



AGNIPATH SCHEME - DEFENCE AND SECURITY PRELIMS AND GS III MAINS

Q. What is the significance of the Agnipath Scheme? Examine the concerns associated with it and steps need to be taken by the government to address those concerns? (15 marks, 250 words)

News: Agnipath Scheme: why it was introduced, the opposition to it

What's in the news?

- The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government's ambitious Agnipath scheme has faced opposition, from political parties and Armed Forces veterans alike, since it was announced in June 2022.

Key takeaways:

- Agnipath was aimed at recruiting personnel below officer ranks - soldiers, airmen, and sailors who are not commissioned officers to the Indian Armed Forces for a period of four years.
- At the end of this tenure, upto 25% of these recruits, the so called 'Agniveers', can join the services on a permanent commission (another 15 years), subject to merit and organisational requirements.

Agnipath Scheme:

- It is a **short-service manpower** model under which around 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers will be recruited annually.
- Of these, 75% will leave the service in four years. 25% will be allowed to continue for another 15 years under permanent commission.
- The new system is **only for personnel below officer ranks** (those who do not join the forces as commissioned officers).

Objectives of Agnipath Scheme:

- To guzzle the armed forces ethos, courage, commitment and teamwork in the youth.
- To provide the proper abilities and the qualities such as discipline, motivation, dynamism so that the youth remains a proper asset.
- Provide an **opportunity for the youth** who are very much eager to serve the country in the uniform of a soldier.
- To enhance the profile of the armed forces by incorporating some of the best soldiers who can be in the front line and be a major asset during the war.

Features:

Online System:

- **Enrolment to all three services** will be through a centralized online system, with special rallies and campus interviews at recognized technical institutes.



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- The recruitment standards will remain the same, and recruitment will be done twice a year through rallies.

Age Eligibility:

- Recruitment will be carried out on an “All India All Class” basis with the **eligibility age ranging from 17.5 to 21**, with medical and physical fitness standards in accordance with existing norms.
- Planned intake of 46,000 young men and women this year.

Payment:

- The ‘Agniveers’ will receive an annual package of ₹4.76 lakh in the first year to ₹6.92 lakh in the fourth year, apart from risk and hardship and other allowances as applicable.

Seva Nidhi:

- Under the ‘Seva Nidhi’ package, they will receive about **₹11.71 lakh**, including contribution and interest, on completion of service.
- The recruits will have to **contribute 30% of their monthly emoluments to Seva Nidhi**, with a matching contribution made by the government.

Pension:

- There will be **no entitlement to gratuity and pension benefits** under the scheme.

Life insurance:

- They will also get a **INR 48 lakh life insurance cover for the four years**. In case of death, the payout will be over INR 1 crore, including pay for the unserved tenure.

Significance of Agnipath Scheme:

1. Leaner and Younger Force:

- The move will make the permanent force levels much leaner for the over 13-lakh strong armed forces in the country.
- As only 25% recruits will be allowed to continue for another 15 years under permanent commission.
- Further, the average age in the forces is 32 years today.
- It is expected to **go down to 26 in 6 to 7 years with the implementation of the scheme**.

2. All India, All Class Recruitment:

- The scheme will ensure ‘All India, All Class’ recruitment to the services.
- This is significant for the Army, where the regiment system has region and caste bases.



3. Patriotism and National Unity:

- National unity, camaraderie and bonding should not be predicated on caste, community, religion or provincial affiliation but on the more equitable notion of being a patriotic Indian.

4. Reduce Defence Bill:

- **Pensions made up 28.4% of this year's defense budget.**
- Leaner force and reduced benefits will considerably decrease the defence bill, which has been a major concern for governments for many years.
- Further, the saved money can be utilized to buy state-of-art technology and equipment which are the backbone of modern warfare.

5. Benefits to Agniveers:

- The skills and experience acquired during the 4-year service will allow the soldiers to get employment in various fields.
- This will also lead to availability of a **higher-skilled workforce to the economy** which will be helpful in productivity gain and overall GDP growth.

6. Buffer Force:

- The ex-agniveers could act as an ad hoc buffer force who may be called to serve again for **boosting national security in times of external/internal threats.**

7. Global Parity:

- All major militaries in the world are undergoing reform.
- There is a trend towards reduction in the number of personnel and emphasis on increasing capital expenditure on modern weapons and equipment.

Concerns of Agnipath:

1. Contractualisation of Armed Forces:

- The foundation of this scheme is a four-year contract.

2. Jobs for the Majority:

- States such as Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan, are where the bulk of the Army recruitment takes place.

3. Perks and Benefits:

- Many of these people value job stability, which includes retirement benefits and pensions over competitive salaries.

4. Uncertainty after the End of Commission:

- Most of them will be forced to leave the job within four years, which doesn't fit into their hopes and aspirations.



5. Casualization of Training:

- It reportedly takes two to three years to train a member of the army, but as a part of the Agnipath, soldiers will only be trained for six months.

6. Threats to National Security:

- Defence analysts have allegedly pointed out that the Russian soldiers who were trained for a limited amount of time before they went to war have performed disastrously.

7. Morality of Agniveers:

- Many experts believe that shorter duration service could compromise on training, morale and commitment in comparison to the permanent recruits.
- Critics argue that agniveers may turn out to be risk-averse with the bulk looking to secure an alternate career.

Way forward:

1. Longer Contract Term:

- Make the period of the contract for new recruits longer than four years. The present clarification fails to address this issue.

2. Continuance of the Commission:

- Relook the 25 percent re-enlistment at the end of the contractual period. Ideally, it should be over 50 percent retention for long-term posts.

3. Policy Commitment for Reabsorption:

- For those leaving after their short service, do obtain a binding commitment from CAPFs, state police forces and other organizations that they are willing to absorb this trained military manpower.

4. Gradual Shift in Recruitment Policy:

- Continue with existing regular enrolment, in reduced numbers, and gradually shift to the Tour of Duty once it stabilizes after five to ten years.

5. Rehabilitation of Agniveers:

- The Government should help rehabilitate soldiers who leave the services after four years.
- They can be provided with skill certificates and bridge courses that will help them in finding gainful employment.