of defamiliarisation, examining the assumptions under which I am working in my own culture, my own personal life,

that has remained with me very strongly. Self-reflexivity, which has attended every one of my actions and therefore sometimes not been materially a very good thing to be. You know, by saying what qualifications you have to do such a thing, you know, not cobbling up things and making a kind of basic honesty I think.

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And also, looking at all this kind of a world, the differences which affect your own opinion of yourself. You don't think of yourself as icing on the cake or anything of that sort. I know when I rang up my niece the other day and told her, You know what, I'm going to be interviewed and this and that, and I told her the history of our correspondence sort of. And she said why do you have to be always so self-deprecatory? I said I am not self-deprecatory.

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I am just being honest you know. I might land up in trouble later if I make claims for myself which cannot be authenticated. So that kind of thing only comes when you are moved into thinking always about every action that you do and I think that came from Tata Institute: my two years there, meeting such different people, those people in having such different notions. I mean this whole business, for example of arranged marriages. Clearly my parents having a mixed marriage, we never thought in terms of arranged marriages. We saw they were happening all around and we had nothing against it but we never thought of it in terms of ourselves.

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Once when I was in the hostel, I used to rush off to Poona every now and again because of home food, and people etc. When I came back once, one of the boys greeted me with "So they wanted to show you, is it?" I couldn't understand what he was referring to. Then I realised, 'dikhana', you know, when in a proposal for an arranged marriage comes, the first thing is that the boy's relations come to have a look at the girl. So you have to show the girl.

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I was so disgusted I said "There's nothing of that. I just went for good food." But you know these things and yet to see, he didn't mean to be nasty, we didn't mean anything, that's happening all over. Weddings are supposed to be sites for showing eligible girls and hoping that they would, you know, catch somebody.

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But these things came as distasteful. And after one learned to kind of balance or whatever you call it.

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ZP: We were always taught to live a simple life and things like that. When I was first assigned a room to the hostel, when I joined the hostel, the bed that I was given, I still remember, it was one of those steel cots or something. And the sleeping surface had completely sunk. I asked the warden, I said, "Look I can't sleep on this." She said, "Well, we can't afford another one at the moment.

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Later on we can see about it." So in those days we had tin trunks, not these natty suitcases and things. So I just put the trunk under the cot, and slept on it. My mother came to see me the first time and she looked at it and said, "What is this?" I said they can't afford another bed so it's okay, I said. I'll put the trunks underneath it and they will provide some kind of a firm foundation so it's okay. She said nothing doing, you just get ready. I am going to take you to the market and we are buying a cot and bringing it back, which we did.

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She insisted upon, and we did. I felt a bit of funny but anyway, she did. And then the - what do they call the kind of person who enumerates the college furniture and he puts number on it, TISS-1, TISS-79 - So he came to the hostel and put TISS number on my cot which my mother

had bought. And he had some little, not trouble I'll say, but a little inquisition as to how did the number come on it? Why didn't you draw her attention to it when it happened?

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And there was the incident of a theft in the hostel. Suddenly we woke up in the middle of the night to screaming by two of the girls just down the little balcony, corridor sort of. A thief had come, and one of the girls happened to want go to the bathroom at that time, and saw him and she screamed. Naturally we couldn't go to sleep after that.

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But, I mean this has nothing really to do with the hostel, but I always had a rationalist background from my parents and I always thought 'rationally', because rationality now itself is a plurality, etc. My mother had to do her last stint in the Department of Education in Bombay so she was staying a little.... (?). And she was an absolutely no non-sense person, no pampering or anything of that kind. But when I went there for my weekend visit, the first thing she asked me was, "Are you alright?"

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I said, "Yes I am fine." "Were you alright on Thursday night?" I said, “Why are you asking?" She said, "I got up in the middle of the night feeling that you were in trouble." That was the first time in my life, and I should think almost the only time when I realized there were other - what do you call them, I don't know - these other kinds of communication which didn't have a material basis.

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And yes, there was another thing. All India Radio had asked Kumarappa that they wanted to have a little program on students in social work. So they should select the team of four and send them to All India Radio. So Kumarappa selected two girls and two boys, and I was one of the girls. The other one was Malti Ruikar, whose father was in the Trade Union Movement in Nagpur.

