



Reforms in Defence Recruitment

This editorial is based on [“It is the conditioning of the Agniveer that merits attention”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 23/02/2024. The article highlights the importance of assessing the challenges involved in implementing the Agnipath Scheme and proposes reforms to address them.

For Prelims: [Agnipath Scheme](#), [Israel Defense Forces \(IDF\)](#), [Russia-Ukraine Conflict](#), [Three services - Army, Navy and Airforce](#)

For Mains: Significance of Agnipath Scheme, Challenges in Implementation

The [Agnipath scheme](#), as it is known, was announced on June 14, 2022, and is in force with the initial batch of Agniveers, as these young men and women are called, already inducted in armed forces units after completion of their recruit training.

The scheme has drawn criticism, especially from the veteran community, citing several grounds. **The veterans have expressed their disapproval mainly due to the sense of belonging that they continue to nurture towards the organisation that they served in.**

What is the Agnipath Scheme?

▪ About:

- It allows patriotic and motivated youth to serve in the Armed Forces for a period of four years. The youth joining the army will be called **Agniveer**.
- Under the new scheme, around 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers will be recruited annually, and most will leave the service in just four years.
- However, after four years, only 25% of the batch will be recruited back into their respective services, for a period of 15 years.

▪ Eligibility Criteria:

- It is only for personnel below officer ranks (those who do not join the forces as commissioned officers).
 - Commissioned officers hold an exclusive rank in the Indian armed forces. They often hold a commission under the president's sovereign power and are officially instructed to protect the country.
- Aspirants between the ages of 17.5 years and 23 years are eligible to apply.

▪ Objectives:

- It is expected to bring down the average age profile of the Indian Armed Forces by about 4 to 5 years.
- The scheme envisions that the average age in the forces is 32 years today, which will go down to 26 in six to seven years.

PAY & BENEFITS: WHAT THE AGNIVEERS GET

■ In Hand (70%)

■ Contribution to Seva Nidhi (30%)*

Similar contribution to corpus fund by Government of India**



All figures in ₹ (Monthly Contribution)

Total contribution to Seva Nidhi after 4 yrs
10.04 Lakh
(₹ 5.02 Lakh* + ₹ 5.02 Lakh**)

Exit After 4 Years

₹11.71 Lakh as SevaNidhi Package
(Including interest accumulated on the above amount as per the applicable rates)

What are the Various Concerns Being Raised Regarding the Agnipath Scheme?

In order to seamlessly incorporate the Agniveers into the milieu of military units, it is important that the respective unit commanders are clear about the challenges ahead. These challenges are beyond the individual capacities of the Agniveers, in which they are likely to excel for the sake of being retained. The challenges are more intangible in nature and warrant the attention of the leaders.

▪ Adverse Effect on Professional Capabilities:

- It starts with the very high turnover of young soldiers, the increase in training capacities and infrastructure and the augmentation of the administrative setup for greater recruitment, release, and retention of soldiers.

▪ Degradation of Operational Capability:

- An armed force boasting of a poor **teeth-to-tail ratio (T3R)** is further increasing the tail. The Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy employ their airmen and sailors in very specialised roles, which require technical skills, and a high degree of training and experience.
 - As the short-term contractual soldier model (the Agniveer scheme) will take some years to fully implement at an organisational level, the scheme runs the risk of exacerbating T3R further.

Note

- The Tooth-to-Tail Ratio (T3R) is a concept used in military strategy and planning to describe the ratio of **combat forces (the "tooth")** to support **personnel (the "tail")**.

- The "tooth" represents the frontline fighting forces, including infantry, combat pilots, and combat vehicles, while the "tail" includes support elements such as logistics, administration, and medical units.
- **A high T3R indicates a larger proportion of support personnel** compared to combat forces, which can be indicative of a **well-supported and sustainable military operation**.
- **Class-Based Recruitment Replaced with All-India All-Class Recruitment:**
 - Such a drastic shift in pattern bodes ill for the armed forces as it will strike at the core of the organisational management, leadership structures and operating philosophy of the Indian Army.
 - Even though the soldiers in the Indian Army are professionally trained, they also draw their motivation from their social identity where each soldier cares for his reputation among the peers in his caste group or his village or his social setting.
- **Fomenting Trust and Cooperation Deficit:**
 - There will be major problems in training, integrating and deploying soldiers with different levels of experience and motivations. The criterion of identifying the 25% short-term contracted soldiers to be retained could result in unhealthy competition.
 - An organisation which depends on trust, camaraderie and esprit de corps could end up grappling with rivalries and jealousies amongst winners and losers, especially in their final year of contract.
- **Doing Away With State-Wise Quota:**
 - The Agnipath scheme also does away with the idea of a State-wise quota for recruitment into the Army, based on the Recruitable Male Population of that State which was implemented from 1966.
 - This quota prevented an imbalanced army, which was dominated by any one State, linguistic community or ethnicity, as it happened in the case of Pakistan with its province of Punjab.
 - Academic research shows that the high level of ethnic imbalance has been associated with severe problems of democracy and an increased likelihood of civil war, a worrying scenario for today's India where federalism is being severely tested by the ruling party's ideology.
- **Lack of Adequate Motivational Aspects:**
 - In India, the Indian Army has so far provided salary, uniform and prestige, an inheritance of the British who took care of the living conditions, facilities for the soldiers' families, and post-retirement benefits and rewards, such as grants of land.
 - A short-term contractual soldier, without earning pension, will be seen as doing jobs after his military service that are not seen to be commensurate in status and prestige with the profession of honour. It will reduce the motivation of those joining on short-term contracts.
- **Acute Mismatch Between Requirement and Recruitment:**
 - The three services currently face a shortfall of approximately 1,55,000 personnel, with the Army having the highest number of vacancies at 1,36,000. More than 90% of these are of non-officer combat ranks that the Agnipath scheme aims to fill. In such a situation, letting go of 75% of the trained recruits after four years of service would be a wasteful expenditure.
- **Worsening Geopolitical Scenario:**
 - The breakdown of "peace and tranquillity" at the borders with China means India now needs higher force levels to keep a check on China, Pakistan, and insurgents in Kashmir.
 - This mismatch is evident because of the reorientation of some of the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) units, previously involved in counterinsurgency operations, toward the China front.
 - Additionally, it cannot overlook emerging security challenges, such as the current Manipur crisis, where the army serves as the go-to force for managing the situation.
- **Inadequate Opportunities for Ex-Agniveers:**
 - To what extent will the economy absorb or welcome the ex-Agniveer will depend upon their skill-set and the training they receive.
 - Especially when meaningful employment opportunities in significant or adequate numbers still elude an ever-increasing number of graduates. But as Agnipath concerns national defence and security, it poses significant challenges.

