

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED TO INVESTIGATE THE ISSUE OF VIVEKANANDA SAMITI

The Fact Finding Committee was formed in light of the grievances raised by the President, Students' Gymkhana as the Chief Executive as well as on behalf of the General Body, on grounds of which the Senate gave its decision of dissolving Vivekananda Samiti from its position as a Gymkhana body.

The committee consists of the following members:

Prateek Mishra

Rishikesh Mishra (convener)

Vedant Goenka

Vimal Kumar

Issues raised on Senate floor, 2nd Special Meeting, 2015-16

For reference, the points raised on the Senate floor are summarized below. Detailed minutes may be found in Senate archives.

1. Complaints received from the General Body about religious inclinations of the activities conducted by Vivekananda Samiti (henceforth called VS), which may not be shared by the entire student community and cannot be endorsed by the Students' Gymkhana.
2. The repeated offence by VS coordinators in failing to abide by Gymkhana code of conduct by not adhering to the President's instruction of not conducting club activities during Orientation 2015-16, and simultaneous absence from the Presidential Council presentation
3. Complaints of unsolicited mailing from vsamiti@iitk.ac.in
4. Persistent financial mismanagement on multiple instances such as irresponsible management of funds, unchecked budget overshoots over multiple tenures, unreported direct income from external sources
5. The use of Gymkhana Corpus out of turn and without adhering to protocol
6. Claims of involvement of VS in sale of merchandise during VYLC without approval from the Finance Convener or President.

FFC Findings

While there was no open meeting of the FFC, as some may note, the committee members met with various stakeholders in the matter to investigate the issues pointed out in the Senate and mentioned above.

1. Discussions pertaining to religious inclinations were deemed subjective during the initial Senate discussion and the committee decided to adhere to the Senate's stance. When asked about the protocol for event-related decisions, VS coordinators reported that as advised by Dr. AK Ghosh, then DOSA, all events are vetted by Faculty Advisors. The President is approached for executive issues only after the Faculty Advisor's approval. VS added that the role of Faculty is purely advisory and non-binding to Gymkhana procedure and does not bypass President's authority. It is important to point out that this is the only instance of the presence of a non-authoritative, advisory faculty role for a Gymkhana club, and, unless explicitly declared otherwise, the approval of Faculty carries significant weight on any subsequent decision of student bodies on the matter and President, Gymkhana may feel bypassed and the event pre-approved. This is also a point of consideration in item 5.
2. On the complaints of VS failing to adhere to the protocol expected of a club, specifically during Orientation (2015-16). The President had instructed the coordinators to not hold their weekly meditation session during Orientation period (as is the standard rule). Additionally the coordinators were asked to be present during Orientation program, as is expected from all club representatives. VS failed to abide by the President's decision on both counts, with no member present in the auditorium while the club's event was carried out in parallel.

Mr. Nakul Surana personally apologised for his failure to be present during Orientation Programme due to personal negligence and asked the conduct of event to not be blamed for it. The two events were appropriated amongst the multiple coordinators, and the absence of assigned club representatives (Nakul and Sakshi) from the presentation was accepted as personal responsibility by the people in question.

Mr. Surana also claimed that the meditation event had a different target audience and sufficient organizing force to not clash with the presentation. Also, it would not have been

possible to hold it had the President not consented. The President claimed to have approved on the condition that the club be present during Presidential Council's presentation.

3. The issue of VS mailing list has seen detailed discussion on Senate floor, and has thus been left out of the committee's agenda, for lack of potential value addition to status quo.
4. The club has received multiple warnings over the years due to regularly overshooting its allocated budget. Financial statement from FYs 2013-14 and 2014-15 reflect this trend with the final budget overshooting by 3-5 multiples of initial allocation. VS reports that the increases in budget had been made with the consideration of the President telling them of expected increase in budget post midterm reallocation. The coordinators also mentioned that the YoY increment in budget allocation has not been reflective of the growth in the club's activities, causing unavoidable overshoot of some degree. The allegations of unreported income, according to VS, are unfounded and correlated to the issue pertaining to Gymkhana Corpus (see item 5), wherein VS was allocated funds it was already entitled to by donations and Ministry of Culture funding, although with significant re-channelizing.

The coordinators acknowledged these facts and assured that the current FYs budget is well under control and should not raise concerns. In light of this statement, the committee advises the Senate to take the discussion under consideration while evaluating the club's financial management for 2015-16.

5. A major point of discussion involved withdrawal of funds of roughly INR 2.5 Lakh from Gymkhana Corpus, without proper approval from the Gymkhana Executives.

The Corpus exists as a project account under Dean, R&D, with Dean, Students' Affairs serving as Principal Investigator(drawing authority). Standard protocol allows withdrawal from Corpus under exceptional circumstances and with all Gymkhana Executives as signatories, following which the DOSA signs for the release of funds. Transactions made under VS amount to excess of INR 2.4 Lakh, of which the Gymkhana Executives were uninformed. VS coordinators reported that the club was entitled to said amount for conducting VYLC through available alumni funds and were part of the ongoing 150th anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda from 2011 to 2015.

The following set of correspondence took place pertaining to VYLC 2015 held during Jan 10-12, 2015.

