

## **CLARIFICATIONS ON GOI POST MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP AT TISS AND INSTITUTE'S ACTION**

**23/07/2018**

### **Background**

In view of the information being spreading about the Students' Protest and the stand taken by the Institute, it would be pertinent to inform the students community and the general public about several facts about the matter.

At the outset, we reiterate that the Institute has not stopped any scholarship and "Students' Aid" given by the Institute. The Institute has no role in the Government of India Post Matric Scholarship (GOI PMS) scheme. It is a central government scheme implemented through state governments and UTs. The GOI PM Scholarship is applied by the students to their respective state government and the government transfers the scholarship amount directly to the students' bank account, as the part of the Direct Beneficiary Transfer (DBT) programme. The role of the Institute is only to endorse the students application and the request.

The Institute was giving fee waiver to eligible SC/ST/OBC students for their tuition fee, hostel and dining hall charges for decades, even though it is not mandated by any government directives. Earlier the fee component of the scholarship amount was directly paid to the institutions by the respective state governments, even though the quantum of scholarship received were not commensurate with the fee structure and varied across states. When the government introduced DBT scheme, the students started getting their scholarship amount in their bank accounts and the Institute asked the students to pay their hostel and dining hall charges to the Institute as practiced by all the universities and institutions in the country. But at the same time the TISS continue to waive off the course fee. Further the institute continued to provide financial aid to needy students through the Institute's 'Student Aid' programme based on the resources mobilized independently by the Institute from time to time.

The argument by the protesting students are that the Institute has withdrawn institutional support in terms of hostel and dining hall fee waivers to the SC/ST/OBC (NC) students accessing the Govt of India Post Matric Scholarship and demand that it continue the fee waiver (including hostel and dining hall charges) for BA, MA, MPhil and PhD students, who are currently studying and for all the future batches of Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

The Institute has extended full fee waiver to all the students from SC/ST communities eligible for GoI PMS and enrolled upto the academic year 2017-18 and worked out mechanisms to substantially support to OBC (NC) eligible students to meet their academic expenditures through student aid and other scholarships mobilised by the Institute. Since the upfront fee waiver for OBC (NC) was stopped they were included in the Student Aid scheme and more than 80% of the total fund allocated were used to support eligible OBC (NC) students. There were also instance of some students getting double benefits while they get fee waiver, they used to get the scholarship amount to their account which are not repaid to the institute in full, especially the amount they receive after they pass out. Such a situation with increasing number of students on roll is creating an unmanageable cumulative deficits to Institute accounts. Thus the institute was forced to take decisions in asking the students to pay for their hostel and dining hall bills with the option of making the payments in easy installments and even supporting students who find difficulties in paying the same through other supports on a case to case basis. **Thus a blanket full fee waiver on the part of the Institute for all batches current and future as demanded by some section of the protesting students is neither mandated by law nor it is feasible in any manner.** This has been upheld by the National Commissions for SC and ST separately in their meetings with the students and Institute officials. It is to be noted that even the current expenses towards course fee waivers are not covered by funds from any ministry or UGC and had to be borne by the institute from its own resources. However all possible support in addition to the course fee waivers extended to eligible SC and ST students and increased Student Aid Support for OBC (NC) would continue. The Institute is continuously taking efforts to generate resources to augment the funds available for Internal Scholarships in collaboration with various Trusts, Foundations and Corporate donors. We expect the student community, alumni and well wishers to join us in this effort.

We are proudly informing all the alumnus and the students that you are part of a very prestigious Institute which has been existing for the last 80 years and upholding the social values. Our name has specially mentioned in the Institute of Eminence selection by the extended empowered committee, to give a special status.

The Institute has the view that all the students should get opportunity to study regardless of their economic conditions. The Institute also understand the challenges faced by the students regarding the GOI PMS issue, and the Institute stood with the cause of the protest but not the

way it is done. The way the protesting students behaved in the campus by blocking staff and students accessing the main gate and blocking the residents through out the night time, making hostage of official, preventing staff from performing their duties for many days, illegally occupying the office of the Registrar and unauthorizedly accessing and copying documents, which are explained below.

The Institute would like to reiterate that it understands the concerns and also stands in solidarity with the idea that marginalised communities need support to receive quality education and educational opportunities. The institute had taken several measures *suo motu*, though not mandated by law, in the interest of supporting the most needy students from marginalized background. At the same time Institute cannot take inhuman way of protest especially when it violate the human rights and take law in hand. It is at this stage the Institute was forced to take the help of the judicial system to ensure that the Institute is allowed to undertake its normal functions.

