



## **Mrs. Jayanti Patnaik**

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Interviewer: Ms. Shilpi Gulati

Camera/Sound: Ms Divya Cowasji

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Mrs. Jayanti Patnaik graduated from TISS in 1956, in Family and Child Welfare. She has been Member of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. For more details: <http://ws.ori.nic.in/ola/mlaprofile/profilepage.asp>



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Q: You tell us, when was the first time you came to the institute and how did you come to social work?

JP: See, just after my graduation, I got married. I was just thinking of further studies but the thing is I didn't know about Tata Institute of Social Science. My husband knew that there is a good institute there and it is the only institute which is famous in the whole of Asia also. He enthused me actually, to tell you the truth. I also jumped at the idea that we will go and I will study. And he went with me and I got admitted also. Then he came back also. Of course my difficulty was that I left my one year child. It was she. Anyway, I like this because Mr.Patnaik who has been encouraging in every field, even in politics, even going to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He is a progressive person. Like this I got admitted.

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Q: So, how was the campus at that time? You studied at Chembur. How was the campus at that time? It was a new campus?

JP: At that time also, we liked that campus. It was, now, it must have expanded so much. But at that time also campus was alright and the students could stay when they were first year, three-three students used to stay in one room. And second year, single room upstairs. So, like that used to stay there. And, there are very spacious also, classes of that side and dining room also. When we go to the dining room and the superintendent... Mr Saeed Anglo-Indian, I could remember. So, like this it was alright, it was a very good, at that time also it was a very good institute. Huge campus with all good buildings, like that.

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Q: So, what did you do after classes? Tell us a little, if you remember some stories, some mischiefs, and some incident that happened on campus.



JP: In the campus? In the campus, itself? The campus, whenever you get time also you talk to each other, whenever we are in the class, we have to study, you know that. And...But one thing I could remember that one important thing that at that time, the governor was from Orissa. I talk to him, I went and talk to him. "Will you please come and address to the students?" And at the same time Prof. Wadia had already given the consent.

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(JP continues): So, I could, that is the one big thing that he could come to the institute and he addresses the students. That is the one big thing also. For me at that time because, just after graduation I went, so naturally it is a big thing also and to the institute like this Tata Institute. So, this is one big thing I could remember.

Q: What about your teachers? Who do you remember and what do you remember about them?

JP: Prof. Desai my teacher because I had taken my specialization, women and children, as my specialization. And there are many teachers also, rural development and all these things...

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(JP continues): Panakkal also. He was from Kerala. He had come from some other business and I think also and many a time I met him also. And so like this it went on.

Q: Do you remember Behram Mehta?

JP: Yes, Mehta, Mehta, Yes, yes.... he used to very jokingly he used to speak and I can, but he is a very good teacher also.... yeah... he was a very good teacher.

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Q: And aunty where did you do your field work?



JP: Field work. Yes. That is a completely new thing to me also. Field work. So many times, Matunga, we used to go there and field work, some house, women's home, so there we used to go. Even group work, case work and group also. Both the things that we were having. The thing is that when we used to go many a time what happened, because we used to go by bus, so if we have to come from Chembur to Sion then Dadar, then some bus number F is standing there.

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(JP continues): I got into, but it was to go this side, straight, but that bus was supposed to go to that, and went also and after going something, at some distance, I used to get down because it was my mistake that F means that you should not go by that. So, like this some mistakes and some jokes. Some like this it happened. So, and because we have to find out some address we have to take the address, we have to find out and we have to go. Everything we have to do. So, like this we used to do.

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Q: How was it to be in Bombay at that time? Chembur is very away from the city.

JP: Yes, I have not seen Bombay so much. By that time, I never, because you know, even just after graduation I never have so much patience in Orissa even. Afterwards, I had Bharat Darshan, when my husband was defence minister, so many places, many states, I had visited. But how can you expect that I had visited Bombay. Visiting Bombay also was new to me and Tata institute was also very distanced I know that.

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(JP continues): But, after staying some days then we are used to come and used to go. And here, even because some relations are there in the Bombay. So, I used to go in bus. So, like that it has become.

Q: So, how did you think that coming to Bombay, a city like Bombay, so different from Orissa? Do you think it helped you?

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JP: Yeah..... this courage , because I, Orissa also I never used to move so much and people will say you take somebody to show you the way, show the home, show this, but in Bombay when I was there, we have to do our own, by our own selves.

