

Fee Hike Protest in JNU

Why in news?

Fee hike announced by Jawaharlal Nehru University has led to massive protests in recent weeks.

What are the mismanagement issues in JNU?

- In 2017-18, the total expenditure on JNU was Rs 556 crore, seeing over 8,000 students through one academic year, over a 1,000 research articles published in reputed journals, 1,086 special lectures being open to the public, and 4,594 MPhil and PhD dissertations being submitted.
- Contrast this with the Rs 1,313 crore spent on mere publicity of the central government and its schemes, The imbalance in priorities are clear.
- In JNU, some 2,500 students with fellowships pay Rs 7,500 (Rs 22.5 crore per annum) per month as housing allowance to the university.
- In the last two years, Mphil/PhD (especially reserved) seats have been left vacant, despite the Delhi High Court castigating JNU for causing a national waste of resources.
- The struggle against seat cuts now joins the struggle against fee hike to make the same point over and over again, the destruction of the inclusive and representational higher education for all by the ruling government.

How students are being affected by this?

- Students are speaking out against the eclipse of equitable access to publicly funded education and attempts to place education in the marketplace rather than at the disposal of the social good
- According to the CAG Report of February 2019, Rs 94,036 crore of the secondary and higher education cess and Rs 7,298 crore of the research and development cess remained unutilized.
- The fee hike in JNU, if implemented, will lead to over 40 per cent of students being completely abandoned by the education system, and render JNU as one of the most expensive public universities in the country

What is the attitude of the government in this regard?

- University students and faculty speaking up for publicly-funded higher

education have been the object of intense criticism in sections of the media and the general public countless times in the past few years.

- They refuse to be shamed into submitting to education policies that exclude large sections of the population to make way for the elite few.
- The attempt to construct stereotypes of students in the public sphere as lazy, good-for-nothings who want to survive on the taxpayer's money is a clever sleight of hand by the ruling party and its offspring.
- Students of research universities like JNU are repeatedly castigated, supposedly by a "taxpaying public" for not earning their own living and paying fees.
- The argument is that money spent on their education is "a waste".
- It helps confuse the true nature of education policies by this government.

How National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 concerns students?

- A deeper reflection of imbalance in the higher education system is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2019, which is really what students in JNU and across campuses are fighting against.
- This policy is nothing more than a deliberately planned eclipse of equitable access to publicly funded education.
- The setting up of the Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA) by government to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) requires that institutions of higher education function not on grants, but on loans.
- These loans are to be recovered through fee hikes and other "internal resource generation", a pseudonym for placing education in the marketplace rather than at the disposal of the social good.
- The vision and the methods of the NEP 2019, which is built on the fundamentals of the HEFA, have nothing to do with universal humanistic values that underlie education policies in many countries where human rights, bridging social, economic, and regional chasms are the objectives of education at all levels.
- The NEP 2019, however, has little beyond the so-called "Fourth Industrial Revolution" as the driving impetus, in which, the individual is seen as mere kindling in the fire of economic activity.
- It sees no other function to education other than producing cheap labour that toils away on the lowest rung of the labour ladder.
- It renders complete the shift from education as a right to education as a commodity.
- In the real world, in real-time, this policy casts a highly porous net that will benefit but a small section of the population that can buy education from private profiteers, rendering even basic education an unaffordable

luxury.

What lies ahead?

- Policymakers in India must note a fact that, in many nations university education is free, even though their average per capita income is far higher than in India.
- Moreover, the Constitution of India requires that education policy provide for equitable access to publicly funded education.
- In the absence of publicly funded education, parents and students will be driven in the direction of education loans and a lifetime of indebtedness.
- This puts education out of the reach of even the middle classes.
- Thus, government should make policies for affordable education instead of making students moving between indebtedness and illiteracy.

Source: Indian Express

