



Anti-NEET Movement in Tamil Nadu

This editorial is based on “[The anti-NEET movement in Tamil Nadu is misguided](#)” which was published in The Livemint on 11/08/2023. It talks about the Anti NEET movement in Tamil Nadu and issues associated with NEET.

For Prelims: [National Eligibility and Entrance Test \(NEET\)](#), Powers of Centre and State, Concurrent list

For Mains: Consequences of States breaking Central Law, Challenges in Indian Education system.

Recently, the Tamil Nadu government passed Tamil Nadu Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill, 2021 to exempt the state from [National Eligibility and Entrance Test \(NEET\)](#), but the Tamil Nadu [Governor](#) has refused to give his assent to it. This has created a **deadlock between the state and the Centre** and raised serious concerns about the future of medical education and health services in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu has opposed the NEET since it was made compulsory in 2017. The exam is seen as **a threat to the state’s autonomy, healthcare system, social justice, and educational quality**. In this context, the advantages and disadvantages of NEET need to be discussed in detail.

What is the National Eligibility and Entrance Test (NEET)?

- The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET), formerly the All-India Pre-Medical Test (AIPMT), is the qualifying test for MBBS and BDS programmes in Indian medical and dental colleges.
- It was introduced in 2013 by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and is now conducted by the [National Testing Agency \(NTA\)](#).

What are the Advantages of NEET Exam?

- **Single Entrance Test:** NEET exam is a single entrance test for admission to medical and dental courses in India. It replaces the multiple state-level and private exams that were conducted before. This saves the time, money and effort of the students and the colleges. The students do not have to apply for multiple exams and pay multiple fees. The colleges do not have to conduct separate exams and counselling sessions.
- **Fairness and Transparency:** NEET reduces the possibility of corruption, malpractice and leakage of question papers that were prevalent in some state-based and independent exams. It also eliminates the need for donations or capitation fees for securing seats in private colleges. Admission is based on the merit and rank of the students in NEET exam.

- **Equal Opportunity:** NEET exam provides equal opportunity for all the students across the country. It does not affect the reservation policies of the states or the central government. The states can apply their own reservation system based on the merit list prepared by NTA. The students can also apply for admission under the state quota or all India quota based on their preference and eligibility. The students from rural or remote areas can also compete with the students from urban or metropolitan areas on an equal footing.
- **Language Options:** NEET exam is conducted in **13 languages**, including English, Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. This gives the students the option to choose their preferred language of examination. It also helps them to overcome the language barrier and perform better.

What are the Issues Associated with NEET Exam?

- **High Risk Factor:** NEET exam is a highly competitive exam with lakhs of students appearing every year. The students have **only one chance to clear the exam in a year** and secure a seat in their desired college. If they fail to do so, they have to wait for another year or opt for other courses. This can cause stress, anxiety and depression among the students who have high expectations of themselves and their parents.
- **CBSE Syllabus:** NEET exam is based on the CBSE syllabus, which may not be suitable for all the students. The students who have studied under **different state boards may find it difficult to cope with the syllabus and the level of difficulty of the exam.**
- **Cost Factor:** NEET exam is not cost friendly for all the students. The exam fee is Rs 1500 for general category candidates and Rs 800 for reserved category candidates. Apart from that, the students have to bear other expenses such as coaching fees, study materials, travel expenses, etc. These costs may be unaffordable for some students from poor or rural backgrounds. They may have to compromise on their quality of education or drop out of their dream courses due to financial constraints.
- **Language Barrier:** As NEET is conducted only in 13 languages, some students may face difficulty in understanding the questions or expressing their answers in a language that is not their mother tongue or medium of instruction. This can affect their comprehension and accuracy.
- **Social and Economic Factors:** Some students may face challenges due to their social and economic background, such as lack of access to quality education, coaching, resources, or guidance. These factors can hamper their preparation and performance in NEET.

Why does Tamil Nadu Oppose NEET Entrance?

- **Violation of Federalism:** NEET has also dismantled the **state's in-service quota for medical graduates in the government sector**, which, according to critics, has undermined quality healthcare.
 - The state has its **own admission system based on the marks obtained in the Class 12 board exams**, which is considered more inclusive and equitable than NEET.
 - NEET, on the other hand, is imposed by the Centre without consulting the state governments and disregards the diversity and needs of different regions.
- **Denies Opportunities to Disadvantaged Students:**
 - According to A.K. Rajan committee (appointed by the Tamil Nadu Government In 2021, to study the impact of NEET on medical admissions in Tamil Nadu), NEET **harms the rights and interests of poor and disadvantaged students who want to become doctors.**
 - The Committee's report concluded that the NEET disproportionately **benefited repeaters (71% in 2021) and coached students (99% in 2020)** and discriminated against first-time applicants.
- **Promoting Coaching Culture:** The report condemned the NEET as **promoting a coaching culture rather than learning**, and as perpetrating cultural, regional, linguistic, and socio-economic biases that go against disadvantaged groups.
 - It was alleged **to favour CBSE students who attend coaching classes**, study in private English-medium schools and are from affluent urban backgrounds.
- **Student Suicides:** NEET has also been linked to **several cases of student suicides in Tamil Nadu**, which have sparked outrage and protests across the state. Many students who have performed well in their board exams or have a passion for medicine have lost hope and confidence after failing to clear NEET.

What is the Recent Plea to Supreme Court Related to NEET Exam?

- The Tamil Nadu government in February 2023, moved the [Supreme Court](#) challenging the constitutional validity of NEET, **alleging NEET violates the principle of federalism**, which is part of the [Basic Structure of Constitution](#).
- The Tamil Nadu government also claimed that NEET takes away the autonomy of states to make decisions regarding education.
- The petition is filed under **Article 131 of the Constitution**, which allows the Supreme Court to adjudicate **disputes between the Centre and state/s**.
- The plea alleged that NEET violates **right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution** as it “discriminates against students from rural areas and state boards”.
- The state said NEET is modelled on CBSE/NCERT syllabus, which puts rural students at a loss.
 - The state alleged that students from rural parts lack economic resources to afford coaching classes which puts them at a greater disadvantage despite good scores in their state boards.
- The Tamil Nadu government **sought a declaration from the Supreme Court to hold Section 14 of the National Medical Commission Act, 2019** prescribing NEET as “**ultra vires**” the **Constitution on multiple grounds**.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Moving education to the State List:** Education can be shifted from the Concurrent List to the State List of the Constitution, which would give more autonomy and flexibility to the states to decide their own admission policies and criteria.
 - This would also enable the states to design their education system according to their regional needs and aspirations and avoid conflicts with the Centre over common entrance tests like NEET.
- **Balancing equity and quality:** A possible solution could be to **devise a more inclusive and holistic admission process that considers both NEET scores and Class XII marks**, as well as other factors such as aptitude, socio-economic status, regional diversity, and rural service. This would ensure that merit and social justice are not compromised, and that students from different backgrounds have equal opportunities to pursue their dream of becoming doctors.
- Reservation for under-represented communities, a constitutionally enshrined goal, must be protected at all costs.

Drishti Mains Question:

How does the Anti NEET protest of Tamil Nadu affect Centre-state relations and equity in medical education?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3, 4 and 5 only
(c) 1, 2 and 5 only

(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**

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