

Post- Matric Scholarship and TISS strike

Pramod Mandade

Tata institute of Social science is one of the important institutes of higher education in India. Mumbai, Hyderabad, Tuljapur and Gawahati, four campuses of TISS went on strike simultaneously from 21st February against the institute's decision to withdrawal of freeship of Post- Matric Scholars and student also demanded overall withdrawal of fee hike. After some days of university strike, protest gathered attention and support from students across India, TISS alumni and from general society. TISS protest brought out issues related to Post- Matric Scholarship (PMS) in general and some other issues that are specific to TISS as an institute. In this piece I want to look at the politics of scholarship, their inevitability in enabling higher education to a huge number of students especially from a certain section of the society. I am going to focus on the subject of Post- Matric Scholarships and will later argue for the importance of linking Scholarship with inflation.

TISS is one of the rare public institutes where affirmative policies of state were implemented with its sprits. If one looks at TISS in recent years, we can see that TISS as an institute has undergone big change. The introduction of online exams for admissions was one such important change; it was vehemently opposed by then student union and students. The changing format of the entrance exam, with high weightage to english language skills, multiple choice type questions etc. that ultimately worked to the disadvantage of students from underprivileged and oppressed backgrounds. Today TISS administration is charging 1000 rupees per program as entrance exam fee. The high entrance exam fee is another example of rampant loot of students. Many students think twice, even before application.

TISS administration changed the name of SC/ST/OBC/minorities cell to "social protection office" and started diluting various provisions meant for marginalized students. TISS administration cancelled the pre- admission orientation program, started asking full fees from eligible OBC –PMS students and later even closed down the system of finical assistance. Along with these changes, TISS has exponentially raised the fees. Finally they are now demanding payment of full fees even from ST/SC PMS students at the time of admission.

Following two tables are self explanatory regarding exponential increase of fees in previous three years. There is no rationale given for such a huge increment. The protests that have emerged in TISS are not spontaneous or sudden, they are a result of this gradual systemic changes.

Hostel fees per semester

Year	Hostel fees
2014-15	6000
2015-16	10000
2016-17	15000

Dining charges semester

Year	Dh charges
2014-15	12000
2015-16	14000
2016-17	16000

(Information obtained by RTI and circulated by protesting students)

In the year 2014, the administration withdrew support for PMS OBCs which led to overall reduction of enrolment of OBCs.

Year	% of enrolment of OBCs
2014-15	22
2015-16	20
2016-17	18

(Information obtained by RTI and circulated by protesting students)

The above table calculates the reduction in enrolment at the time of admissions. So definitely there will be many more students who have dropped out in between their courses for not being able to manage the financial burden. Striking students are also demanding restoration of various

support systems, including financial aid system and withdrawal of fee hike. Earlier TISS students forced the administration to appoint the review committee in 2014. The committee pointed many irregularities in their report, which was submitted report in July 2014. But TISS successfully buried review committee report. Hence the huge increase of fees and scrapping of various support systems is also result of those irregularities. Eruption of TISS student needs to be understood in this context.

Apart from issues related to TISS, striking students have brought forth the larger issue the terrible situation of Post- Matric Scholars. So it is important to understand what PMS is.

Post- Matric Scholarship (PMS)

According to Indian state PMS is “the Single largest intervention by the Government of India for educational empowerment”. PMS scheme was started in 1944 by the colonial government and initially it was meant only for Scheduled caste students. Intention of the scheme was to help Dalit students to obtain higher education. This help was introduced in the form of maintenance allowance which was very minimal. After independence, in 1948 PMS scheme was extended to Scheduled tribes. In 1998 OBCs were added to the list of beneficiaries. For SC/ST PMS is demand driven, but for OBCs, it is limited and available only in some recognised institutes. The PMS ‘support’ from the state is very minimum and arbitrary. There is no regular revision of maintenance and other allowances. Last revision of the PMS allowances has happened 7-8 years back in 2010. The coverage of Post- Matric Scholarship is different for SC/ST students and OBC students. Depending upon nature of course PMS is divided in four different groups.