Dec 05, 2014: Letter forwarded to DOSA by VS coordinator Mr. Koustuv Ray, through Mr. Gautam Pratap Singh, acting President on behalf of Mr. Abhimanyu Arora seeking approval and financial support for VYLC 2015. The contents of the letter are fairly generic. This letter was accompanied by a proposal outlining the program for VYLC 2015 and citing a budget requirement of INR 2,45,300.

Another letter was presented to the committee by VS, probably drafted before this and forwarded by Faculty members Dr. Arnab Bhattacharya and Dr. Raj Ganesh S Pala and addressed to DOSA seeking undisclosed financial support for VYLC. The typed letter has only two forwarding authorities and no placeholder for the President's signature. However, this second letter does not bear any further sign of use in correspondence, and was possibly rejected on these very grounds. The letter through the President was subsequently communicated among various institute offices. The committee, however, makes it a point to mention the content of second letter due to the discussion held in item 1 on the role of 'Faculty Advisors'.

Dec 10, 2014: DOSA forwards the letter to DORA for release of additional funds citing insufficient balance in the Students General Activities Account.

Dec 23, 2014: DORA forwards the letter to Director suggesting the amount be drawn from Gymkhana Corpus (upto a maximum of INR 2 Lakh). The suggestion was approved on the same day by the Director.

This is the first mention of Gymkhana Corpus in the conversation. Since the first generic letter of intent and budget proposal, there is no official record of President's involvement in the correspondence between Deans and Director.

Jan 6, 2015: Minutes of Meeting held in Office of DOSA have following points (taken verbatim from the original document):

a. Alumni of Batch of 1988 has donated Rs. 245000/- for Vivekananda Samiti to DORA.

b. DORA has transferred the complete amount to Students' Gymkhana Corpus account under DOSA.

c. Vivekananda Samiti has not spent any money for any sort of activity from this fund.

d. A committee has been formed to recommend the utilisation of this fund for the upcoming VYLC-2015 activity. Such committee exists for Prayas also.

e. The committee consists of Head, Presidential Council, DOSA and Coordinator, Vivekananda Samiti.

This is accompanied by a letter seeking an advance sanction of INR 70,000 from the allocated budget head. Mr. Gautam Pratap Singh, then Head, Presidential Council had earlier claimed:

A. no income to Gymkhana Corpus account in recent years (Statement to Vox Populi); and

B. unawareness of the Senate of these withdrawals,

which are both in contradicted by the minutes of said meeting. It should be noted that the copy presented by VS is from before the document was signed by the stakeholders, namely, Coordinator VS, President Gymkhana and ADSA.

Subsequently, multiple bills amounting to INR 1,36,527 were cleared, mostly on Mar 26, 2015 and marked 'Contingency'. This amount is subset of the total sum withdrawn. The President, having independently checked the transactions, reported that the remaining bills are in order as well. The issue having been redressed, the committee did not pursue locating the remaining bills.

6. VS was allegedly involved in direct sale of sweatshirts and mugs during VYLC 2015, without prior approval from President or the Finance Convener. The standing instructions on Gymkhana finances dictate that all Gymkhana transactions are to take place through receipts accountable to DOSA Office. Proper contracts must be drawn with the artists or external parties concerned prior to any program.

On Jan 2, 2015, VS coordinator Mr. Raghunandan B. Iyer wrote to DOSA seeking permission to set up merchandise stall to sell sweatshirts, in a letter dated Jan 2, 2015. Permission was granted by ADSA to set up a stall in auditorium foyer, and communicated to relevant offices over the next few days, to allow security clearance to the vendor to set up

shop. Mr. Ashwani Kumar, Festival Coordinator, VYLC 2015 was point of contact for these discussions. The letter of permission mentioned sale of sweatshirts by the vendor in auditorium foyer, with no mention of mugs. VS claims that permission for sale of mugs was granted after discussion in the meeting itself.

A mail was subsequently sent out to the campus community selling Sweatshirts and Mugs for INR 550 and 200 a piece respectively. The mail declared the merchandise could be collected from Mr. Ashwani Kumar's hall of residence, with the option to place an order or purchase the goodies directly, indicating possibility of cash transactions. When the President later enquired about the income from sales, VS said that they had not made sale of sweatshirts and hence there was no question of receipts.

When questioned on the matter by the FFC, coordinator, VS gave the following reply(paraphrased): *Approximately 30 sweatshirts were bought from the 3rd party seller and gifted/distributed among performers, speakers and organizing team. Mugs were used for prizes to school children and as mementos. This was paid for out of the VYLC budget. The sales were done directly by the seller, as was permitted by DOSA. The student selling it at his room was doing so on behalf of the seller and hence, any receipts, if present, were of the seller, and not IITK.*

The committee contacted Mr. Ashwani Kumar but could not have an insightful discussion, Mr. Kumar having graduated after the previous academic year. On the matter of merchandised purchased as memorabilia, the bills drawn from Gymkhana Corpus (refer item 5) bear INR 33,180, an amount roughly equivalent to 30-35 sweatshirts and 70-80 mugs. However, a volunteer with VYLC reported having purchased said memorabilia which was being sold not by third party, but members of the campus community itself.

The committee could not find verifiable threads to track the transaction which may have taken place in Mr. Ashwani Kumar's presence, due to lack of bills and unavailability of the person in question.