What are the Different Reforms Required in the Recruitment Process?

- **Raising Age Limit and Permanent Retention Quota:**
 - By raising the age limit and permanent retention quota to 50%, the government can attract committed and skilled individuals, ensure the armed forces' operational readiness and achieve a balanced mix of youthful enthusiasm and experience.
 - These modifications will be a welcome course correction by the government to ensure that the armed forces can effectively downsize and modernise over time without compromising their overall operational readiness.
- **Psychological Assimilation into the Milieu of Military Units:**
 - A military unit is eventually expected to deliver when it is in combat. Preparations for the desired outcomes in the face of an adversary have to go on relentlessly and do not wait for testing combat situations.
 - Similarly, the unit commanders will have to focus on the psychological assimilation of the Agniveers into the unit fabric and ensure that they are moulded into becoming effective team players.
- **Fostering Military Unit Cohesion:**
 - Unit pride flows out of unit cohesion, which is a hallmark of an excellent military unit which, in turn, is contingent on the human element of the individual soldier.
 - The basis for soldier discipline and, thereby, his motivation and psychology as a team player is always about his/her individual conscience and character. It is this character that harmonises relationships and builds up unit camaraderie which gives a soldier strength in the battlefield.
- **Recognising Human Element and Conventional Methods of Combat:**
 - The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict or, maybe, setbacks by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Israel-Hamas conflict, have vindicated the point that the human element and conventional methods of combat shall outlive modern technology, which can only complement the age-old methods and tactics.
 - The fact that the Agniveers possess a better technical threshold should not make the leaders complacent. The said attributes will be futile unless these men and women are trained to live a life of camaraderie.
- **Value Based Nurturing and Training of Agniveers:**
 - The value-based nurturing, based on unit ethos, needs to commence immediately and the onus of planning and executing this rests on the unit leadership. Irrespective of technological advancements in the realm of warfare, the character of a soldier to stand by his flanking mate can never be undermined.
- **Ingraining Competitive Collaboration:**
 - On the issue of competition for retention versus rejection, the Agniveers would try to outdo each other. But a tendency of one-upmanship amongst the Agniveers would go contrary to the goal of developing unified force.
 - The onerous challenge would be to arrest any germination of an undesired personality trait among the lot given that 25% of the Agniveers will stay back. If not conditioned, this could evolve into something serious and affect the health of the unit in the long run.
- **Incorporating Psychology Test:**
 - The government should consider introducing a test of 'psychology' as part of the recruitment process, in line with the methodology used in the selection of officers in the military.
 - This will help the unit commander manage the human resources available and facilitate the better grooming and assessment of Agniveers.
- **Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide:**
 - Military has remained that institution that is revered and venerated for the role of national security it plays. The most important aspect and impact of the start of recruitment of Agniveers, is that forces will take a small step to become a citizen's army. Agnipath should facilitate youth's exposure and understanding of the military, thus minimising the military-civilian divide.
- **As Futuristic Combat Ready Force:**
 - The Ukraine war has proved the importance of trained civilians as part of the defence system. Agnipath has the potential to give India a futuristic combat-ready force which can

- be available in war and peace time, especially situations such as disaster relief and rescue.
- There even is potential for them to be a resistance force during terror attacks. So, it should be appreciated that after they get trained in the armed forces, the discharged Agniveers can be incorporated as potential reserve youth army among civilians.

Conclusion

The introduction of the Agnipath scheme marks a significant reform in India's defence policy, altering the recruitment process for the armed forces. While the scheme has garnered attention and sparked debates, its initial implementation has shown promising indicators regarding the motivation, intelligence, and physical standards of the recruited Agniveers. The human element remains paramount in military operations, surpassing the significance of technological advancements. Therefore, leaders must prioritise the character development and psychological well-being of Agniveers, ensuring they align with the ethos of unit pride and cohesion.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the significance and challenges of the Agnipath Scheme introduced by the Indian government for recruitment in the armed forces. What measures can ensure its success?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Department of Border Management is a Department of which one of the following Union Ministries? (2008)

- (a) Ministry of Defence
- (b) Ministry of Home Affairs
- (c) Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways
- (d) Ministry of Environment and Forests

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q1: Analyse the multidimensional challenges posed by external state and non-state actors, to the internal security of India. Also discuss measures required to be taken to combat these threats. **(2021)**

Q2: Analyse internal security threats and transborder crimes along Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan borders including Line of Control (LoC). Also discuss the role played by various security forces in this regard. **(2020)**

Q3: Border management is a complex task due to difficult terrain and hostile relations with some countries. Elucidate the challenges and strategies for effective border management. **(2016)**