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And we sort of doodled off and we were interviewed etc. About a week later, I got a stern letter from my father saying go at once to the Free Press Journal, and enclosing a five rupees note. Get that old issue with this money - apparently your photograph has appeared in the Free Press Journal. I want to know what it is all about.

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I was scared stiff, you know. Thought the old boy's fears about Tata Institute are all becoming. So anyway, I jumped into the bus and went to the Institute and took out that. Some itinerarant photographer at All India Radio decided to come and snap a photograph of us while we were talking over the radio. And that was it. "Your brother's friend has drawn his attention to this photograph, and so I want this photograph." I sent it to him, he was acting a little.

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ZP: In fact, it's very surprising that how important a certain formal introduction to any theory, like feminist theory, is necessary to make you see something as discriminatory. Values of your culture are so internalized in you that you need something from outside to show you that it is not the only way you can locate anything. I remember when we were in a refugee camp at Kurla, in charge of the little children.

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The women used to say, Have a cup of tea, have this, have that, etc and we were strictly told by our field work authority that you are not to accept anything to eat and drink because they are

destitute, they have come without anything and you are not to make them spend a pie on you. So we used to turn it down.

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One day one woman told us that you don't want to eat in our houses. Tell the truth, isn't that it? So we at once went and reported back to our supervisor that this is a discriminate. They look upon it as a caste thing, or kind of class discrimination. So what do we do? And he thought about it and said, "Okay, a cup of tea, nothing else." So once again, what I say, something that is coming from one subculture has a totally different interpretation in another.

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In that way, since gender was not a formal piece of the course, I don't remember, except for these off the cuff reactions like why can't I come late, or why can't I do what my brother's doing, we never really learnt to look at what could have been a gendered custom or whatever it is. In that connection, I was just talking to a friend of mine yesterday or day before yesterday I think, and said that we should have models were we can identify discrimination.

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Because it is not so simple. And if might be a little erudite or whatever, you know that model that Habermas has made about the ideal speech situation where he says he decides the power configuration by things like who has chosen the topic (it may have nothing to do with social work), who fixes the parameters, who initiates it, who has the power to intrude, who has the power to close. That will give you a much better idea of the power configuration than many other so called objective. And it really, in my later life for example, I was the Head of the Department (it was by rotation) at the Miranda House English Department and we were selecting candidates and there was the Chairman of UGC was the Chairman of our selection committee, the Vice Chancellor's representative, then there was the Dean of Studies' representative and all that and I as the Head of the English Department.

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First one candidate, then another candidate goes, the chairman looks, "Anymore questions, anymore questions?" He wouldn't look at me. So when the third candidate came and he started dismissing after the members had anything to say, he said, "So you are all satisfied?" Then I said, "No Sir, I have something to say." He regarded it as a bit of impertinence. Who are you to talk when all these people, including the Head of your own English Department in the University? And I was instrumental in changing the decision because; again it’s a gender thing.

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Our Principal, who was in favor of, let's say Candidate A, candidate A to be the wife of an IAS officer. Candidate B didn't have any such credentials though she was pretty well up herself, well connected herself. She said, "You know, we have to do a lot of extra-curricular activities and they all require after class presence. These being married women, they have children, and we can't expect them to stay. No, wait, I'm getting this wrong.

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We need A, we want to choose A because she has qualifications, such and such, and not B. No, we want to chose A because I asked her whether she would be available to conduct extra-curricular activities and she said yes. So she is a clear candidate. I said, in the first place, Dr. Rukmini, you never asked that question of B. But on objective evidence, A is a mother; she has two children of junior school age for which she has to be present at home.

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Candidate B is unmarried, single and available. If extra-curricular is going to be the cutting edge, I would take the unmarried person as the right person. That's what these gender things do.

Q: Is there anything you would like to, message you would like to give back to TISS on its 75th year, something very short?

ZP: Well, all I can say is that although I have left the field of social work after less than a decade, and devoted the rest of my life to academic career, I never regretted those two years. Even though people tell me it was a waste, I do not feel at all. What it has done to me as a person, probably not always a very nice person, is to examine the assumptions beneath which a lot of our life is conducted.

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We have so many assumptions with which we conduct our life, and because of this defamiliarisation, completely new atmosphere, cosmopolitan world, late hours - because of all these things, I think I am a richer person.