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(JP continues): So, like that way, Bombay was a big place for me, new place but a big place for me.

Q: Were you in the hostel?

JP: Yeah, I was in the hostel, I told you that in the first year, we three were there in one hostel and second year, everybody used to get one - one single room.

Q: So, how was it in the hostel? Must be like, Chembur area must be like a jungle? Chembur and Deonar area must be like a jungle...

JP: No, meaning, we were in the campus. There was no necessity of going outside the campus, Chembur is naturally like a jungle at that time, and I knew that. But that doesn't mean, that we are feeling like we are in a jungle, not typical...

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(JP continues): Because in that campus, always crowded, always, meaning it is very, meaning we are living there like families and like this. So, I used to feel like that because even if it is in a jungle, I didn't care so much.

Q: Was Raj Kapoor's house there also then?

JP: Yes, yes, now that you reminded me.

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Q: You were from Orissa. What are the other places that students use to come from?



JP: From all over the country and from Burma....yeah... South East Asia, some people they had come. So, that is why I told you that is a famous institute in the whole of Asia. So... from all over the state also, for me it is also a great thing. Like people meeting each other from other states. Because you are different culture, different way of living.

Q: Social work at that time was very new...

JP: Very very new, I know that. That is why it is a professional thing. At that time also, as people from Orissa, they also didn't know. So, for me also it is... but still gets used to do and after my completion, that you know there was an organisation called State Council for Child Welfare. So, the governor Sukthankar, he was there. He was the chairman of the state council for child welfare. So, I, when they wanted one organiser, and I was a trained social worker, they took me. I told that I can work for you. So, I worked, even for sometimes for the Red Cross also.

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(JP continues): When they were starting Blind school, then I helped them also, mainly for State council for child... so many... I am a life member of state council for child welfare also. So, they must know. Sukthankar is from Karnataka and his secretary Hitprakash, he was also very eager to take me also because even he came to know that I am a trained social worker. So, like that, but the thing is that, I worked in the state council for child welfare at that time there was no centre for pre-primary school children.

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(JP continues): I started it. It was a very new. There was none...now so many centres have been started but at that time that was the only one, that city, Cuttack city. And I used to take also my new kind of method that for every child there must be a record for improvement or whatever there is. So, at the same time I organised the mother's club also. So, all these things I have started gradually, gradually. Then, like from 57 to



58, there was no difficulty while working but after that I got my children. My children were born, two children after that, one after... I could not give my time on this.

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(JP continues): Two children. So, I kept myself inside the house at that time also. I had started also writing some articles, translating some PremMunshi, Rajgopal's books and I used to give to one daily newspaper where my husband was the editor of daily language paper. So, like this I had to leave because I, there was a old mother in law. I didn't want to give so much responsibility because she had already taken the one eldest daughter's, so naturally I had to leave that job.

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(JP continues): After that my husband left journalism, then he entered into politics. '71, he went to parliament, '73, when he left journalism, one daily newspaper he was bringing, when he left, he brought a monthly magazine of our own with own press. And already then, because I used to be at home, I used to get time also, though children are there, so I used to write also serially.

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(JP continues): It is a famous at that time because such types, digest types, never had in our own language in Orissa. So it was in circulation. So, like that I was also going like that. After that, when he became Defence Minister in '73, he cannot look after, he cannot hold any business. So, I had to take the whole responsibility at that time of the magazine. So that also, gave us confidence.

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(JP continues): When I came from TATA institute, it gave me confidence to work in the child welfare and when I brought out the publication this monthly magazine that **School of Media and Cultural Studies**

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also gave me confidence. So, like this I was remaining like that. And suddenly...Mr.Patnaik... in 1980, that was an election for Parliament, so because he remained '70 to '77 as a defence minister. Then 1980, general election came and he conducted election for Orissa, Indiraji was there and with thumping majority our party came.

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(JP continues): So, naturally after that Indiraji told that you go and take up the responsibility of Orissa, so he became the Chief Minister of Orissa. But he was at that time, in the year '91, he was elected. He was actually in the centre, was Cabinet Minister, ....(?) and Civil Aviation and Labour. Anyway, that he had to leave that because Indiraji's order was that you go and take the responsibility of Orissa.

