

## OCCUPY UGC: LETS RECOGNZE OUR LIMITS TO MOVE BEYOND THEM

The Occupy UGC movement has been going on for a while now. It has gone through many stages, many ups and downs. As the movement is about to move into a new phase, it is a good time to propose future directions which we can take reflecting on the limits that our movement has faced so far.

- Very early in the movement, all of us became part of it under the slogan “Paanch se aath, aath se baara!! Yeh hai hak hamara”. There has been unanimous acceptance so far to demand not just a reinstatement of the non-net fellowship but an increase in it as well. While several individuals and groups questioned the limits put on the fellowships (8,000, 12,000) few if any questioned this segmentation. It has been taken for granted that MPhil students and PhD students should get different amounts. **Why is our movement is accepting the hierarchy in the value chain set in place between M.phil and Phd researchers by the State?** We need to not only question the amount of fellowship, rather wage for our research, but also break this segmentation!
- **The movement asks us all to unite against the attacks of the “Modi Sarkar” and WTO to stop education from being sold, to stop its commodification. But it refuses to address the differences between us, the inequalities between us.** Some MPhil scholars in AUD said, “JNU researchers may find that 8000 Rs a month is enough for them but that is because they have subsidized hostels, subsidized food and a pittance of a tuition fee. We have to pay 20,000-25,000 Rs as fee and we don’t get cheap hostels or cheap food”.
- We propose Living Wage for all because it opens up precisely these differences. Not just between M.phil and Phd researchers but segmentation within these researchers as well. The **differences between students** themselves, due to caste, gender and being a religious minority, show how capital has ascribed an inferior position in the value-chain for academic production onto students belonging to such identities (or segments) within the universities. We need to highlight the differences that these segmentations entail. **University production makes the same demands of a woman, a dalit and a muslim, and ignores the different material and social conditions under which they labour** (different from the “average student”). The dalit student has to work harder to make the same grades, for she does not have the ‘cultural capital’ that upper caste students enjoy (due to the several generations with education behind them). The woman has to work relentlessly without caring for the discomfort that her monthly menstruation puts her through. The muslim has to make do with the whatever little facilities the state makes available to them in their ghettoized neighborhoods. This student will also have more limited options for jobs when the “fellowship” disappears.
- In this context, the practice of general body meeting everybody can speak is a good step. It came as a result of a lot of debate within the movement. Some voices wanted to push for a coordination committee comprising of representatives from universities, student unions and other such independent student groups. **But let us not delude ourselves, and confuse the general body meeting with a GENERAL ASSEMBLY.** Yes, everyone can speak but the course of the movement is already decided. It is to help researchers gain a higher fellowship! The topics of discussion, whether in the coordination committee or the general body meeting, have often ended up being limited to what kind of event to create so as to get more numbers and sustain the occupation. Whether to Occupy MHRD or to Occupy UGC, whether to break one barricade or two!
- Where and when will we, the protesting researchers and students, address the segmentations created by caste, gender, being a Muslim in an increasingly right wing Hindu dominated space, or in fact, asserting one’s Hindu identity in a class dominated by a liberal *all-same façade*? **To address these segmentations among workers is the only real way to**

counter the fascist moment of capital. These are some reasons why it is important to move out of this cycle of police action, detainment, cultural events, etc. and to try and expand our struggles and address the segmentations between us!!

- The point is not just to be democratic and inclusive towards these minorities but to destroy these segmentations. ‘Standard stipends for all’ is already not sufficient and it can’t fulfill the specific needs of all these segments. What does it mean to have a consensus about the amount of fellowship we should demand (8000 or 12000), given that we are segmented and all have different basic needs? Does a consensus not reproduce these segmentations and benefit only the upper segments, the better students? Living Wage breaks them as it forces Capital to pay for each and everyone’s needs!
- ‘Education is not for sale’ has been the slogan of our movement. We are against the commodification of higher education because it means that access to it will be dictated by one’s income. But it also means that the production of education will not be for us, for our valorization but for the valorization of capital. **We who produce it will be alienated from it because we will be made to work so that universities and publishing houses make profits out of our labours!**
- But should we defend the university as it has been till now? Even now it is a fact that it is our work as researchers through which the university gets its grants and publishing houses their profits. Aren’t we already alienated from our work in the university? **Don’t we already do many of our assignments and research papers just to get our degrees and to satisfy the demands of the university!?** Even when we are genuinely interested in our work how are we give it proper attention when the university insists that we take care of all our re-production (rent, food, travel, medical expenses) on just 5000 or 8000 Rs. Or, when it limits the satisfaction of our own desire for work and research through its own rules, regulations and mode of operations that is not equal for all!
- We need to ask whether we want to defend the university or to wrest it from the control of capitalism! We must also keep in mind that to actually rescue it from the clutches of capitalism we will have to first admit that it is a part of it already and that we are workers in it. To fight this aggressive process of the commodification of education we need to admit that education is a commodity we produce as workers! Those who deny this, and react only to this end up only protecting their earlier privileges which are now under attack.
- We need to stop thinking of a general assembly as merely a decision making body for a movement where everyone can speak. We must turn this “event-planning” body into dialogue in which the antagonisms between different segments are addressed so as to move beyond the segmentation itself. We should not take these divisions-Mphil and Phd students, or students and teachers, or academics and technical students, or even open learning students - in the university for granted, these divisions are precisely what we need to fight against. **The movement cannot be called UNITED until and unless each and every segment has its own demands, i.e. autonomous to the other segments, whom they are generally pitted against in the standardized forms of academic worth ascribed onto different universities and different students working in them! We need to turn this defensive situation into an attack –**

**Let the university shut down**

**Let’s all strike**

**Let’s all get what we want!**

**A decent living wage for all!**

For further discussions, contact: [universitymajdoor@gmail.com](mailto:universitymajdoor@gmail.com); [zerohistory.jnu@gmail.com](mailto:zerohistory.jnu@gmail.com)