### **An overview of the protest**

The base of the protest is the notification issued on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 to inform all SC/ST students eligible for GoI PMS to pay dining hall and hostel charges. Due to the serious financial crisis and mounting deficits on account of a range of reasons, the Institute was forced to direct the eligible GoI PMS students to pay for at least their dining hall and hostel fee while continuing the full course fee waiver to eligible SC/ST students. A notification issued was made effective for the 2016-18 and the upcoming 2017-19 batch. The students started registering their opposition to the same and demanding for the withdrawal of the Notification. The Institute assured that no one would be forced to leave the programme and hostel or stopped from having meals in the DH on account of not being able to pay the fees and bills that they were now supposed to pay. This is a commitment that the Institute has honored till date.

Later in the year, after a meeting held with the students' Union in November 2017 regarding the same matter, a **GOI-PMS Working Group** was set up with representation from students, faculty and staff to engage and work on long term issues relating to GOI-PMS. e.g. state governments not approving scholarships to TISS students on the ground that they were studying outside the state, online forms of a few state governments for availing GOI-PMS, not uploading the full list of TISS courses or not listing the TISS off campuses, Maharashtra

Government included TISS in the list of private deemed universities and excluded our OBC(NC) students from availing GOI-PMS facility and also reducing the family income limit for SC students from 2.5 to 2 lacs to avail GOI-PMS facility, etc. The GOI-PMS Working Group members have since met the Minister for Social Justice and Tribal Affairs and officials from both the Ministries to apprise them of the issues being faced by GOI-PMS students and work towards addressing the same. The Hon'ble Minister of State for Social Justice, Sri. Ramdas Athavale had addressed the student gathering sometime in October 2017 and remarked that these are policy issues and he would call for a meeting with the Ministry Officials. On 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2017, the Hon'ble Minister called for a meeting at Delhi, which was attended by officials from the ministry and officials from the Institute. During the discussions and on a specific request from students, the Ministry declined to issue any directives not to collect any hostel and dining fees stating that how can the Institute run these facilities. To resolve the issues, the TISS has made some progress and efforts, which are still continuing.

The protest begun on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018, making inconvenience to the main campus residents at 11.pm in the night by ringing calling bells of all the houses for distributing the notice, shouting slogans and loudly drumming. They gathered around the residence of Registrar and deputy registrar and shouted slogans for more than 15 mins. The Protesting students blocked the main entrance of the Mumbai campus not allowing any one to enter or exit through the gate, even during the whole night blocking the residents for many days. They have made the Acting Director to sit on the floor when she tried to go through the main gate. They made a senior citizen residing in the main campus to stand in the main gate the whole night not allowing to enter through the main gate. The Protesting students have held hostage the Acting Director, Deputy Director and administrative staff in their respective offices for hours. The Acting Director and administrative staff including senior citizens jumped over the window to flee outside. The Protesting students unauthorizedly entered in to the office of the Registrar and accessed all the document and turned off the CCTV camera. The protesting students kept posters, banners and blockades in the main campus disrupting the normal movement and painted walls including the historic building and roads with anti-institute slogans.

There was a general sense of distress among students, faculty, staff and their families who stay on campus about the methods of protests by the students, especially till the restraining order by the City Civil Court was passed. Protesting students engaged in loud drumming, and

sloganeering till late into night from time to time; gheraoing of faculty including the Acting Director, Dy. Director, Dean Students Affairs and Dean Social Protection and trespassing and intrusion into the Office of the Registrar, blocking the administration wing of the Institute for four days at a stretch from March 24 to 27, which caused severe damage to the year-end financial and accounting deliverables. There were situations where the administration wing was blocked and staff members (including women) were not allowed to go to the wash rooms for more than 4 hours at a stretch. All the staff caught inside the office, including senior citizens had to jump out of the window to escape the blockade and which is video documented. Some of the protesting students also got engaged in circulating whatsapp messages with the photographs of the Registrar, Dean Students' Affairs, Dean Social Protection and a few faculty colleagues with objectionable and maligning captions with personal attacks. Some of the students also posted messages on facebook exhorting students and alumni to send mass messages, mail and whatsapp messages to the officials causing immense distress. Hundreds of messages were received in their inboxes (of Ag. Director, and Deans SA and SPO) since the facebook post appeared. The Institute tried very hard not to initiate legal action despite continuous provocation – until March 27, when legal notices were served on some of the students warning them against blocking the normal functioning of the Institute and also filing a civil suit in the City Civil Court requesting for a 'restraining order' to ensure that student do not continue to block movement and access to the administration wing. It was only after the court intervention the faculty and the administration could function without having to fear for blockades, gheraoing and other obstructive means. Not only the administration and faculty were impacted by their protests, but also sections of students. "We agree with the cause but not the means" is what many students have communicated to faculty members - both verbally and in writing. Further, several press releases were issued by some of the protesting students purportedly on behalf of Students General Body without having any meetings of the entire student body. This has misled the media as well as the external actors that all such allegations and media briefs had the approval of the entire student body which was not the case.

