



Future of Agniveers

This editorial is based on [“Don’t Cry for Agniveers”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 25/06/2022. It talks about the possible opportunities which will be made available to the Agniveers after 4 years of service in the armed forces.

For Prelims: Agnipath Scheme, Armed Forces, Defence Sector Reforms

For Mains: Significance of Agnipath, Impact on Agniveers and Society, Challenges of Implementation

We live in times where the nature of combat has transformed beyond recognition. India faces threats not just from land, water and the sky but also from [cybertech](#), the [internet of military things](#) and [artificial intelligence](#).

There is, therefore, a need for a better equipped and more prepared military. To fulfill the need of young and well equipped [armed forces](#), the government came up with the [Agnipath Scheme](#).

Soon, the armed forces will begin the all-important task of recruiting India’s Agniveers, who have been envisaged as the backbone of our combat units. In this context, let’s understand the nucleus of the Agnipath Scheme.

What is Agnipath Scheme all About?

▪ About:

- The government has unveiled the Agnipath scheme for recruiting soldiers across the [Three services \(Army, Navy and Airforce\)](#).
- It allows patriotic and motivated youth to serve in the Armed Forces for a period of four years.
- Youth joining the army will be called Agniveer. Youth will be able to be recruited into the army for a period of 4 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:

- 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 will be eligible to apply.

▪ Benefits for Agniveers:

- Upon the completion of the 4-years of service, a one-time ‘Seva Nidhi’ package of ₹11.71 lakhs will be paid to the Agniveers that will include their accrued interest thereon.

- They will also get a ₹48 lakh life insurance cover for the four years.
- In case of death, the payout will be over ₹1 crore, including pay for the unserved tenure.
- The government will help rehabilitate soldiers who leave the services after four years. They will be provided with skill certificates and bridge courses.

What was the need for such a scheme?

▪ Lower the Median Age:

- One of the reasons for implementation of the Agnipath Yojana is to lower the median age of our personnel.
 - The need for it was felt after the 1962 war with China. Decades later, the Kargil Review Committee also highlighted the same.
 - In the Indian Army today, only 19% of the personnel are below 25 years of age and a whopping 19% are in the age group of 36-40.
 - Since both China and Pakistan have mountainous terrain, units with a lower age profile will perform better in such areas.

▪ Future Ready Soldiers:

- Nature of warfare is changing and is becoming increasingly multi-domain and becoming increasingly evolving in different aspects of warfare, be it cyber, space, information warfare.
- There are **new technological infusions** in terms of recruitment and systems. So the forces need to leverage this technology to come up with a future-ready fighting force.

▪ Focus on Research and Development:

- More than half the **defence budget** is allocated for pensions every year while less than 5% is allocated for research and development.
 - One key reason for the Agnipath scheme, which aims to recruit defence personnel in short-term contracts, could be to reduce increasing pension payments in the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
 - It will enable more investment in R&D of the Defence Sector.

What are the Concerns of Agniveers?

▪ Difficult to Find Another Job:

- The 'Agnipath' scheme opens the way for recruitment of about 45,000 soldiers into Army, Navy and Air Force in the first year but on a short-term contract of four years. After the completion of the contract, 25% of them will be retained and the rest will leave the forces.
- Our four years of service will mean other jobs will be out of reach after that, and we will be left behind our peers.

▪ No Pension Benefit:

- Those hired under the 'Agnipath' scheme will be given a one-time lump sum of a little more than Rs 11 lakh when they end their four-year tenure.
- However, they do not receive any pension benefits. For most, seeking a second job is essential to support themselves and their families.

▪ Training May Remain Unutilized:

- Forces will lose experienced soldiers.
- The jawans joining the Army, Navy and Air Force will be given technical training so that they are able to support the ongoing operations. But these men and women will leave after four years, which could create a void.

What are Government's Promises for Non-Retained Agniveers?

▪ Ease in Bank Loans:

- The government will help the disbanded Agniveers to start the next phase with bank loans, which will be extended to them on priority.

▪ Preference in Other Services:

- A proposal to reserve 10% of the job vacancies in the Union Ministry of Defence for Agniveers meeting the eligibility criterion has also been approved
 - This reservation will be implemented in the **Indian Coast Guard**, defence civilian

posts and all 16 [Defence Public Sector Undertakings](#).

- This is in addition to the existing reservation for ex-servicemen.
 - The Ministry of Home Affairs has also announced schemes to ensure that the Agniveers get opportunities to remain in the nation's service beyond the four years they serve under the Agnipath Scheme.
 - It has announced a 10% reservation as well as an upper age limit relaxation for Agniveers for recruitment in the [Central Armed Paramilitary Forces \(CAPFs\)](#) and [Assam Rifles](#).
 - The upper age limit for the CAPFs — [Border Security Force \(BSF\)](#), [Central Reserve Police Force \(CRPF\)](#), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), [Indo-Tibetan Border Police \(ITBP\)](#), [Sashastra Seema Bal \(SSB\)](#), and the [National Security Guard \(NSG\)](#), [Special Protection Group \(SPG\)](#) — will be 26 years.
 - The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) has announced six service avenues for a smooth transition of the Agniveers in various roles of the Merchant Navy after their stint in the Indian Navy.
 - Several states, including Assam, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, have announced preferential recruitment of Agniveers in respective government jobs.
- **Education:**
- [National Institute of Open Schooling](#) has announced that it will institute a special programme in consultation with defence authorities to enable Agniveers to further their education and obtain a Class XII pass certificate.
 - The Ministry of Education has decided to launch a **three-year skill-based bachelor's degree programme for serving defence personnel** that will recognise the training they have received during stint time in the armed forces.

What Could be the Way Forward?

- **Ease in Licensing:**
- Government should consider relaxation in mandatory licensing regulations for Agniveers to attract more of them to invest in starting up a business unit.
 - It will act as a double benefit move of providing entrepreneurial opportunity and growth in the economy.
- **Tax Exemptions:**
- Tax exemptions on salary income/profit earned through business for a specific initial period could be considered. It will attract more Agniveers to either take up an employment opportunity or start up a business.
 - It will work as an eliminating factor of spending idle money and being unemployed.
- **Attractive Interest Rates:**
- Banks can consider giving attractive interest rates on the deposits of Agniveers.
 - It will also act as a double benefit move as an attractive interest rate will act as earning for Agniveers and banks will get access to more money in the market.
- **Relaxation in Admission to Institutions:**
- For those Agniveers who want to pursue higher education, a relaxation in the admission criteria (relaxation in cut off etc) will prove to be a major attraction.
 - Highly qualified and disciplined Agniveers will have the ability to take up ample opportunities available to them.

Drishti Mains Question

Short Tenure of Service and Absence of Pension has led to agitation against Agnipath Scheme of Government of India. Critically analyze the statement and suggest measures for growth in the Defence Sector.

