

Dear Ms Nikhila Henry,

Thanks for your mail dated November 7th.

Even as I was planning to respond to your mail, a colleague sent your article (dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019) this morning and I was rather taken aback to see that you ended your report by saying "Prof Vindhya refused to comment on the allegations". In fact, on the contrary, I had specifically asked you to mail me what were the student's allegations (since in your text messages sent to me on 6<sup>th</sup> November you had not disclosed what the allegations were) in order for us to give a detailed response.

The mail that you sent me on 7th November also did not contain any deadline for me to respond unless it is being assumed that there should be an immediate response without of course being mindful of the fact that like journalists, we too have pressing work commitments and deadlines. I had also texted you on 6<sup>th</sup> of November saying that I was currently not in Hyderabad and that I would ask my colleagues to provide you with a response, although it is our vacation now.

We would like to clarify the following points, which we strongly believe Huffington Post should carry as a correction to some of the views expressed in your piece.

1. You referred to two show-cause notices given to the student whom you have quoted as saying on Facebook that she has been pushed to the verge of suicide on account of them. I wonder why you did not choose to report the final outcome of one of the notices involving her. The notice pertained to a complaint of intimidation and assault levelled by a student belonging to a marginalized community against her and several others. The administration constituted an inquiry committee, consisting of two faculty members of TISS Hyderabad and one external member, a reputed academic. After lengthy hearings and ample opportunities given to both parties to put forth their points of view, the conclusion of this committee was ***not*** to recommend ***punitive measures against any student***. Rather the committee strongly suggested that both groups of students should henceforth actively work towards bridging differences stemming from varied ideological perspectives, and towards creating a healthy culture on the campus. The FB post that you referred to was dated 28th September but your article was published on 8<sup>th</sup> November; so I wonder why you chose not to report the outcome of the inquiry committee which in no way can be construed as pushing anyone "to the verge of suicide".

There was another inquiry committee too constituted to go into a complaint lodged by one of the students who was a key participant in the students' protest in July. This complaint too was against other fellow students. The outcome of this inquiry too was to suggest restraint and better relations between students. I am referring to these inquiry committees only to say that the administration has not been selective in its approach of taking up complaints lodged by students. Therefore, to answer your specific question "Did TISS take punitive action against students?", the answer is "No."

2. The second notice given to 30 students referred to the events in July 2019 when a section of students physically prevented faculty, admin staff and students from entering the premises for several days at a stretch, and asking faculty members, and "upper caste faculty to get out", leaving the administration with no choice but to declare sine die closure of the Institute (which incidentally was in force for 9 days from July 16<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> 2019). The student protest had continued despite the matter of the hostel fees for the GoI-PMS students having been resolved according to the GoI-PMS students themselves who reported that they were satisfied with the outcome of the talks with the administration. Therefore, despite the efforts made by the administration to resolve the matter of affordable accommodation for the GoI-PMS students, which was the very first and primary demand of the protesting students (and despite the larger picture of reduction of funds by the government, referred by you too in your report), and again, despite the GoI-PMS students deciding to withdraw from the protest, some students persisted with their blockade attempts. It was in this context that the Institute decided to issue show-cause notices asking them to explain their actions. However, till date, no student has been handed down any punitive action such as suspension or expulsion. Further, it is these students who have taken the Institute to court on this matter and the issue is yet to be settled by the court. Therefore, the answer to your question on punitive action is "No" again.

3. You also quoted a student as saying that following the July protests, the "administration has become more hostile". I would like to categorically refute this 'perception'. Despite vicious and personal attacks on me and some of my colleagues that caused many faculty who are also in administration to be disheartened and demoralized, I must say that we have tried our best to bring back a semblance of normalcy and effective functioning on the Hyderabad campus.

Following from the time of reopening of the Institute in July 2019, we have

- conducted direct elections to the Students' Council (a long-standing demand of the students which was addressed through a multi-campus review committee and accepted);
- appointed three psychological counsellors in our Student Counselling Centre (in the place of only one Counsellor that we had last year) who attend to mental/emotional health issues on a one-on-one basis.
- appointed two full-time faculty in the English Language Cell that provides individual help to students coping with language difficulties, apart from conducting classes;
- constituted a duly-notified Facilitation and Support Cell with representatives from faculty and students to address the concerns of the students in a prompt and responsive manner.

Furthermore, if any student(s) perceive that strict adherence to norms such as attendance and grading constitutes “hostility” towards students, I can only say that these are some of the 3 norms the Institute has put in place to uphold rigorous academic standards and not in order to be “hostile” to students.

4. Your latest report dated November 8<sup>th</sup> also contains several factual inaccuracies. Please see our responses below.

a) “...a threat of closure looms over the temporary campus that operates from the congested premises of a private school in the neighbouring Ranga Reddy district...the lease of which is about to run out in 2020...”

*Response: No, the current campus has a lease of 5 years beginning May 2019; and the current campus is not congested.*

b) “TISS went for expansion without taking required permissions from the University Grants Commission”

*Response: All teaching programmes are offered as per the mandatory sanction and clearance of UGC and other regulatory bodies.*

5. Finally, we would like to say that contrary to the doomsday predictions that TISS is going to “collapse” and TISS Hyderabad in particular is on the “brink of “collapse”, as projected in your piece, we, faculty and students are committed to its continuance and growth. The admission and placement figures belie your gloomy prediction. We are proud of our students in whom we have nurtured a sense of critical reflection and questioning and we are hopeful that our collective pursuit of social change, for a more democratic and egalitarian society, will not go in vain.

In the interests of responsible journalism that would include fair and balanced reporting, I would like to once again urge you to either present the points put across in this letter in another piece or publish the letter itself in its entirety.

With best wishes,

U.Vindhya, Acting Deputy Director, and faculty members of the Management Committee

TISS Hyderabad campus