Today PMS covers following things¹

- Maintenance allowance amounting to Rs.380/- to 1200/- per month for hostellers and Rs. 230/- to Rs. 550/- per month for day scholars.
- Reimbursement of compulsory non-refundable fees

¹ Here we are mentioning mmaximum coverage of PMS. PMS coverage is for OBC is much lesser.

- Study tour charges (one time)-1600
- Thesis typing/printing charges for Research Scholars (one time)-1600

For last 8 years there is no change in these allowances. In 2014, the state started giving these allowances to students in their bank account through the Direct Benefit Transfer mode instead of providing the same to the institute. This system increased the burden of student in two ways. First, they need to pay full fees at the time of admission and most of the students face huge difficulty to collect the fees amount. Reduction of enrolment of OBC student told us the difficulty of PMS student to collect money at the time of admission. Second, now PMS student needs to run across various the state departments to get money from the state. This consumes a lot of time and energy of individual students. The DBT also made scholarship an individual transaction between a student and the government, leaving the institute without any responsibility. The arbitrary nature of PMS application, follow up, dispersal have made it a difficult task for students to approach the respective state government departments.

Importance of PMS for higher education

Going through the annual report of the Ministry of Social Justice ministry and looking at number of beneficiaries, one realises the importance of the PMS. Last year, more than 57 lakhs SC student benefited from the PMS. This number will increase if we add ST, OBC and other beneficiary students. In general, the demand of PMS is continuously increasing.

Analysis described in the below table shows that from 2013-14 to 2015-16, the demand of PMS has continuously increased, but per student expenditure of state is reduced drastically. In 2016 state spent less than 4000 per PMS SC student for one year. Less than 4000 per year is very minimal support for higher education. For OBC PMS student, the state is spending less than 2500.

Expenditure of state on PMS SC Students

Year	Central assistance release (Rs. In Crore)	No of beneficiaries (In lakhs)	Per students expenditure
2013-14	2153.49	49.95	4311

2014-15	1963.37	53.38	3687
2015-16	2213.88	57.69	3837

(Annual reports of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 2015-16 & 2016-17)

Expenditure of state on PMS ST Students

Year	Central assistance release (Rs. In Crore)	No of beneficiaries (In lakhs)	Per students expenditure
2013-14	748.39	20.34	3678.51
2014-15	587.84	21.06	2791.26
2015-16	857.14	20.33	4216.13

(Annual reports of Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2015-16 & 2016-17)

Expenditure of state on PMS OBC Students

Year	Central assistance release (Rs. In Crore)	No of beneficiaries (In lakhs)	Per students expenditure
2013-14	822.34	32.57	2524.83
2014-15	790.13	41.77	1891.62
2015-16	885.00	40.93	2163.22

(Annual reports of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 2015-16 & 2016-17)

Reservations may guarantee disadvantaged and marginalized community people's representation in higher education institutes, but there is no assurance that proper representation will come into actualization without necessary support. Even though the actual amount of PMS is very minimal, but it is one such assurance to ST/SC/OBC students which enables them to complete their higher

education. It inevitable that if the state wants students from these sections of the society to get higher education they have to increase spending on education.

The amount allocated to PMS allowances is very minimal and arbitrary. It is not clear that how state calculated various PMS allowances and up gradation of Post- Matric Scholarship is also depend upon whims and fancies of the state. In this context, it is important to remember that there were many struggles in the past and their demand was to link PMS with inflation rate. In 1982 it was the last time when Yuva Kranti Dal and Dalit Panther took a morcha of 10,000 students with demand of linking PMS with to inflation. But after 1982, this demand to link PMS with inflation has lost somewhere. TISS is one of the elite institutes, but most of the beneficiaries of the PMS scheme are pursuing their education in the various state universities. This is also an appropriate moment to raise this issue again. I am writing with hope that protesting TISS Students will link themselves with problems of lakhs of other PMS students.