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(JP continues): When he took up the responsibility of Orissa, that seat remained vacant. So, the question rose that who will be the candidate again to contest for by-election. So, by that time, I was helping in politics also because all the MLA's, all the people used to come to me. I had to I had to tell him all the things to my husband. So, like that, I am used to do, at the same time I used to look after my press, and magazine and all these things. Along with my children and my old mother also, I had to look after her.

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(JP continues): So, like this it was going and when question of filling that post, Mr. Patnaik came, all the MLA's, they suggested my name. I never thought of going to politics because no lady had gone until that time. No lady had gone to Lok Sabha. So, I was so much afraid, I never insisted, I never told them. Will I be able to do? Like that. Anyway, I contested in the by-election and I won. So, after when I won, people started saying, she is a lady, what can she do there Lok Sabha like thing?



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(JP continues): For that also, I had to labour so much because otherwise, my constituency people of Orissa, will say it is of no use sending her, so like, natural in the parliament, I used to work so hard. Every time I use to tell with my name for participating in the further. Many questions I use to ask also, so, and wherever, whenever, any issues come, women and children, repressed people, and children, child labour all these things, whenever come, I never, use to stop, I always use to give my name to participate.

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(JP continues): So, like that it was going on and with constituency also, I use to work so much, I use to, now this is the problem, so much, people use to like me also, people use to... so I had worked very much for the constituency. Even my husband is this ruling party, he is chief minister, still once what happened, I had to agitate, I just went with the people. I had to take the lead for agitation to get a bridge because the distance of 8 kms, that river, that was the bridge, that bridge was already the foundation of... then my people came, Ma... I didn't contest because I told that because of my knee problems I am not going to contest anymore. You young people come and contest.

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(JP continues): I gave chance to others also in the last election. But now the thing is that, in 1989, the congress party lost in many states. In my state, miserably. So, I also lost in the election. 1992, I was appointed as the chairperson of the first national commission for women. So, in those circumstances also, the training I got from the TATA institute of social science helped me also. So, various types of work you had to take, forming legislation, amendments.

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(JP continues): Then take up the cases and so how one can, could be taken in the mainstream of development. That we had to see also. So, all these things...that I can't explain so much of the TATA because it was the first commission that was nothing... not a single room. In one single room we used to sit all the members and everything and from that we expanded like anything. We expanded on various types of activities.

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(JP continues): So many things we had done at that time. Just gave the foundation at that time. Now, they are going on but on our foundation only they are going on. Then again, I was elected for Rajya Sabha. Two times I had already did it... 1981, 1984. Twice. And 1996, again elected to Rajya Sabha. And 1998, I was told to go and contest for another constituency which was Narasimha Rao Prime Minister's constituency, because that time he had not been given the ticket, he didn't contest.

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(JP continues): So, it became prestigious thing. So, we have to win and I also went and contested. After that also, I lost also once again. Then, last election did not contest. Before that also, I told to Soniaji, that I would not contest but I was forced to contest. I said, the party situation is not alright. How I will contest until we lose. But still they made me contest. Then, last election I didn't contest. So, anyway, these are the things as I how I have decided not to contest but people are going coming. They are not leaving me.

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(JP continues): So, my life is like that. I have to look up and my children, they are all got married. So, I don't have any difficulties.

Q: Aunty, tell me something, you had such a dynamic career, you've been in politics, you've worked for women, you've been on the national commission for women. How do you think being a social worker helped you in your career?

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JP: Ideally, what is your objective? To serve the people. Isn't it? To serve the people. That is the main thing in politics. I always used to say that I am a student of social work. I am also a student of politics also which is very much similar. And we go to the people and we hear the grievance and we try to solve the problems. These are the things that also which are necessary for social work.

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(JP continues): So, it helped it. That is why, TATA institute training, it helped me. So, I am very proud that I was a student of TATA institute of Social Science.

Q: It's been 75 years now, TATA institute has finished its 75 years. Is there any message you would want to give to your Alma Mater?

JP: See, it has already earned a good name. I think now it has been very research oriented, what I heard about that. How... still, so many problems. Women, though for their empowerment. So, much things are being done but women are far behind.

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(JP continues): They are of course, now educated. Literacy has increased but gap between the boy's literacy and girls literacy not bridged. Still, now, have got the right to education. So, in every field, women are behind. There are social customs, taboos, still now which come in our way, even the progress of women. So, that is why I say, we have to go a long way. And being that, TATA institute should take probably this also. Those who are student come out, they should also have this vision to serve the people.