

**Position Paper 1 AIPSN Higher Education Desk**

**Autocratic, Unconstitutional and Anti-people Moves towards NTA  
and CUET in Indian Higher Education**

India lives in diversity and so its education system. Historically there exists huge diversity among the Indian states in terms of their location, society, culture, languages and education system. As a result, students from state to state severely lack in equity from various perspectives and cannot be uniformly competitive. So, the recent introduction of the National Testing Agency (NTA) in higher education for conducting Common University Entrance Test (CUET) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at the UG and PG level is against this Indian spirit of diversity. Any such 'One India' move in higher education before attempting equity by providing a level playing field to the students from backward regions seems to be autocratic in nature. This is because; education (including higher education) still belongs to the concurrent list and a joint policy matter to both the Centre and States (Seventh Schedule of the Constitution: 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of 1976). But there is a serious allegation that the Centre has remarkably ignored the stake of her federal states in framing and implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. Even, the education policy bill has been passed in the parliament during the Covid 19 pandemic period by not allowing any debate and discussion. So, it's a clear violation of the constitutional provisions in educational development.

The higher education regulator, the University Grants Commission has introduced the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) from this current academic session for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the central universities. The National Testing Agency (NTA) has been given the entire responsibility of the further processes and conducting of CUET. In India, there are 1,027 universities altogether consisting of 54 central universities, 444 state universities, 126 deemed-to-be universities and 403 private universities. Out of 54 central universities, 45 have already entered into the CUET system. The test is in line with the New Education Policy which envisages the need for an entrance examination for admission to universities and expected to be extended for other universities of the country in a phase manner. However, this centralized admission process is not conducive for the desired expansion of higher

education in India, rather may stand as obstacle owing to its autocratic and anti-people nature on several counts.

### **A hasty implementation of the NEP 2020 and CUET**

As pointed out that education is still in the concurrent list but the states were not duly consulted in framing and implementation of the present National Education Policy. Similarly, no discussion with the states took place for introduction of CUET as this is introduced in the central universities at the first phase. However, the stakeholders of CUET belong to the states with varied academic backgrounds. The experts are of the view that the students should have been given scope to understand and become familiar with the modalities and format of the test. Owing to the recent pandemic, the students were already under stress due to online classes, changes in the exam schedule, paper pattern, assessment plan, etc. Therefore, the new entrance test, CUET has just added extra burden on them. Besides, unpreparedness and contradiction from the central implementing authorities also adding trouble to the higher education system. The UGC is yet to clearly notify whether the CUET will replace all available tests in Central Universities for different courses. The admission process is getting delayed like anything. Only the test for UG level got conducted in August, 2022 but no one knows when the PG admission will take place. Actually, the bottlenecks of the new policy implementation were not a priori taken into consideration by the government.

### **Limited resources and infrastructure**

Learning has to be local and contextual because 75-80 per cent of the people live and work in their own state where they get education from. There are serious shortage of faculties and technicians in vast majority of the backward states. Particularly, constraints related to laboratories, computers and internet facilities put greater obstacles before the students of the backward and rural regions. Thus, any test of elimination or selection has to be local. What a student learns in Nagaland may not be the same as the one that learns in Karnataka. The focus of the government should be on creating more seats and more opportunities in higher education rather than utilising limited resources on creating another burden of a test, pro-urban in nature. At this present state of educational system when public funding to even central universities is getting meager day by day, it was not surprising that even some of the central universities in

Northeast failed to organize NTA-CUET test in their own centre during the recent UG admission test. It is because, to be a NTA test centre, the institution must be in a position to spare 300 desktop computers with dedicated internet facilities. Some central universities have failed to fulfill that criterion. So, let's think about the situation of managing the test centres where there are crores of applications for UG courses. NEP, NTA and CUET are the vivid examples which clearly exemplify how the present central government is in a passion to rule but not to facilitate. Besides, any entrance examination like CUET based on the NCERT syllabus will not provide an equal opportunity to all the students who have studied in varied State Board syllabus across the country.

### **CUET is a pro-urban and pro-rich concept**

Once a competitive examination or admission process is centralized for a big country like India having huge regional disparity, the elite classes mainly from the urban centres get a clear upper hand by grabbing the opportunity. It is because they can afford expensive coaching, quality teachers; whereas a poor student from rural areas cannot afford these. So, a rich student can get good score, however, a poor candidate cannot compete and lose out. The absence of the level playing field will actually augment the rural-urban gap in higher education further. Even, the practical problems related to this process of centralization are more serious. For example, *Kokborok*, a language of the Tripuri community of Tripura is only taught at the PG level in Tripura University (A Central University). So, only the backward tribal students from Tripura will study the subject at Tripura University. But the National Testing Agency has fixed the CUET centre for this subject outside the Northeast. Now, there is a big question that how the poor Tribal students from Tripura will attend the entrance test and their higher education in *Kokborok*. For the reason of having minimum required infrastructure, the NTA is fixing the test centres in such locations and even private institutes which are really expensive and troublesome to the students from interior and backward regions. Now, the irony is that the rich students getting subsidised education will take off abroad and the marginalised groups will remain deprived. This is improper utilization of national resources.

### **Promotion of coaching centre and private institute**

As pointed out earlier that the Centre has introduced the CUET through NTA in a hasty manner without proper planning and providing necessary guidelines to the agency and the stakeholders. As a result, the parents and students became compelled to rush to the private coaching industry as the competition is so fierce that every single score matters. On the other hand, many of the students from backward regions will get deprived of higher education due to this centralized process and a section of them who can afford will indeed join the mushrooming private higher educational instruction in the country after the Modi government came into power. In fact, the NEP 2020 is also largely in support to reduce or stop funding public higher educational institutions and promoting the private ventures in higher education rampantly. The CUET is supposed to address – “one nation, one test” may sound good on paper but very tough to get managed for the vulnerable rural sections of the society. Simply, another centralized examination for a vast country like India is just another billion dollars earning for the government and coaching industry at the expenses of the poor families having aspirant and qualified students.

Finally, an entrance test no matter how much objectivity it has can never be a magic solution to our educational woes. Judging quality, particularly for higher education and research is multifaceted in nature. A single test like CUET based on single benchmark cannot serve as a good measuring rod. Rather, it actually demeans the autonomy of the higher educational institutions in selecting quality students as per their choice and practice. Introduction of CUET is an attempt of the Union government to centralize higher education. An NCERT syllabus-based entrance examination would place a vast majority marginalised but deserving section of students from other state boards in a disadvantageous position in securing admission to Central Universities. Above all, NEP 2020 led CUET violates the constitutional rights of states, and is against federalism. The pattern of the paper could also put significant pressure on students, and compel them to take up subjects that do not have relevance to them. For instance, sections 1A and 1B of CUET, which test language efficiency, require students to choose up to three languages across the two sections (out of 13 languages for 1A, and out of 20 for 1B). But it is not clear why should passing an exam in that other language be mandatory for admission to any particular course. The only thing these requirements will do is denying opportunities and

fundamental rights to Indians, especially from the working class. The concept of 'One India' may be good for telecommunication but can never be suitable to higher education and research where depth and diversity are the *sinequanone*.