Fighting for legally acceptable rights and justice is welcome, but all rights operate within a framework of institutions that are designated as duty bearers. The distinction between moral and legal claims has to be kept in mind when we speak about the issue of fee exemptions for SC/ST/OBC (NC) students. The distinction is important in the context of social justice. Each one of us at the Institute envisions a country where no one is denied access to higher education. Here we wish to share through this note that while we are considered a prominent Insti-

tute, we are a modest university, compared to the central universities, which get generous funding. The Tata Trusts have supported us in times of need over the last 7 decades and they continue to do so for specific projects, infrastructure and faculty.

### **How TISS has Supported the Cause of Social Justice Over the Years**

The TISS has always more than filled the quota of SC/ST students and offered support way beyond what is mandated by the government and within the ambit of existing schemes and policies. The Institute had offered the same fee exemptions to OBC (NC) students as was offered to SC/ST students from 2013 to 2015 batches, despite having no guidelines from the government of UGC to this effect. This could not be sustained due to financial viability issues as there was hardly any scholarship money being reimbursed by the state governments for OBC (NC) students besides not being legally mandated and therefore not supported by UGC. No assessment was done on the long term, recurring financial costs before an executive decision was taken to extend facilities to OBC (NC) on par with SC/ST students. Hence the full fee waiver was stopped for OBC (NC) in the year 2015 while including them in the Student Aid scheme. With regard to ensuring that there is minimal entry barrier, upfront student aid for covering the tuition fee was offered to all eligible OBC (NC) students at the time of admission. Further, in the Plan of Action dated 10 March 2018, the upfront fee payment for OBC NC students has been reduced by Rs.50,500 to further reduce the entry barriers. Later upon taking admissions, student aid is offered to economically marginalised students upon assessment of the need. It is to be noted that more than 80 per cent of the student aid given to students from economically weak backgrounds goes to OBC (NC) students admitted to TISS. OBC (NC) students were offered student aid through its internal funds ranging from Rs. 12000/- to Rs. 50000/- per year per student. We understand that there is a need to support the most needy OBC (NC) students. However, course fee exemption given to SC/ST students is on the basis of UGC/MHRD guidelines. There are no such guidelines to extend the same to OBC (NC) students and hence no discussion on support from UGC / MHRD is entertained by the government.

### **TISS Committed to Honor Students**

Right through the days of students' protest most of our faculty members have been busy with the admission process, followed by end semester thesis evaluations, exam paper corrections, preparation of results, working hard towards ensuring that convocation is organised as sched-

uled in the first week of May. More than 1200 students graduated from the TISS main and off-campuses in this years' convocation and took up jobs of their interest or pursued higher education as per their dreams. Preventing the administrative section to enter their work spaces with the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March created a major disruption for the Accounts and Academic and Administrative Sections and its functions. Insisting that they want the Ag. Director and Registrar to dialogue on their Charter of Demands does not sit well with the fact that 6 to 8 such meetings had been held so far with the protesting students in the presence of Acting Director, Deputy Directors, Registrar, Deans and senior faculty – including three to four rounds of discussions with an Expanded Empowered Committee of faculty set up on February 28, 2018, to talk to the students almost every day, and when most of their demands have been met. The press notes and other documents that appear with regularity on the social media create a false impression that the administration is unwilling to speak to students and that their demands are not being met.

There is a detailed document that clarifies facts and the situation at the Institute and we encourage our alumni, students, well-wishers and the press to engage with these details, before coming to any conclusion about whether or not the TISS walks the talk of social justice. At the end we would like to inform all of you that the Institute need your understanding and support to ensure that we continually impart socially relevant quality higher education with no barriers for students from socially and economically difficult circumstance. Your support can make it happen.

**Registrar**

